



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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

Volume 119

(15 October 2016 to 28 October 2016)

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Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sitings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 17 October 2016

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statement

Intergovernmental Agreement on Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement regarding a bilateral meeting under the auspices of the intergovernmental agreement (IGA) on cooperation on criminal justice matters held at Lough Erne on Wednesday 28 September 2016. This was my second such meeting with Frances Fitzgerald TD, the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, at which I represented the Executive. As I previously stated to the House, it is my intention to keep the Assembly informed of meetings held under the auspices of the agreement.

The meeting provided a timely opportunity, after our previous meeting in July, to build on the excellent cross-border relationship that the Tánaiste and I have already established. The combined efforts across the spectrum of criminal justice cooperation, particularly in the area of law enforcement, have served to protect the people of Northern Ireland and Ireland and maintain peace on this island. We know that organised crime groups from both sides of the border work together, and we know that, to successfully tackle organised crime, we must also have effective cross-border cooperation across and between government and law enforcement agencies. It was, therefore, fitting that the fourteenth cross-border organised crime conference provided the backdrop for our second intergovernmental agreement meeting.

The conference and the IGA are examples of how an effective and important partnership approach can work, bringing together complementary strands of work to enhance cross-border cooperation in relation to criminal justice and policing. The conference also provided an opportunity to launch the 'Cross Border Policing Strategy', a document welcomed by the Tánaiste and me. It aims to build on existing partnerships between our respective police services in achieving the shared objectives of further improving public safety throughout Ireland and disrupting criminal activity. The joint strategy covers a range of policing areas, including operations, rural policing, community relations, intelligence sharing, ICT, service improvement and emergency planning.

The conference also provided a platform for the publication of a biennial cross-border organised crime threat assessment, which provides an assessment across a wide range of cross-border crime types. This is the seventh such cross-border threat assessment to be

published. It compares trends and developments across both jurisdictions to highlight similarities and differences in the threat posed by certain areas of criminality.

Obviously, cross-border cooperation is not exclusive to policing. Minister Fitzgerald and I discussed other areas where excellent collaborative working is ongoing, such as the management of offenders; support for victims; knowledge exchange between our forensic services; engagement on youth justice developments; and policing of diverse communities. Five joint project advisory groups provide the mechanism by which the work in each area is taken forward. Encouraged by the progress that has been made in those areas, Minister Fitzgerald and I agreed that it would be mutually beneficial to allow the existing work streams to continue and be augmented to enable them to meet their full potential.

We also discussed the prevalence of mental health issues in society, the links to offending and the challenges that they present to our respective criminal justice systems. The Tánaiste shares my views that the justice and health sectors could achieve more by working together not only to improve outcomes for offenders and for our communities but to better support our staff in the management of offenders with mental health issues.

As Members will know, the Minister of Health and I recently visited Hydebank Wood to discuss health issues in prisons. By tackling mental health issues in prisons through a collaborative approach, we are together playing an important role in building a safer community. My Department is committed to working with the Department of Health to assist those with mental health problems. We know that poor mental health is a major factor in people offending. I was therefore pleased to have the support of Minister O'Neill in recently launching a new app, developed by the Probation Board, to help offenders to desist from crime.

The Programme for Government will undoubtedly give us the platform for working in a more joined-up way, but I am also keen to exploit other avenues for developing best practice in that area, and the IGA framework provides such an opportunity. Minister Fitzgerald and I have therefore tasked the project advisory group responsible for public protection matters with developing and taking forward an action on mental health care in prisons as part of the joint work programme for 2016-17. I am keen to make progress in that area as well as to ensure that we keep up the momentum in the other work streams. The Tánaiste and I therefore intend to review progress of the work programme at our next meeting in November, and I will endeavour to brief the Assembly on progress following our next IGA meeting. For now, I have attached a copy of the 2016-17

work programme, which was agreed at our meeting on 28 September, to the printed version of this statement. It will also be published on the relevant departmental websites following this statement.

I also wish to provide Members with an update on the joint agency task force. The fight against organised crime in Northern Ireland is continuing, and, as I reported in September, the joint agency task force, instituted under the Fresh Start Agreement, has advanced our cross-border operational response. The task force has carried out joint operations on rural crime; child sexual exploitation; excise fraud; drug-related criminality; and human trafficking. A report received at the IGA meeting noted that rural crime has remained an ongoing priority, with further operational work planned in the border areas. Human trafficking remains a concern in both jurisdictions, and a number of cross-border investigations remain active, with potential victims having been identified. Excise fraud, including fuel and tobacco-related crime, continues to be a major concern. However, as I have previously advised the Assembly, the new fuel marker appears to have led to a significant decrease in fuel laundering.

Other priority areas for the task force during its early months of operation have included child sexual exploitation, financial crime, and illicit drugs. A strategic review of its priority areas, along with additional learning, will form the basis for operational planning. The Tánaiste and I will take receipt of the formal six-month update from the joint agency task force at our next ministerial IGA meeting in November, and I look forward to reporting further successes of the task force to the Assembly.

It is also clear that problem-solving justice is an area of mutual interest across our jurisdictions and where we could learn from each other. We have tasked our officials with liaising and ensuring that learning is shared from our respective initiatives as they develop.

At the previous IGA meeting, Frances Fitzgerald and I commissioned exploratory work to allow better understanding of the key justice issues that are likely to be affected by the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. I am committed to working closely with the Tánaiste on that issue and to building on our close working relationship as the picture on the UK and EU negotiating position becomes clearer. Our common strategic goal is to achieve the best possible outcomes following the UK's withdrawal from the EU in a way that promotes peace, stability and prosperity on the island of Ireland. Now that the Prime Minister has confirmed that article 50 will be triggered by the end of March 2017, our next IGA meeting at the end of November will provide us with an appropriate opportunity to discuss the matter further.

As I have stated before, I am committed to maintaining and indeed strengthening our excellent criminal justice cooperation with Ireland. The successful cooperation between our respective law enforcement agencies and the excellent engagement between our other criminal justice agencies have undoubtedly been, and will continue to be, important drivers in maintaining peace on this island. Our ability to build on the success of this cooperation will ensure that our justice systems are better equipped to meet future challenges.

Mr Beattie: I thank the Justice Minister for her detailed statement. It is most welcome, as is the cross-border

cooperation from policing to mental health. How does the National Crime Agency (NCA) build into that strategic intelligence sharing, particularly in the Executive's action plan for tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. The purpose of the IGA in itself is the cooperation between the two jurisdictions, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, on criminal justice outcomes. The NCA's approach is something that we will be looking at within the Fresh Start arrangements. The intergovernmental agreement with the Tánaiste is about cooperation between the two jurisdictions of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I thank the Minister for her statement. She said that she discussed the ongoing collaborative work between the jurisdictions in a number of areas, including the management of offenders. She will know that sex crime and public protection arrangements is one of five key priorities for the Justice Committee. Will she outline how sex offenders and perpetrators, including those involved in domestic violence and abuse, are monitored on a cross-jurisdictional basis? Does she agree that this is an area that causes a lot of concern? Is further work being undertaken to improve, amongst other things, information sharing?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. The cross-border cooperation that exists between the PSNI and an Garda Síochána is important in tackling a number of crimes, including sex crimes and sexual exploitation. Indeed, the information sharing that happens between the two agencies, North and South, has provided some successful outcomes in tackling that. Again, the joint agency task force is something that was agreed under the Fresh Start Agreement, and it is very much at the beginning of its work. That cooperation is something that has continued for a long time, and it is about strengthening that knowledge so that we can better tackle these types of crimes. Those crimes affect both sides of the border, and I know that the PSNI is keen to strengthen those relationships.

Ms Boyle: I thank the Minister for her statement to the House. Given the massive cuts to the justice budget in the Twenty-six Counties, the many closures of rural garda stations and the Chief Constable's concerns about Brexit and the impact that it could have on local policing, has she had a conversation with her counterpart about ensuring that effective policing structures are in place along the border to protect people who are in fear of crime and those who have been the victims of crime?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. The IGA provides the opportunity to have a number of conversations with my counterpart the Tánaiste, Frances Fitzgerald, on these particular issues. The programme delivery groups will look at these areas throughout the year and come back to us. Crime in border areas — agri-crime and crime that happens in rural areas — is something that we are keen to focus on. Indeed, there was a strategy in place that would have followed through to this month. It is deemed appropriate that we continue that work because there continues to be a prevalence of rural crime in the border areas. I want to give an assurance that it is something that we are very mindful of. The opportunity that the border provides for criminals is something that we are also quite mindful of. It will form part of our ongoing

discussions, and it is something that we have regular conversations about.

Mr Attwood: I welcome the report and, in particular, the appendix that outlines the work programme for 2016-17, which gives an indication of what can be done if there is the political will, North and South, for North/South cooperation.

The Minister referred to Fresh Start, the threat of organised crime and the most recent risk assessment of criminal activity on the island. If, arising from Fresh Start, there were a request from the PSNI for dedicated resources to deal with those who hold historical criminal assets — that has a real and harmful impact upon the community, North and South — would she back the PSNI in a bid for extra people and resource to go after them?

12.15 pm

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. I have conversations day-to-day with the PSNI about the resources that they need and how I can better provide them so that they can be effective in their job. If the Chief Constable wants to have a conversation with me and see how we can move forward in the areas that the Member mentioned, I am quite happy to have those conversations.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for her very detailed report. Unfortunately, there are only three lines in it on problem-solving justice. Will she expand on what is in the report on that area? Will she reference the cooperation between the probation services, North and South, and the input that they might have into problem-solving justice?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. Problem-solving justice will be a key thread that runs throughout Department of Justice work in the next five years. It is quite a critical piece of work, certainly from the perspective that it would be much better if we took a more common-sense approach to dealing with criminal issues, in a way that better facilitates victims and our courts process. The outworkings of that would be a lot savings, from a financial perspective and also in time.

There are so many great opportunities with problem-solving justice, and the Republic of Ireland has a similar mindset. At this stage, we are feeling our way through those opportunities. In my meeting with the Tánaiste, she was quite keen to hear how the work that we are doing here in Northern Ireland develops and how we can better share practices, because they are keen to take a similar approach.

As the work progresses, I am quite keen to update the House on it and see how we can share best practice.

Mrs Cameron: My apologies for not being in the Chamber for the beginning of the statement. I thank the Minister for what I have heard of it so far.

The Minister will be aware that the most recent Prisoner Ombudsman reports relate to a death in custody and a very serious case of self-harming. What can be done in cooperation with the Republic to ensure that the mental health issues experienced by prisoners in particular are being properly addressed? Also, given that we are obviously dealing with a workplace that is very traumatic daily, what help can be given to prison staff over and above the normal six Carecall sessions provided by the Civil Service?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. This is not the first time that we have addressed mental health issues in prisons. We have done so from the perspective of prison officers and prisoners. The Tánaiste was quite keen to raise the issue from her perspective of prisons in the Republic of Ireland. It is no great secret that mental health has a big impact on our criminal justice system. We should be looking at how we can better support prisoners, and prison officers in their jobs, so that we can have the best outcomes, which are safer communities.

In the intergovernmental agreement, we instructed our officials to move forward on considering the mental health issues that we are finding within prisons to see how we can better facilitate them. That will require a lot of cross-cooperation with my Executive colleague in the Department of Health and her counterpart in the Executive in the South.

At this stage, we are very much beginning to recognise the problem of mental health right across Northern Ireland but, particularly, in prisons. The narrative around it has been positive in the sense that perhaps this is the way of finally addressing it. I am quite keen to see what the best approaches are moving forward. That cross-cooperation, North and South, is a great way to learn from one another and see how we can both put in place best practice on this island.

Mr Kearney: Go raibh maith agat agus mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas chuimsitheach seo. Thank you, Minister. Last year, the UN Economic and Social Council noted that domestic violence is pervasive in Ireland, North and South. In the absence of consolidated legislation in both jurisdictions and given the similarity of domestic violence patterns, North and South — in fact, it is estimated that up to 70,000 women in the Twenty-six Counties are the subject of domestic violence, and you are very familiar with our patterns of crime here in the North — will you give us an update on any discussions that you have had with the Minister of Justice and Tánaiste in the Twenty-six Counties in relation to addressing the gaps in legislation, North and South?

Mr Speaker: That question is outside the matters in the Minister's statement, so it is up to the Minister to decide whether or not she wishes to address the question.

Ms Sugden: I am more than happy to answer the question, Mr Speaker. The Member has rightly identified one of the biggest issues that we face in the criminal justice system and in wider society. Indeed, at our second meeting, the Tánaiste and I had a discussion around the impact of domestic and sexual violence and abuse across Northern Ireland, and she was keen to know that this is one of my overarching priorities in the next five years and how we address it in the North.

As the Member so rightly put it, it is estimated that there are up to 70,000 victims across the North and South of Ireland. Those are only the ones that we know about. In Northern Ireland, it is around 28,000. To me, it is probably one of the worst types of crime because it does not discriminate. It happens to both genders, all races, all backgrounds and all religions. We need to tackle it by trying to get to the root cause. It is not just about tackling domestic violence in itself; it is about the wider societal impacts that occur when we effectively address it. That, from a justice perspective, is how many people we are

finding in the criminal justice system who have had some association with or direct impact from domestic and sexual violence and abuse.

The Tánaiste and I are really keen to work together on this particular issue. There will be certain areas of work that she will be involved in that Northern Ireland can learn from. Equally, as I mentioned last week in the local press, I am committed to addressing that, even from a legislative perspective. The Republic of Ireland will be keen to see how that plays out here, so that they can see if they can implement something similar in their policy.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for a very comprehensive report this morning. I welcome the focus on problem-solving justice. Did the Minister have an opportunity to highlight the Londonderry court's problem-solving model on domestic violence? Does she have any plans to roll that out across Northern Ireland?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. Yes, indeed. The pilot scheme that has been run in Derry Magistrates' Court around the special listing arrangements for domestic violence has been very positive. To fully realise the wider impacts of that type of court, we are enhancing those arrangements to see if it is something that we can roll out across Northern Ireland. The very essence of the problem-solving justice court is that it better supports victims in this instance so that they will perhaps attend court and give evidence that might eventually lead to a conviction of the perpetrator.

We are also potentially looking at a potential perpetrator programme. One of the biggest challenges in tackling domestic abuse is the reluctance of victims to come forward because it might lead to a prosecution of the perpetrator. We are trying to see how we can best satisfy the victim. From my perspective, the victim of domestic abuse has to be front and centre. The Tánaiste was quite keen to hear about the work that we are doing in Derry and how we will roll that out across Northern Ireland if, indeed, that is deemed to be the most appropriate thing to do.

To come back to your original point, problem-solving justice is a really positive way of looking at our criminal justice system, first and foremost for the public service that it provides and also for the savings in time and money that we will realise through it.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for her statement. In it, the Minister highlighted that financial crime is one of the issues for priority action by the joint agency task force. There has been significant concern regarding the NAMA allegations that have come to light, whether it be the £40,000 cash highlighted in the BBC 'Spotlight' programme or, indeed, the £6 million in an offshore account. Were there any discussions about this very significant case, which has potential implications in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland? Were there any requests for changes or cooperation —

Mr Speaker: The NAMA issue is not in the Minister's statement. We are asking questions on the Minister's statement as presented to the House today.

Mr Beggs: In conclusion, can the Minister advise whether, as a result of NAMA, there were any discussions at the joint agency task force, which —

Mr Speaker: It is for the Minister to decide whether she wishes to answer the question.

Ms Sugden: As I am sure the Member knows, the NAMA issue is the subject of an ongoing investigation, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment. However, he raises the issue of financial crime, which I am quite happy to comment on.

From a cross-border perspective, financial crime is damaging to businesses north and south of the border. There is a focus from the PSNI and an Garda Síochána to see how they can better tackle it. I actually visited the cybercrime unit within the PSNI this morning. This is an issue that is perhaps under-reported, and the impact it is having on businesses north and south of the border is worrying. There is a keen focus on it and an opportunity to tackle it in some way, but we need to get on the front foot with it, as criminals tend to be quite far ahead in their approach to cybercrime.

It is important that we maintain the discussion, particularly with the various stakeholders. Businesses are quite reluctant to come forward because of the reputational issues in these types of crimes. The Assembly and the Dáil in the South can see how we can better support businesses so that they are confident in coming forward. Financial crime in all its varying degrees will have an impact on our wider economy as much as on individual businesses. I think it is something we need to have a keen focus on, and the Tánaiste and I are quite happy to provide that focus.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for her statement. In it, she said:

"Human trafficking remains a concern in both jurisdictions."

I am aware that new legislation is at a fairly advanced stage in the Dublin regime. Were there any discussions on this new legislation? How supportive is an Garda Síochána of it?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. The Member will know more than anyone in the House about the impact of human trafficking north and south of the border. In Northern Ireland, we have had a keen focus on it, and we are happy to share that information with our counterparts in an Garda Síochána. Human trafficking seems to be on the increase. I have been told that, in 2015-16, we had 59 potential victims of human trafficking recovered in Northern Ireland, which was an increase on the 46 we saw in the previous year. There is a lot of conversation between both jurisdictions, because the border provides an opportunity for those people who are trafficking victims north and south of it. We need to better understand this so that we can approach it in the right way for the victims.

A lot of the crimes I talked about in the statement — financial crime, cybercrime and particularly human trafficking — are a means to an end a lot of the time. Once we capture one sort of criminal conviction, it leads to others, and in a lot of cases, it is in human trafficking. It is something that we need to be mindful of, and the joint agency task force with an Garda Síochána, the PSNI and the other agencies is a mechanism to allow that. It all leads to one bigger picture, and it will not be treated in itself. It is important that the joint agency task force has a number of areas that connect with one another.

12.30 pm

Mr McPhillips: I thank the Minister for her statement. I note that, on the topic of Brexit, you and your counterpart have commissioned exploratory work on the key justice issues. Can you provide us with some detail on this now? Will you also lodge in the Library the details of the explanatory work that is being done? Can you also explain what is going on between the PSNI and the gardaí in respect of Brexit issues?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. Brexit will have a huge impact when it happens next year. Indeed, my Department, along with its counterpart in the Republic of Ireland, is keen to better understand the justice implications of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU. It is important to remember that the Republic of Ireland did not have a say in the UK referendum, but the impact of Brexit will certainly affect it. That is why I think there is an opportunity, through my formal arrangement with the Tánaiste in the Republic of Ireland and through the intergovernmental agreement, to have a close working relationship and to better understand those implications. For example, we want to ensure that the common travel area continues to operate in a way that promotes peace, stability and prosperity right across the island and that the border is not altered in any way. That would cause unnecessary barriers from an economic, social and human perspective.

It is something that is ongoing. The Prime Minister's statement that she will trigger article 50 at the end of March next year provides a very keen focus. Indeed, at our first meeting in July, at the meeting in September and at the meeting that we will have in November, this is at the forefront. There are a lot of practical implications of Brexit, particularly around the criminal justice space, and we want to ensure that we can maintain some, if not all, of those so that we will not have any difficulties when article 50 is triggered.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for her statement and for the publication of the programme for work. To follow up on Mr McPhillips's point, the statement referred to exploratory work to be commissioned between the two Departments on the issues affecting the justice system in the event of the UK leaving the EU. Will the Minister give a firm commitment to publish that research? Will she also give a commitment to publish any research that has already been commissioned in her Department and make that fully available, particularly on the dangers of losing the European arrest warrant that was so nearly lost two years ago? On that topic, can she give us some information on the item highlighted under the public protection project advisory group and what opportunities she thinks there now are to explore European Union funding?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. The implications of Brexit are wide-ranging. This will not be an easy transition and, certainly from a Justice Department perspective, there are a number of mechanisms that we are quite keen to ensure we hold on to, including, as the Member mentioned, the European arrest warrant. I will give a very basic outline of what that is. It is based on the principle of mutual recognition of judicial decisions, which simplifies the administrative system and reduces the capacity for delay. That is an important mechanism. The Member rightly points out that that was nearly lost a couple of years ago in one of the pre-Lisbon treaties. The UK Government decided to opt out of a number of measures,

including the European arrest warrant, but very quickly realised that they had to opt back in.

We need to put our best foot forward on Brexit. Indeed, my Department was looking at the potential implications even before the outcome of the referendum was realised. Any of the work that we are doing is a matter of progress and, in order to put the best foot forward, we will do what we have to, including me maintaining the strong relationship that I have with my counterpart in the Republic of Ireland — and, indeed, the east-west connection. I have had a number of meetings with the Secretary of State and officials in the new Brexit Department of the UK Government. It is something that we are all working towards, and I do not think that anyone could accuse us of not having a focus on it. Perhaps they are not aware of that detail but, from my perspective, I am keen to see how we can put Northern Ireland at the heart of all this and put our best foot forward.

Mr McNulty: I thank the Minister for her statement. In it, she referred to the issue of mental healthcare in prisons and the work that she is doing with the Minister of Health in the North and the Minister for Justice in the South. Will she outline the shape of the discussions that she is having with the NIO in relation to provisions for those with mental health trauma arising from the conflict as part of current legacy meetings? Is she having a similar discussion with the Minister for Justice in the South, given that there are people in Ireland, North and South, who are victims and survivors of the conflict?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. Yes, indeed, there has been a focus from me and the Tánaiste on the mental health issues that we have in the criminal justice system. Indeed, it seems that a lot of those who come into the criminal justice system have had some sort of trauma in their lives, which has led either to an addiction or a mental health issue. The way to tackle that is to strip it right back almost as a preventative measure so that we find fewer people coming into the criminal justice system. I almost want to make myself redundant, in that if we were to tackle mental health issues earlier in life, even in other areas such as domestic violence that I have talked a lot about in the past week, it will stop people coming into the criminal justice system and, unfortunately, into custody. I am glad to say that my colleague on the Northern Ireland Executive, the Minister of Health, recognises the issues with mental health in prisons. As I have reiterated to Members time and again, it is not just prisoners but prison officers.

One of my biggest realisations since becoming Minister is that there is a legacy of mental health throughout Northern Ireland because of the impact of the Troubles. The Troubles in Northern Ireland were quite a significant thing, and I think that we are starting to see the outworkings of that now, particularly in people who find themselves at retirement age and perhaps having more time to think about those issues. We have to have quite a holistic approach. It will not be just the Minister of Health and I who will do that; there will be a focus right across the Executive and, indeed, the Assembly, and I appreciate the debate that we are having on the issue.

The Tánaiste, who is also my counterpart in the Republic of Ireland, also recognises that issue. It might not necessarily be from a legacy perspective — mental health issues come from a number of perspectives — but we recognise that mental health is an issue in our prisons and something that we are all keen to address.

Mr Allister: In the aftermath of the Máiría Cahill case, Frances Fitzgerald said that she was minded to establish a cross-border inquiry into allegations of sexual abuse by members of the IRA. At the time, your predecessor said that the time was not right because the Keir Starmer review was under way. That has long since finished. Has the Minister ever discussed that issue with her counterpart or has it simply been swept under the carpet?

Mr Speaker: I remind the Minister and the Member that that matter is not in the Minister's statement. It is for the Minister, who has made a very detailed statement of five or six pages, to decide whether she wishes to address it in her remarks.

Ms Sugden: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I also thank the Member. I can confirm that the Tánaiste and I have not had a conversation about that case.

Mr Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister on her statement.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. For the information of the House, the previous ruling from the Speaker was that, if a person was not present at the start and for all of a Minister's statement, they would go to the back of the queue in terms of asking questions. Will you indicate if that previous ruling has been revoked?

Mr Speaker: I will take a look at the point that you have raised, Mr Allister.

Private Members' Business

EU Special Status for Northern Ireland

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

Before we begin, I advise Members of the need to take care in their contributions today. I am sure that you are all aware that there are active legal proceedings on certain matters related to the EU referendum result. I do not want to inhibit discussion on the motion, which clearly relates to a matter of public interest, but in accordance with my responsibilities under Standing Order 73, I caution Members to be particularly careful that they say nothing in their contributions that might prejudice the outcome of those proceedings. Members who deliberately flout the sub judice rule will be asked to resume their seats.

Mr Eastwood: I will try my best to take your advice, Mr Speaker. Feel free — I am sure that you will — to pull me up if I do not.

I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the current public concern arising from the European Union referendum vote; endorses the proposal of the Irish Government and others that there should be legal recognition of the unique status of Northern Ireland and the circumstances on the island as part of the arrangements to leave the European Union; believes that this is one mechanism that can safeguard the interests of the people of Northern Ireland, including future access to European Union funding opportunities; and calls on the British Government to fully endorse, and to negotiate for, this outcome in discussions on leaving the European Union.

Brexit is the biggest issue that has faced the Assembly and this part of the world for a long time. I believe that it will affect this island and these islands more than any other issue and, unfortunately, in a very negative way. We tried to make the arguments during the referendum campaign. Some were, unfortunately, not prepared to listen, but 56% of people in the North of Ireland did listen and supported the European Union and our membership of it. It is unfortunate that some could not hear what our electorate said.

We have tabled this motion to try to inject some urgency into the Assembly and, hopefully, into the Executive. It is not good enough to protest passionately on the streets while sitting quietly in the Executive. It is not good enough to tell us that there will be tremendous opportunities from Brexit without actually telling us what they might be. It is definitely not good enough to send a letter to the British Prime Minister in August and then patiently wait for a reply; I do not think that we have got one yet. We should be kicking the British Prime Minister's door in to ensure that the interests of the people of Northern Ireland are protected. I do not hear anything coming from the British Government that would give us any confidence that people here are at the top of their agenda.

We said, after the referendum result, that we would use any legal, parliamentary and diplomatic options that we had to try to protect the will of the people here. You have

already referred to the court case; I will leave that with the judge. We have also been hard at work using our contacts in the Party of European Socialists, our sister parties right across Europe, to try to make sure that the issues of the North of Ireland are front and centre, because we have no confidence that anybody else is doing that.

We have heard the words coming out of the Tory party conference, and I do not think that any of us are filled with confidence that a success will be made of this. It is very interesting to note — I do not know how many times I and others have asked him — that our Economy Minister cannot tell us what way he voted in the referendum. I think that he should just be honest because he is with the 56% who voted to remain in the European Union. It would fit him a lot better to tell us that once and for all.

It says something that the Economy Minister understands that we are better off in Europe. I just wonder what happened to the rest of his party.

12.45 pm

The British Treasury, which is beginning to implement Brexit, has told us that a hard Brexit will cost the British Exchequer between £38 billion and £66 billion a year. What will that mean for Barnett consequentials and the Executive's already tightened and straitened financial opportunities? What will that mean for us when it happens? People need to understand that, no matter how many glasses of champagne are poured, the British Tory party has no interest and does not care one jot for people in Northern Ireland. I am surprised that people have not learnt that lesson.

Since this happened, we have made it clear that our job here is to stand with the people who voted to remain in the European Union. Our job here is to protect their interests, not the interests of people anywhere else, not the interests of people on a different island or in a different jurisdiction. Our job is to protect people here. That is why we have to ensure that we maintain the four freedoms on the island of Ireland. That is why we have to ensure that our people have the right to move freely around this island and around the European Union. That is why we have to ensure that our businesses can trade freely without tariffs, borders or any impediments to business and growth around this island and the European Union.

That is why we clearly believe that, whilst the new mantra of the British Government is "We will not return to the borders of the past" — I think that that is the line that they keep trotting out — we need to ensure that we explain to people what that actually means. People who argued for Brexit need to be more honest about what that means. If we are not to have a border like we had in the past and if we are not going to control our border at Bridgend, Newry or anywhere across this island, where will we control it? My strong belief is that the only practical place and the best place to control the border into Britain is at Stansted Airport, Heathrow Airport or any port that you want to name, because it will not be possible to do it here. We should not tell the —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: Go ahead.

Mr Allister: Is that not precisely the outcome that would flow if the Member had his way? He is insisting on this

special status, which, effectively, would keep Northern Ireland within the EU, and the border, in consequence of that, would be moved to Stranraer. I can understand that, as a nationalist, that is his goal, but is that not really the underlying thrust of why the Member is so anxious to keep Northern Ireland in the EU: he knows that that moves the border to Stranraer, whereas this United Kingdom has voted to leave, and this United Kingdom, when it leaves, will have its single land border with the Irish Republic?

Mr Eastwood: I thank Mr Allister for his intervention. As usual, he always hears what you are saying. He listens very carefully, and he has picked it up. It is unfortunate that those who, like him and others in the Chamber, argued for Brexit could not see this coming before the referendum result. He is absolutely right. If our job is to protect people here, we have to protect their ability to move and do business around the island and into the European Union. That should not be negotiable by anybody. Confusion reigns across the Chamber. Some of the DUP spokespersons seem to be saying exactly the same thing as we are saying: no return to the borders of the past; no hard borders; we need to maintain the special relationships across these islands; and all these things.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: No. You have had your chance, Mr Allister. The Member is absolutely right: the border will have to be moved to the island of Britain. I did not vote for tighter controls on immigration. Those who did and those who argued for it can have their border if they want, but it will be down the middle of the Irish Sea. That is the realisation that people need to come to very quickly.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way again?

Mr Eastwood: OK. Go ahead.

Mr Allister: It is the Member who wants the border down the middle of the Irish Sea. There will be what is called a "hard border" only if the EU wants a hard border. Otherwise, the UK wants no tariffs. If the EU wants tariffs, there will be a customs border. There will be a passport border only if the Republic of Ireland opts out of the common travel area and joins the Schengen Agreement. All of that would be at the behest of the EU and one of its member states, not at the behest of those who voted to free us from the EU.

Mr Eastwood: This, again, is from the political school of, "Let's have our cake and eat it". The Brexiteers were told over and over again that, if they wanted to control immigration, they would have to have controls on the freedom to do business around and into the European Union. You cannot have it both ways. I do not know how many times people need to be told. They are being told by everybody in a senior position, including Donald Tusk, in the European Union.

The Irish Government have done a good thing in proposing the conversation around this and all the issues associated with it. I appeal once more to political unionism to get involved in that conversation. There is no trapdoor here to Irish unity; this is about getting people together and working to defend the interests of the people who voted here. We do that every day in London as Irish nationalists. There is nothing to stop political unionism doing it in Dublin as part of this conversation.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude.

Mr Eastwood: Do I not get an extra minute?

Mr Speaker: No, you do not get an extra minute.

Mr Stalford: Given the contribution that we have just heard, I am almost tempted to open by asking, "What is the point in having cake if you cannot eat it?"

I feel that I need to reiterate some basics. Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom. Every party represented in the Chamber accepts that Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom. The people of the United Kingdom as a whole were afforded the opportunity to have their say on this country's continuing membership of the European Union. From John o'Groats to Land's End, from Newry to Strabane and from London to Londonderry, every corner of the United Kingdom and every citizen had the opportunity to cast their ballot and have their say on whether the United Kingdom should remain a member of the European Union.

The Member's motion talks about "public concern", and I accept that there is public concern. I also accept, however, that we have just come out of the biggest democratic exercise conducted in this country since the 1975 referendum that affirmed our position in Europe.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. He pointed out the UK-wide nature of the referendum. Does he not see the irony in that many who voted to get out did so on the message of "Take back control"? If every person in Northern Ireland had voted to remain, we would still have been taken out of Europe. What does "control" mean for the people of Northern Ireland whom he should be representing?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Stalford: I do represent them. Every person in Northern Ireland had the same opportunity. I think particularly of constituencies like East Belfast, North Antrim, South Antrim and East Antrim. Perhaps the Member thinks that, in order to represent those areas, we should draw the border there as regards the European Union. Maybe County Antrim should stay part of the United Kingdom and the rest should stay in the European Union. That is the logic of saying that we should divide the country into certain areas. Maybe we should carve off the eastern quarter of Belfast: it should stay out of the European Union, and the other three quarters should stay in. That is the logic of those who seek to divide us. Where does it end? Does London secede from the Union too? That is the logic of our friends who cannot accept the democratic will of the people in action.

The reaction of those on the "Remain" side during the referendum has varied. There are people, like our colleagues in the Ulster Unionist party, who accept the outcome. I appreciate that they campaigned — at least, the leadership did, if not the members — for a different position, but they have accepted the outcome and are committed to ensuring the best deal for the United Kingdom.

I think that is what people expect.

In the time since the referendum, we have had demands for a second referendum that have slowly been watered down and dropped. We have had suggestions that the result can simply be ignored, and, gradually, people have come to realise that that is not viable either. Then we had the idea that — our friends in the SDLP were particularly strong on this point — Nicola Sturgeon was going to be the saviour

of EU membership. They cling to Nicola Sturgeon. A Celtic alliance will be formed to keep us in the EU. The bold claims that she was making immediately after the referendum have slowly but surely been watered away to the point where, now, the Scottish First Minister tells us that the single market is the big issue and Scotland has to stay in it. The single market has become the last redoubt of the "Remain" campaign. Over time, we have seen that even some of the most vociferous "Remainers" have come to accept the outcome. I urge all parties to adopt that approach.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. For those who seek to have Northern Ireland and Scotland annexed from the agreement, when the United Kingdom voted as one to leave the European Union, how do you believe that the Spanish Prime Minister might react if the Basque region or the Catalan region wanted to leave the European Union? How would Europe react to that?

Mr Stalford: I can see why our friends across the way would perhaps agree with that position, given their historical support for the Basque region, but I do not think it is one that, as you say, will go down terribly well in Madrid. We need to be realistic —

A Member: Or Brussels.

Mr Stalford: Or Brussels, indeed.

We need to be realistic. The decision has been taken, and it is now our job to implement it. I welcome the fact —

Mr Eastwood: The Good Friday Agreement.

Mr Stalford: The Member chunters away from a sedentary position.

Mr Eastwood: I will stand up.

Mr Stalford: No, you are quite all right. You had your chance.

The Member chunters away from a sedentary position, and that is precisely the type of thing that puts people off. It puts people off that a party that has the word "democratic" in its title is not prepared to accept the democratic outcome of the referendum, in which all citizens had their say. I will say briefly that running off to the courts does not strengthen your case for being a democrat.

Mr Speaker: I ask Members not to speak from a sedentary position.

Mr O'Dowd: This is our now weekly debate on Brexit. It would be useful if we debated the motion before us rather than its generalities. I am disappointed that, during his 10-minute contribution, Mr Eastwood did not inform the House what the special status was that the Irish Government were proposing. He used very strong language:

"We should be kicking the British Prime Minister's door in".

I do not think I will be arrested for having information useful to terrorists if I reveal that the British Prime Minister lives at 10 Downing Street and the postcode is SW1A 2AA. If Mr Eastwood wants to go and kick her door in, go and kick it in. We have to caution about the language we use, because I often find that those who call for doors to be kicked in are not the ones who do the kicking. It is other people who have their door kicked in at dawn and are brought away for questioning rather than those who use the strong language that Mr Eastwood used today.

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

Mr Eastwood predictably attacked the Executive because we have a different position from the DUP and vice versa. Imagine this scenario: would we be in a much stronger position if the SDLP had joined the Executive and two of the three Executive parties were opposed to Brexit? Our voice would be much stronger. It would be much stronger not only on these islands but across — *[Interruption.]* A Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, it is very difficult when —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member must be heard. There are a lot of loud noises, and I would like it if the Member is listened to.

Mr O'Dowd: Across these islands, our voice would be much stronger if two of the three parties in the Executive were opposed to Brexit.

But let us return to the motion. With regard to special status, I go back to the very strong words of the SDLP leader. I suspect that, in there somewhere, the Irish Government and the SDLP are moving away from the position that "Remain" must mean "Remain". Fifty-six per cent of the people did not vote for special status; they voted to remain in the European Union. If Mr Eastwood is going to back up his statement by saying that they have not moved away from that position, that they continue to lobby the Irish Government, that they continue to lobby all their friends in Europe and elsewhere and that, when he kicks in Theresa May's front door, he will say to her, "Remain means Remain", that will be an important statement.

1.00 pm

Mr Eastwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes.

Mr Eastwood: Has the Member read Martin McGuinness's article in 'The Guardian', which was published last night and referred to special status for Northern Ireland? Has his party moved away from the position that "Remain means Remain"?

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

Mr O'Dowd: I know Martin McGuinness's position on this: Martin McGuinness's position on special status is that it means that the North of Ireland should remain in the European Union. You did not take the opportunity to state whether the SDLP's position remains that the "Remain" vote should be respected.

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: No, I have given way enough.

As to where we go next on this, despite differences of opinion with the SDLP and their presentation today, we agree: the fact that 56% of people in the North voted to remain in the European Union has to be respected. What we are looking at in the future is a disaster. Why? Because despite what the most avid Brexiteer in the room or elsewhere says, nobody can tell us what Brexit means. The British Government cannot tell us and — talk about disagreements in the Executive — there is disagreement in the Cabinet about what Brexit means. We had reports over the weekend that the Chancellor was now calling for careful thinking about curbs on immigration. Why would a

Chancellor come out with something like that? Because the Chancellor recognises that immigration is healthy for the economy. He realises that the workers who are coming in to what is known as the UK bolster the economy of what is known as the UK.

We also learned over the weekend, through various polls, that one of the concerns of those who voted for Brexit — there were many reasons why people voted for Brexit — was immigration and the belief that it was damaging public services. What was the reality of that situation? It is not immigration that was damaging public services; it was austerity. The cuts to the health service and the cuts to services across these islands were damaging public services, and that is beginning to dawn on people.

Mr Stalford gave a very good reason why partition does not work — in a different context, perhaps, than I would. However, he also asked if we were going to partition off Antrim.

Mr Stalford: Upper Bann.

Mr O'Dowd: Partition off Upper Bann: some might want to do that and not let me out of it. Let us look at what the British Government are thinking of doing. They are thinking of partitioning off Nissan. They are looking at big car manufacturers and saying, "Yes, we will give you special status. We will allow Nissan to rest within the EU" —

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

Mr O'Dowd: When I read this comment, I thought that it was a joke: the British Government propose to fund Nissan to promote driverless cars. How apt: the British Government are driverless on Brexit.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Smith: Whilst I share my opposition colleagues' frustration at the lack of action and leadership from the Executive on Brexit, I believe that neither High Court actions nor the development of a special legal status for Northern Ireland is the best way forward.

The Ulster Unionist Party, as has already been mentioned, campaigned for the UK to remain in the EU, but, as Mr Stalford said, that was not the unanimous view of our members; we allowed our members to vote with their conscience, as we do on a number of key issues. We do democracy, even if some parties in the Assembly do not. In our opinion, the result of the referendum is the result. While the majority in Northern Ireland supported "Remain", it was a national poll, and that decision must be respected. We based our decision to support the "Remain" campaign on three key issues: the economy, the UK's constitutional future and the contentment of the majority of people in Northern Ireland with Northern Ireland.

First, the economy. The impact of Brexit on our local economy will be immense if we do not get this right, and not in a good way. While we do have some great companies who sell goods and services to the world, our economy is primarily an inter-UK economy, with most of our exports going to the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the EU. The two competing fantasies that, on the one hand, we can place barriers between ourselves and the rest of the UK, which provides us with the lion's share of our trade as well as our £9.8 billion subvention, or

alternatively we can become buccaneer traders with the world on WTO tariffs, are both at odds with reality.

Secondly, we feared that significant change to the UK constitution could destabilise the post-Scottish independence referendum settlement. With Brent crude at \$51 per barrel I suspect that the SNP will not proceed with the second referendum, but if it does I trust a pro-union majority will prevail once again. However, as forecast, the Brexit decision has let this genie out of the bottle once again, with all the potential for destabilising Northern Ireland politically, socially and economically. While some may welcome that outcome, I do not.

Thirdly, all evidence shows that the vast majority, from all communities, were content with Northern Ireland and the status quo. OK, everyone has their issues, their gripes and their agenda for change, but it was all within the current Belfast Agreement settlement. As even today's debate shows, the EU referendum has the potential to change that, with many from a traditionally nationalist community feeling unsettled and angry at the referendum result.

My party has, uniquely, produced an initial post-Brexit analysis, vision and plan. The Executive, to date, have produced a letter. I sincerely hope that more is happening behind the scenes, but experience to date makes me fearful.

Everyone now accepts that Northern Ireland is the region in the UK most impacted by Brexit. We also appear to be the least prepared. We are in a unique situation, which is why it is doubly frustrating that our divided Executive appear to be paralysed by this issue, like a rabbit transfixed by the headlights of an oncoming truck.

There is much in the motion that I can support. Our Government must ensure that, whatever Brexit becomes, we continue to have single market access, that there is no change to the existing Irish border arrangements, that our agri-food industry is sustained and that current EU funding is at least replaced like for like. I agree with much of the motion's sentiment and many of its goals.

However, I believe that there are better ways to achieve similar outcomes. We require a clear voice for Northern Ireland at the UK's negotiating table, as opposed to trying to create barriers between ourselves and the rest of the UK. By all means —

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. He talks about a divided Executive, and we all know what a divided Opposition looks like. Does he not realise that, whilst we come from different, opposing positions, when it comes to knowing what is good or bad for Northern Ireland in the Brexit context, we will know that, we will agree to it and we will fight for Northern Ireland?

Mr Smith: I appreciate what the Member has said and I look forward to seeing whatever that is. The difficulty at the moment is that we have seen absolutely nothing, and that is the challenge. Until the Executive come out with their plans, proposals and solutions, we are all working in the dark. I look forward to when the Executive produce that information.

By all means, we will work with our neighbours across the border to hopefully achieve a win-win solution, but that does not require a constitutionally questionable legal recognition. What is critical is that the Executive get over their policy stalemate and produce a plan. I look forward to seeing this plan and negotiation strategy to ensure that

Northern Ireland is not destabilised economically and politically by Brexit. We need both action and leadership from the Executive, and to date we have had neither.

Dr Farry: Last week the Assembly backed an Alliance amendment which recognised the importance of continued participation in the EU single market. To make it clear to Mr Frew, and to put it on record, the DUP and Sinn Féin do not agree on whether or not Northern Ireland should continue to be part of the single market.

This motion allows us to move to the next step in beginning to scope out the political arrangements that give effect to addressing the particular challenges facing Northern Ireland. While the UK has voted to leave the European Union, what Brexit entails continues to mean different things for different people, and the referendum result does nothing to assist in this regard.

Over the past few weeks the UK Government have signalled a greater likelihood of a hard Brexit. In parallel, the devastating implications for the future prosperity of the UK, and especially to this region, are becoming ever clearer. The Northern Ireland perspective continues to be marginalised, most recently shown by our Secretary of State not being part of the Cabinet Committee on Brexit.

"Leave" advocates somehow suggest that there is a choice between trading with the rest of the world and trading with the EU. We can and should do both, and it is through the single market that we can best open up new trading opportunities. By contrast, the risk of erecting barriers to what remains by far our largest external market is an act of supreme folly. Northern Ireland is a distinct political entity, with the right to determine its own political future recognised in international law. This region did very clearly vote to remain.

Overall, Brexit is a bad thing. Everyone across the UK is set to suffer some degree of consequence from this vote. The harder the Brexit, the deeper the consequences will be. By contrast, a very soft Brexit could avoid some of the wider economic and political challenges facing the UK and, indeed, Northern Ireland.

This region is particularly vulnerable, and I want to cite four areas. The first is financial support from EU funds. We achieve more per head from these than we would through any Barnett consequentials, assuming that they were available. This is particularly so in terms of agricultural support.

Secondly, our economy has been improving in recent years but has still to truly lift off. We had hoped to have a step change in our inward investment profile, but this was clearly linked to unfettered access to the single market. I want to stress that the European Union is not really about handouts but allowing us to compete on our own two feet through having access to those markets.

Thirdly, we have greater uncertainty over potential borders to people or goods being erected somewhere in these islands.

Finally, we are concerned about the implications for the Good Friday Agreement. This was a finely balanced settlement with three strands and has facilitated a shared space for open, mixed and multiple identities. When lines are drawn or redrawn on maps or barriers are erected between people, it is not good.

This builds the case for exploring some form of special status for Northern Ireland. For some, this talk of special status may be viewed as the counterpoint to Northern Ireland just being treated as an integral part of the UK and the UK as a whole leaving the European Union. However, in practice, the choice is between discussing and negotiating some form of special status or seeing Northern Ireland by default becoming some form of anomaly. Already, the people of Northern Ireland have the right to be Irish citizens and, therefore, EU citizens. Already, large parts of our economy such as agri-food are organised on a North/South basis. Apart from warm words, there is no clarity on how the interface between the UK and the EU and the movement of EU nationals plus goods and services will be managed. Also, we must protect the Good Friday Agreement.

At this stage, of course, there is no shared or common understanding of what is meant by special status or what it should look like. It could be something where Northern Ireland is an associate member of the European Union or we could be part of the European Union or we could be outside the European Union with a special set of arrangements. We are not expecting that type of answer to be provided today or in the coming days. However, over the coming months and, indeed, over the coming weeks, there is, nevertheless, an urgent necessity for all relevant stakeholders to come together to do just that. In that regard, the decision to have the forum in Dublin is, to our mind, particularly welcome and should not be seen as threatening.

I want to say a couple of things to make a slight qualification. As much as I do recognise and respect the right of nationalists to seek a united Ireland, this process of advocating special status for Northern Ireland must be based on pragmatism and separated from that wider aspiration.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Can the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Dr Farry: I am also disappointed that there is no specific call for the Executive to show leadership around special status. That would greatly enhance the prospects of success. It is a travesty that no Ministers are here to respond to what is one of the most important issues facing Northern Ireland.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mrs Cameron: I welcome the opportunity to take part in today's debate. We are at the beginning of a long process of untangling our relationship with the EU. Just as in the breakdown of any relationship, there comes a point when squabbling is put aside and the parties move on, trying to achieve what is best as an all-round outcome.

Our First Minister and deputy First Minister have identified the key priorities in ensuring that Northern Ireland is in the best possible shape for triggering article 50 in March, confirmed by the Prime Minister during the recent Conservative Party conference, to 2020 and beyond. The Prime Minister has confirmed that Northern Ireland will be fully involved in the negotiation process, and I am pleased that she has given her commitment to ensuring that we remain economically competitive. We have ease of movement across the border with the Republic of Ireland, and our agri-food sector is protected.

We are in a unique position, given our land border with the Republic of Ireland, so it is vital that in any discussions we recognise the importance of freedom of movement of people and goods. Given the importance of tourism to our economy, not to mention our reliance on health and social care workers from across the border, how we deal with the border issue is significant and may be one of the greatest challenges during the negotiations.

1.15 pm

In contrast, the weakening value of sterling may have a positive effect on encouraging tourists, those from the Republic of Ireland or those visiting the South from overseas, to consider Northern Ireland as a tourist destination. I look forward to seeing the effects of the new Tourism NI advertising campaign and how the current greater value for money will impact on visitor numbers. During the last year, Northern Ireland's exports have increased by 9.5%, in the only part of the UK to see a rise. During our negotiations, we must build on that success and ensure that we capitalise on the reduced level of corporation tax to continue that growth. Given that we send more to the rest of the world than to the single market, the opportunities for growing the Northern Ireland economy are huge.

I understand that there are concerns amongst our many farmers about what will happen after 2020. Whilst the Treasury has committed to funding agriculture, fisheries and rural development, I appreciate that there may be some grey areas to be clarified following our exit from the EU.

Mr Lyons: I thank the Member for giving way. We talk about uncertainties around what will happen to agriculture post Brexit, but does she agree that those uncertainties would exist for farmers whether we stayed in the EU or not, because of the way the funding is changing, with more of the payments moving towards eastern Europe? There will be uncertainty either way.

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

Mrs Cameron: Thank you, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the Member for his intervention and agree wholeheartedly with his comments.

I am, however, content that, given the reliance on the agri-food sector, we will arrive at a position that will protect our rural heritage and allow our farmers to continue unencumbered by European bureaucracy.

Ms Dillon: I thank the Member for giving way. Unfortunately, Mr Stalford has left the Chamber, but we should raise the issue that he mentioned. He said that the courts were not the most democratic way of taking this forward: I think that the courts are an extremely vital part of our democratic process. However, given that that is how he feels, it is unusual that his Minister took the previous ARD Minister, Michelle O'Neill, to court to prevent her from spending EU money in the way in which she saw fit in her Department. Given that, it is unusual that he does not think that the courts are a democratic way of dealing with things.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Member for the intervention, which was not really addressed to me at all; it was addressed to another Member.

The right decision has been made: leaving the European Union is the right decision for Northern Ireland and the UK

as a whole. We should respect the democratic process that has delivered us to our current position. We will have the right to make our own laws and shape a future for the United Kingdom without the red tape of the European Union. I understand that we have some way to go in negotiating how that happens, but I trust that we will have a more efficient and competitive system in place once our exit is finalised.

At a recent Committee meeting, we heard a presentation from Professor David Phinnemore from Queen's University, who gave a brief overview of the possible outworkings of our exit and a number of potential scenarios. Those options have given us food for thought, and I am sure that they will be examined in greater detail in our discussions.

It is clear that special status for Northern Ireland is simply not required. The Prime Minister has plainly stated her assurance that the devolved Administrations will be fully involved and included in shaping the conditions of our exit from the European Union. On 23 June, the United Kingdom overwhelmingly voted to leave the European Union. The voter turnout of almost 72% is practically unheard of and one that we can only hope to replicate in future elections. The UK spoke loud and clear: we want to leave the European Union. To borrow Theresa May's term, "divisive nationalists" will not be permitted to destabilise the process of exit. We are the United Kingdom, and united we are greater than the sum of our parts. Leaving the EU will ensure that we take back control of our laws, our borders and how our money is spent. The United Kingdom is leaving the European Union, and that is a fact.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring her remarks to a close?

Mrs Cameron: There will be no second referendum.

Ms Archibald: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on what has clearly become one of the foremost topics in current politics. The pros and cons of leaving the EU and the implications for all sections of society here have been debated and discussed at length. Undoubtedly though, since the vote, the realisation has hit businesses, academics, the community and voluntary organisations and others of the need to focus on alternatives and plan contingencies. All those groups have pointed out the black holes that will exist in their budget as a result of the loss of EU funds. The implications for particular sectors, including the agri-food sector in terms of trade, have been discussed. The impact on our migrant workforce and the ability of universities to recruit and retain overseas staff and students are all things that we are very aware of. It is time to do more than discuss them.

In the months since the result, none of the above-mentioned groups or sectors has been shouting about the opportunities that have opened up for them; they are instead attempting to deal with the challenges that now exist. In the event of an actual exit and the freeing-up of some of the British Budget, the development of future funding streams to replace those lost will not be finalised for several years, and, in the meantime, all those groups and organisations face nothing but uncertainty.

We, in Sinn Féin, have been unambiguous before and since the referendum on our position: we believe that the best interests of the people of the North are served by remaining in the EU, a view clearly held by the majority

here. We believe that the democratic will of the people here must be respected, and the High Court challenges are one strand of trying to achieve that. Since many now believe that there is not majority support in the British Tory party for the type of Brexit that currently seems to be the preferred option of those negotiating, it would seem that they are reluctant to allow their own democratic parliamentary processes to be actioned in case the result goes against them. We await the outcome of the legal challenge with interest.

Equally, though, it is important that other mechanisms that would allow for recognition of the unique status of the North continue to be explored. Any mechanism should allow for the North to remain part of the EU. We have very different circumstances — economically, socially and in terms of trade — from those anywhere else in England, Scotland or Wales.

I do not believe that the British Government understand or particularly care about the best interests and needs of people here. There is no permanent representative for the North or any of the devolved regions on the British Cabinet Committee on Brexit. They will be called as required, apparently. Half of that committee, which will have responsibility for the exit, is made up of so-called hard Brexiteers, including Liam Fox, David Davis and, of course, Boris Johnson. Added to the soundings that the British Government do not intend to remain within the single market and last week's comments from the president of the European Council, Donald Tusk, regarding a hard Brexit or no Brexit, these are all signals that do not bode well. Any future trade arrangement other than continued single market access will take time to negotiate. It will involve further uncertainty, and there is no guarantee that the North and its unique circumstances will feature highly in the discussions. The new British Cabinet is increasingly insular and inward-looking, putting up barriers to the rest of the world in a time of increased globalisation; indeed, it seems intent on cutting off its proverbial nose to spite its face to prove that it meant what it said and is sticking to it guns, regardless of the consequences, with the hollow rhetoric of "Brexit means Brexit".

Alongside the consequences that are already beginning to unfold for business and trade is the somewhat ironic news that the plummeting post-referendum pound, which had initially been hailed as good for exports, is likely to see the British budgetary contribution to the EU for next year being up to £2 billion more than it was at the beginning of this year. I guess that was an unforeseen consequence, but it would seem that many of the consequences are exactly that. The British Government, meanwhile, seem to lurch from one idea to another and go further to the right by the day as they try to keep everyone on board.

It is clear that none of the ideas or proposals that are being put forward is good news for people here, nor, indeed, are they intended to be. It is, therefore, up to us as elected representatives here to stand up for the interests of the people of the North, our businesses, universities, young people and all those who have come from other countries to make their life here. In that regard, I welcome the setting-up of the all-island forum and statements by various parties, including those in the Irish Government and the DUP's Jeffrey Donaldson, that call for a settlement that takes account of the circumstances on this island.

It would be good to hear some more reassuring soundings coming from the British Government in the same vein. The democratic will of the people here who voted to remain must be respected —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring her remarks to a close?

Ms Archibald: — and all mechanisms within that need to be considered.

Mr Logan: I love taking the opportunity in the Chamber to discuss our exit from the European Union. We once had “Remainers” and “Leavers”, and we once had a “Remain” campaign and a “Leave” campaign, but we all have one thing in common in the Chamber today, and that is that we are all leaving the European Union. We no longer have “Remainers”, just a few “Remoaners”. I would much rather the Opposition brought before us today a motion of substance that talks about the opportunities outside Europe, the trade deals and an outward-looking United Kingdom.

I stand, unsurprisingly, today to oppose the motion because it is premature. Why do we need special status? Of course, the negotiations have just begun, and we have a seat at the table with our eight MPs at Westminster, who actually take their seats. I oppose it, secondly, because it is a national matter. Yes, there are issues specific to Northern Ireland that need to be addressed. We do share a land border with an EU state, but Theresa May, as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom — a nation made up of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland —

Mr Eastwood: Thanks to the Member for giving way. I am glad he raised the point that we have a number of MPs who take their seats and will be in Westminster. Does he therefore support the call for the Westminster Parliament to be given a vote on what happens with article 50 and any subsequent potential deals? Is that what he is saying or are they just going to sit there and debate things but not actually get the opportunity to vote?

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

Mr Logan: Thank you. No. We got our answer on that. Theresa May has committed to triggering article 50 by March next year. That is what they are committed to doing, and we are absolutely supportive of that. You see, Theresa May is our Prime Minister. We are united with the United Kingdom, which has the fifth largest economy in the world. Perhaps —

Mr Aiken: It is now sixth.

Mr Eastwood: Sixth, now that you voted for —

Some Members: — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Logan: Yes, thank you very much. Sixth? Where is our recession, Steve?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will Members refrain from making comments from a sedentary position?

Mr Logan: Yes. Perhaps Ireland, as the thirty-seventh — I hope I have that right — largest economy should be taking our lead on this one.

I oppose the motion as well because I believe in democracy. In June this year, people walked into a polling station and were given this question: should the United Kingdom leave the European Union or remain a member

of it? I will not go any further on that; we are all aware of it. So it would be ridiculous of me to suggest that some constituencies in London that voted to remain should be given special circumstances, and the same should be said for here. Some constituencies voted to remain and, again, it would be ridiculous to suggest they should be given special circumstances. It was not done constituency by constituency or region by region; it was —

Mr Attwood: I am very grateful to the Member. Is he aware that the Lord Mayor of London has argued very much in the spirit of what you are saying, namely that London needs a seat at the table in the negotiations? Will it not be the case that, if there are any seats in the negotiations, London will be there much earlier than anybody from the North?

Mr Logan: That is right. Everyone has a seat at the table with their MP, and they are very welcome to that discussion.

It was not done region by region or constituency by constituency; it was a United Kingdom vote. I respect democracy, and we in this party have shown that time and time again, although sometimes we maybe do not agree with it. I mean, I do not get too excited about doing business with Sinn Féin, but we respect the democratic will of the people of Northern Ireland and we get on with the business of doing what is right for Northern Ireland.

Finally, I oppose the motion because I believe we are better off outside the European Union. I do not want to be part of an organisation that penalises us, as the United Kingdom, for economic success, like we saw back in November 2014 when David Cameron was landed with a bill for £1.7 billion. By the way, France was given a reduction of £800 million and Germany was given a reduction of £600 million. We were landed with a bill for £1.7 billion as a result of our economic success. He said he would ask for a reduction in that, and he did not get it. He said he would ask for special terms, and he did not get them. That is what the vote was all about. It was about taking back control. It was about taking back control of our laws, because, remember, either you have control of them or you do not. Either you have control of immigration or you do not. Either you have control over finances or you do not. There is no happy medium with the European Union.

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Logan: I have given away quite enough.

You have never heard me say in the Chamber that leaving is the easy option; I have never said that. It is a difficult option — of course it is — but we are up for that challenge. We acknowledge and recognise the options and the opportunities outside of Europe.

1.30 pm

Had we remained — Mr Lyons made this point — there would have been uncertainty on many aspects. As well as that, when was the next bill or penalty going to come? This was a tough decision, but our eight MPs and a First Minister who is firmly at the table will be there to represent Northern Ireland and all our people here.

Mr Aiken: I will begin with a note of clarification for the record. My fellow MLA from South Antrim spoke about Northern Ireland's trade figures. Northern Ireland trades most with GB, secondly with the European Union and then

globally. I think she indicated that we were trading mostly globally first. I just want to change that for the record.

The motion looks to provide a degree of clarity about how we in Northern Ireland can best position ourselves to prepare for the UK leaving the EU in 29 months' time. Regardless of your perspective on the referendum, that is an event that will have profound implications for everyone across these islands. We also believe that the Assembly should be asking the hard questions of our Government. What is the plan?

As a party, we released a discussion document on a vision for Northern Ireland outside the EU, based on Northern Ireland becoming a gateway to the EU. We have been particularly pleased to receive very favourable responses from across the political and business spectrum, in Northern Ireland and beyond, for our approach. In particular, noting in the motion the need for a unique status for Northern Ireland, we were intrigued to listen to the views of the DUP put forward by Sir Jeffrey Donaldson as he put down his glass of champagne at the Tory party conference this year:

"We don't want to see a hard border. We don't think it's in the interest of either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland for that to happen so we will need to make a special case for the island of Ireland within both the European Union and of course within the wider world ... But we also need to ensure that special arrangements are put in place to ensure that we have free movement of goods on the island. That we have a market in the island that enables businesses to do what they do best, trade with each other without any inhibiting factor that is unnecessary."

I would welcome, as part of establishing a plan — any plan — the DUP taking these ideas, which Sir Jeffrey obviously took from our document, and incorporating them into our negotiating position with the Prime Minister.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Aiken: Certainly.

Mr Allister: I must say that I was very alarmed by what Sir Jeffrey Donaldson said. However, when I raised it with one of his senior colleagues, I got the rather withering response:

"Oh, Jeffrey. The less you know about a subject the more he is likely to say."

Is it not the reality that, if Mr Donaldson's advice was followed, like the SDLP advice, it would have the result of driving the border to Stranraer, whereas any border there is has to stay between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Is that not the folly of what Sir Jeffrey Donaldson was saying?

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

Mr Aiken: Thank you very much indeed.

The obvious question raised by both the DUP and this motion has to do with the form that these special arrangements will take. Do we, as in our vision document, look to create an agreed access to the single market based on our unique geography and economic circumstances, our specific needs for energy, agriculture, health and

education, and a variety of other North/South and east-west dimensions?

We have also called for looking at making an all-Northern Ireland enterprise zone, which could have elements of free trade areas and agreements. Indeed, I am grateful for the Economy Minister pointing out the relationship with the Gulf Cooperation Council and Singapore. We could look to the special trading areas in China and trading relationships with the EU, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey et al, all of which employ a coordinated approach that would require an understanding, as outlined by Sir Jeffrey, with the Government of the Republic of Ireland —

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Aiken: No, not just at the moment.

As well as building a strong relationship with our counterparts in Scotland and Wales. However, to address your question, we do not believe that that would require specific change in the legal status of Northern Ireland. We do not wish to see a border that goes down through the middle of the Isle of Man or the Irish Sea.

Indeed, in the Assembly, we should be able to debate and help inform these decisions. However, it seems that the openness and transparency agenda that the co-First Ministers and David Gordon seem to be following will mean that unfortunately, like Parliament, our options for influencing our Government will not be heard or, indeed, acted on for the good of all our people.

It is also disquieting to note that the avenue of influence to Downing Street is not through the Assembly and not even through our Government, as the Secretary of State has been assiduous in gathering his own information. It has become clear to major businesses and interest groups that the best way to get through to the Brexit Committee is through the NIO and the SpAds rather than the telephone calls — is it two? — that the First Ministers' offices have had with the Cabinet Office. Maybe Marlene does not even have a direct line.

We as a party have a well-established position on recognising the result of the EU referendum given by all the British people and the legal status of the United Kingdom. While we appreciate that other parties are seeking to change the result, we cannot support the motion. Therefore, despite supporting many of the issues, unfortunately we will not be able to support the motion.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next Member, I ask that all Members refer to other Members by their proper title.

Mr McAleer: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the motion. Looking through the research papers and reading some commentary relating to the so-called Brexit and dealing with many of the stakeholders in society, it is becoming clear to me, and, indeed, to our party that we are on an enforced journey into economic and political chaos. It will have the biggest impact on vulnerable communities, such as hill farmers, small businesses, ethnic minorities and, indeed, the wider community sector.

The idea of the North being outside the EU trading block will leave us more peripheralised because we will end up being sandwiched between the South of Ireland, which is a fully fledged EU state, and Scotland, which has actually strengthened its ties with the EU and has triggered the Bill

heading towards full independence. That will leave us on the very edge of Europe and more peripheralised than ever.

Along with others in the Chamber, I represent the border constituency of West Tyrone. Strabane and Castleterragh are amongst the top economic black spots in the North — indeed, on these islands. Through the last 40 years, the border has softened by dint of the fact that we are jointly in the EU, but a hard border preceded that from 1922. With the softening of the border, we have seen better cross-border flow in public transport, radiotherapy, cooperation between district councils on INTERREG, second- and third-level education programmes across the board and other things that have been beneficial for people. The border has softened, but that has been by virtue of the fact that both are in the EU. The proposition being put in front of us is that we are to have an international border between the EU and a non-EU state right on our doorstep. That has caused a lot of fear and anxiety.

The EU has many faults. Being from a rural area and dealing with the farming community and rural groups, I know that there is lots of bureaucracy and things that really frustrate them. Even in relation to the A5, the EU habitats directive is one of the reasons why the project has been held up. There are many areas where the EU has faults, but, in the wider scheme of things, it is beneficial and the majority of people here prefer it. That is why they voted for it.

During the election campaign, we heard many promises on health and investment and what would be freed up to go into health. One of the things that I noted during the referendum and since it was a promise by the British Government of cheaper food after Brexit. Here in the North, farmers are battling the supermarkets, which are selling produce more cheaply than farmers can produce it. The fear, post Brexit, is that farmers will lose their subsidy, which accounts for 87% of their income. You will have trade deals opened with the likes of Argentina and the Americas, where beef is 60% cheaper, and the place will be flooded, literally, with cheap beef, and farmers will be pushed against the wall.

There is no certainty for farmers. I heard it said earlier that, up to 2020, the Chancellor has guaranteed this and guaranteed that. The reality is that, after 2020, nobody knows. I note predictions from our Finance Minister at the recent meeting in Leinster House that the percentage of the British block for the CAP, which is 9%, could drop to 3% in a post-Brexit scenario. The effect of that in rural areas in our part of the world would be devastating. Farming would not be sustainable any more, rural community groups would fold, and it would be very difficult to survive. We would end up almost like England is at the minute, where you have quaint little villages with very little in between them. That is something that we really want to resist.

I also note that, in the debate around Brexit, Professor Phinnemore spoke to the Executive Committee recently, and he said:

“No non-member state of the European Union has free trade with the EU in agricultural products”.

There will always be controls, quotas and, in his words, “exceptionally high” tariffs, even if we remain part of the single market and the customs union. Brexit will have an absolutely devastating impact on agri-trade and on our rural communities. We hear talk that farmers are finding it

OK now because they get a good conversion rate for the single farm payment. That is a short-term bounce —

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

Mr McAleer: — that will be detrimental in the long term.

In conclusion, whilst we support today's motion, I add the caveat that we see that the best long-term future for this part of Ireland and, indeed, the island of Ireland is to remain.

Mr Frew: I have an understanding of why the SDLP is bringing this before us again. It is a massive issue for the whole of the United Kingdom, the whole of the EU and, I suppose, the world. I get that. I get why we want to debate it, but, sooner or later, the Prime Minister will trigger article 50; sooner or later, the position of the United Kingdom Government will become clear in the negotiations with the European Union; sooner or later, we will see what is good and what is bad for Northern Ireland within that; and, sooner or later, we will be able to challenge Her Majesty's Government on that and try to influence and change that.

Throughout the months since the referendum verdict to leave the EU, which I and my constituents supported, as we have gone along, I have heard about how everyone who voted to leave Europe must be stupid, must be racist or must be elderly. Some of the language used around that time was absolutely scandalous. There is no doubt that this is a momentous occasion in the history of the world and, most definitely, Europe. It is probably one of the most seismic changes in post-war Britain. It probably goes right back as the most momentous decision since the home rule crisis. But we have to get over the decision that the United Kingdom population made.

When I read the motion, I think, as I sometimes thought with the “Remain” campaign, especially on the nationalist side, that this is desperation. I think that this is a lack of confidence. I think that this is the SDLP trying to scrap for nationalist votes in a diminishing market with Sinn Féin. I really think that that is what the motion is about.

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: Yes, I will.

Dr Farry: It is not usual for me to come to the defence of either Sinn Féin or the SDLP, but I will just say that it is a mistake for people to assume that the issue about special status and the consequences for Northern Ireland is purely for nationalists. Clearly, the Alliance Party is not a nationalist party. We were contacted over the summer by people from across the spectrum, including people who would declare themselves unionists, who are deeply concerned about the implications of Brexit and have asked us to take forward the cause of finding out some solution particular to Northern Ireland.

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

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for that intervention. I am not suggesting for a moment that the Member is fighting on a nationalist agenda; he does not get any seats in nationalist constituencies, so I understand that. For nationalist parties, for the SDLP, they cannot tell us what the special status could be, just in the same way as anyone else cannot say what Brexit will be. That is because there is a negotiation to be had, and it is to be had by Her Majesty's

Government. Brexit will be this: Brexit will be whatever Her Majesty's Government and Brussels agree on. That is what Brexit will be, and it is up to us in Northern Ireland to feed into that negotiation.

I am proud that my constituency of North Antrim voted to leave the European Union.

Some 62% of North Antrim decided that it is better to leave the United Kingdom.

1.45 pm

Mr Allister: The EU.

Mr Frew: The EU. *[Laughter.]* I represent North Antrim, and I will represent all the people there in the next two years: the people who voted to remain and the people who voted to leave. I will represent those people as best I can. I will know what is a good deal for Northern Ireland and what is a bad deal for Northern Ireland, and I will know what part of a deal is bad for Northern Ireland and what part of a deal is good.

Mr Eastwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: Yes, I will.

Mr Eastwood: I have no doubt that the Member will know if it is a good or a bad deal. Does he think therefore that we should have a vote on it, or should we just leave it to the British Prime Minister, who has not given us much hope that she is too concerned about whether it is a good or a bad deal for us?

Mr Frew: I remind the Member that we have just had a vote. It is called a referendum. I remind the Member that, just as we debate Brexit in this Chamber every week, so does Westminster. Every single MP will have a chance to put their case to the Prime Minister.

Here is the point that I want to make before I sit down: Theresa May campaigned to remain, as did some of the Ulster Unionist Party, but she is now Prime Minister and has said clearly that we are leaving the EU. She has got over it. She knows what needs to be done for the betterment of the United Kingdom, and she accepts the democratic wish of the people of the United Kingdom. Why can other parties not accept that? That is not me saying that you should all become pro "Leave". I am not saying that at all, but I am saying that you should think about your constituents and what is the best way to —

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

Mr Frew: — represent and lead those constituents to make sure that we get a better deal for Northern Ireland. There are opportunities here. We should grasp them.

Ms Hanna: This motion should be uncontroversial. In the last weeks and months, we have heard Members of all parties, regardless of their pre-referendum stance, talk about getting the best possible outcome for Northern Ireland. The constitutional, legal and political necessities of our situation, geographic and otherwise, will require specific provisions in the event of any Brexit. Every Member who has spoken acknowledged those, so we might as well seek to maximise and firmly embed them.

We are in uncharted waters here, but the EU is a creative problem-solver. The continent abounds with specific

solutions to specific problems, but we need to meet the European Union halfway and set out a case. The SDLP has been very clear and consistent on this: people here voted decisively for the opportunity, stability and diversity of the EU, and it is our job to deliver that for them. Even those who do not share that view —

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Ms Hanna: I will in a moment, but I have some progress to make.

Even those who did not campaign for or vote "Remain" should be clear-headed enough to know that any impacts, even if there are some good ones, would be felt disproportionately here. As custodians of the public interest, it is our job to set out a mitigation strategy, and special status is very worth pursuing.

The silence from the Executive on this is very worrying, particularly when those in London have made clear time and again that they never gave our situation much thought before the referendum, and they certainly are not wasting a lot of time on it now. It is ironic, given that this is an Assembly known for crises, drama and conflabs — once a year, we will be down in Stormont House or over in some stately home in England, and there will be late night press conferences and presidential hand-holding — that now, when an actual crisis has hit us, there is almost not a word, apart from one unrequited letter three months on. It is ridiculous. Whatever the very major issues in Stormont House, they never prompted a run on passport forms. The Executive remind me of a driver, possibly male, who is hopelessly lost but will not roll down the window and ask for directions. I am not given to quoting Martin McGuinness, but the article yesterday in which he set out his support for special status also said that he believes that the Executive need to get their "act together", and I concur.

It was a dollar short and a day late, but the letter that the joint First Ministers sent to Theresa May — we still do not know whether there has been a response — set out some very key issues. Heaven forbid, we could have campaigned on those jointly before 23 June and we might be in a different situation. It outlined issues around the need not to have a hard border, continued tariff-free access to the single market, free movement of labour, energy supplies — God help energy bills if sterling keeps going in the direction that it is going — and EU funding. However, it is impossible to see how any of those conditions would be met if we Brexit in the hard fashion that London is outlining without some special provision or status for this region. Northern Ireland voted for a very different future to that being set out by Theresa May, and we must have one.

The Good Friday Agreement gave Northern Ireland supremacy in deciding our constitutional future. It recognised the dual identity — that people here can be British or Irish or both, as they so choose — and it gave equal status to those identities. Those who shout and roar about supporting this referendum can maybe update their response to the Good Friday Agreement, given that they believe that 52% is an overwhelming majority in this case. Under that interpretation of the Good Friday Agreement and recognising the 56% vote, only Northern Ireland can determine its constitutional status, and it is clear that a clear majority voted to remain.

The SDLP has always stood by the principle of consent, even when it supported a constitutional status that was not of our choosing or our liking. This is not just a technical issue. Please do not underestimate the importance, to nationalism in particular, of unimpeded access to the rest of this island and of the European Union, which was so pivotal in allowing sovereign Ireland and sovereign UK to work together as equals and as partners, underpinned a supernational link between the contracting parties to the agreement and provided validation to Northern nationalists that the two Governments were cooperating with equal status.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for giving way. Given the references to “divisive nationalism”, as one comment quoted Theresa May, does the Member have any observation about where divisive nationalism exists on these islands?

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

Ms Hanna: I think that it is very clear that the divisive nationalism in this case is the English nationalists who forced this on us. I will also say that, when they talk about having cake and eating it and about the best deal on the islands, they sound more and more like Donald Trump and this wall that the Mexicans are apparently going to pay for. For all of Theresa May and the other Brexiters' rhetoric, Brexit will mean what the EU says it means. We believe that the EU understands this region far better than London has; perhaps better than some people in the Chamber do.

We are somewhat encouraged by some of the change in direction and thinking. Some of the thinkers in the DUP, such as Jeffrey Donaldson, clearly understand some of the nuances, but we are disappointed that some of his colleagues are more bullish and do not seem to acknowledge the issues. The Brexiters told us for months that this was about taking back control. How does sitting on the Benches, rebutting every sensible argument, fall into that definition of taking back control? If this is about getting the best result for Northern Ireland, you cannot just sit back and wait for London to tell you how we will get out of this mess.

Lord Morrow: When I first read this motion, I could not make up my mind whether the SDLP was still in denial or whether, in fact, it had come round to accepting the reality of the situation, which is, of course, that the people of the United Kingdom have voted to leave the European Union. I am happy to state that I was one of those. Not only was I one of those, I campaigned and encouraged everybody else to do likewise. Not everybody did that, and I think that is a pity; but that is by the way.

I listened to some of the comments today, and I wonder where those Members have been living of late. I see that the party that brought the motion today is even beginning to get a bit tired of it. It is down to four Members. It did manage to get seven or eight on the Benches at the start but, one by one, they have all gone away and said, “We have more important —

Mr Eastwood: You only have four.

Lord Morrow: We did not bring the motion. You brought it.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask Members not to make comments from sedentary positions.

Lord Morrow: The SDLP should step into the real world and realise that the people of the United Kingdom have voted to leave the European Union, not to leave Europe. The sooner the SDLP gets round to accepting that, life will be a lot easier for it and it will maybe start to be a wee bit more progressive in its thinking going forward.

I listened to Mr Smith, I think it was, and it is ironic that the things that he outlined as reasons for staying in Europe are the very reasons that I voted to leave the European Union. The greater risk was remaining in the European Union, not leaving. I accept that there will be some tough decisions to be made as a result, but the tougher decisions would have been required had we stayed. It should be remembered that the United Kingdom contributes something like £18 billion per annum.

It gets back £11 billion per annum. There is a deficit there of some £7 billion, and I ask Members to keep that in mind.

Recently, the Northern Ireland manufacturing sales and export survey 2014, which was published in December 2015, made some interesting observations. I think it is worth quoting. It indicated that £8.3 billion of a total of £18.1 billion of sales goes to the GB mainland market. In percentage terms, that is 46%, so we must remember that our main market is the rest of the United Kingdom. Some £1.4 billion goes to the Irish Republic — that is 8%; £1.5 billion goes to the rest of the EU; £3.1 billion, or 17%, goes globally; and £3.8 billion remains in Northern Ireland. There are those who have tried to paint the picture today that it will be abject poverty for the United Kingdom once we leave the EU. I do not accept that. I do not accept that for a moment. I believe that, when we leave, there will be new horizons to look to and new opportunities will come. That does not mean that we will then have absolutely nothing to do with Europe. No one has ever advocated that at any time.

Mr McAleer maybe came closest to telling the facts when he said that we do not really know what will happen come 2020. That is right: we do not really know. Our fishing industry has welcomed that we are coming out of Europe, our farming industry has welcomed it, yet the question was put up today about what is going to happen to our agricultural industry when we pull out. What was going to happen to the —

Mr McAleer: Will the Member take an intervention?

Lord Morrow: Right; OK.

Mr McAleer: Does the Member accept the point I made that never in the history of the EU has a non-EU state had an agricultural trade agreement with an EU state? In those circumstances, as Professor Phinnemore said, the tariffs will be very high, irrespective of whether we are in a customs union.

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

Lord Morrow: Thank you. I heard what the Member said, and I do not think he was entirely accurate in that.

Many in the debate, particularly those who moved the motion, said that Northern Ireland will be the lost cause. Indeed, it was Ms Hanna who very boldly stated that the EU understands Northern Ireland far better than the United Kingdom. If that is the case, you have absolutely nothing to worry about. Your worries are now all over, because your

friends and colleagues in Europe understand Northern Ireland far better than we do. That is a lot of nonsense; no disrespect to you. It is pure, unadulterated nonsense for anybody to come out with that and try to tell us that. We —

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

Lord Morrow: Yes. We will be in a better position come the day we leave the European Union. I understand that article 50 —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Lord Morrow: — is going to be triggered at the end of March.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Lord Morrow: Is it not a pity it is not sooner?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest the House takes its ease until then. The debate will continue after the ministerial statement, when the next Member to speak will be Paula Bradshaw.

The debate stood suspended.

2.00 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Oral Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Ministerial Code

1. **Mr Agnew** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the mechanism in place to allow members of the public to report breaches of the ministerial code of conduct. (AQO 461/16-21)

Mr McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): As the Member will be aware, no authority was conferred on the First Minister and me by the Good Friday Agreement or the 1998 Act to rule on alleged breaches by other Ministers or impose sanctions on them. The accountability of Ministers for their conduct is, ultimately, to the Assembly. The fact that the Pledge of Office and the ministerial code of conduct are included in the ministerial code did not qualify or replace the statutory arrangements put in place to determine alleged breaches of the pledge, which include questions of compliance with the ministerial code of conduct. However, as with any issue, a member of the public may write to us. Where we receive such a complaint, we consider it in accordance with the mechanisms provided in the Act. They allow us, if we consider it justified, to table a motion asking the Assembly to resolve that a Minister has not observed the terms of the Pledge of Office. If the Assembly so resolves, the sanctions available to it are censure, exclusion from office or a reduction of remuneration. That decision, however, is one for the Assembly. A member of the public may also, of course, approach an MLA and request them to consider tabling such a motion, which must have the support of 30 Members.

Mr Agnew: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. When I brought an amendment to the House, it was disappointing that no one from the Executive Office was here to respond. Why does the deputy First Minister think it acceptable that, whilst other Members of the House are open to an independent investigatory process, there is a lower level of accountability for Ministers and no direct access for members of the public to make complaints? Why does he think that he and other Ministers should be less accountable?

Mr McGuinness: I am aware that, in a recent debate in the Chamber, Mr Agnew called for there to be a standards commissioner to investigate alleged breaches of the ministerial code of conduct. He alternatively suggested that the remit of the Assembly Commissioner for Standards be extended to give that office the power to adjudicate on alleged breaches of the ministerial code. That would be in addition to the powers that it has to adjudicate on alleged breaches of the Members' code of conduct. The Assembly defined the role of the Commissioner for Standards to exclude ministerial conduct, even though it is the Assembly that must resolve whether the Pledge of Office has been breached. While this would be a matter for the Assembly to pursue, if Members saw fit, we would be happy to discuss the need for any expansion of the role, particularly to avoid

nugatory expenditure on separate arrangements. We are willing to have a conversation about the matter in the time ahead. I suggest that people take up that offer.

Mr Speaker: I inform the House that question 13 has been withdrawn.

Mrs Cameron: Does the deputy First Minister believe that the public are being fettered from raising concerns by the present arrangements?

Mr McGuinness: As I outlined in my initial answer, it is quite clear that there are several routes that can be accessed by Members and members of the public. One is through the First Minister and deputy First Minister; the other is through approaching a Member, who, to put it before the Assembly, must gather 30 signatures. I have listened very carefully to what Steven Agnew has had to say. I hope that my answer allows for a conversation, and not just between the Executive Office and Mr Agnew. If any other Member feels the need to take up our offer to discuss the matter, we are more than willing to facilitate that.

Mr Speaker: You are very late to rise. I call the Member.

Dr Farry: Thank you, Mr Speaker. On the heels of his last answers, does the deputy First Minister recognise that there is a wider problem with regard to ministerial conduct, openness and transparency, and that we have seen a decline in standards during this mandate with regard to things like responses to FOIs, the number of ministerial statements to the House, delays in responses to questions and, indeed, non-responses by Ministers to very important ministerial debates, including today's debate on Brexit?

Mr McGuinness: That is a range of criticisms, all of which may have merits or not. I believe that the Administration is open and transparent; others will disagree with that. The big change that happened, folks, was in May, when we had the election. There was an opportunity for five parties to take up ministerial positions, and three parties chose not to do that. We and the DUP had the courage to go forward together. Of course, the criticisms that have been lodged in relation to the issues that have just been specified by the Member are all issues on which we have tried consistently to ensure that we close the gap between us. It is still early days. Some of the criticisms I accept; some I do not. We will try to do something about the criticisms that I accept.

Mrs Palmer: Will the Minister outline what sanctions are in place where Ministers are found to be in breach of the ministerial code?

Mr McGuinness: I think that I answered that question in my first answer.

Paramilitary Activity: Action Plan

2. **Mr Smith** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they are monitoring the effectiveness of the Executive's action plan for tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime. (AQO 462/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: The Executive published an action plan on tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime in July 2016. When we published the action plan, we made clear our commitment to work with local communities and build on the good work that we know goes on already. We have established a cross-departmental programme board that meets regularly and is developing a work programme for 2016-17. Work is also

under way to develop detailed costed programmes to be put in place from 2017-18 onwards. We regularly meet the Justice Minister to review progress. We also discuss progress at our Fresh Start meetings with both the British and Irish Governments.

Mr Smith: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Following recent media revelations and allegations about organisations in receipt of major Executive funding, what actions are you putting in place to ensure that funding is not given to those involved in criminality and paramilitarism?

Mr McGuinness: I think that we have very robust processes in place. It is obvious that the Member is talking about the recent publicity surrounding the Charter group in east Belfast. It is obvious from the steering committee on that group that it is made up of politicians from the Assembly, people from statutory agencies and people from the business community. We have a robust mechanism in place to ensure that all funding for the SIF programme is properly accounted for. We have no concerns about that at all.

Ms Hanna: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answers. He referred to media investigations around SIF and concerns about a recipient organisation. He will also be aware of the three-person panel report on paramilitarism and the need not to bolster and empower paramilitary organisations. Can he outline whether he thinks the UDA is a current or former paramilitary organisation?

Mr McGuinness: Our responsibility is to deal with the steering groups that were established under the terms of the SIF programme, as they are the people who decide how a project or projects are taken forward in any area.

I have no doubt whatsoever that the UDA is in existence. The question is what role people who were formerly members of the UDA play in our society. There are people who are still in the UDA who play a very negative role; there are people who were formerly in the UDA and play a very negative role; and there are people who were formerly in the UDA who play a very positive role. I would like to think that, in our dealings with people, we are working with people in society who play a positive role.

On the republican side, there are many ex-prisoners who have been convicted of many things and all of them make a powerful and positive contribution to developing communities and their capacity. Just as important, they work on a cross-community basis with many individuals who, previously, would have been considered as enemies.

We are a society in transition. I know that it is the job of the Opposition, if they get the opportunity, to score cheap political points, but the main message here today is that there is a steering group in east Belfast made up of politicians from the House, statutory agencies, the business community and others who would be deemed to be of the loyalist persuasion. The important thing for us is that every penny is spent properly, and, thus far, there has been no suggestion from anybody that anything other than that has been the case.

Mr Stalford: I thank the deputy First Minister for the answers he has given the House up to this point. Will he provide an update to the House on the establishment of the Independent Reporting Commission on paramilitary activity? Does he agree that it is an outrageous slur on

many of the good people who are involved in SIF projects to accuse them of being involved in paramilitarism? In my constituency, I have seen the positive benefit that the projects will have, as has the lady from South Belfast. She knows the positive benefit that they will have, and it is wrong to slur those people in that way.

Mr McGuinness: In relation to the Independent Reporting Commission, one of the commitments in 'A Fresh Start' was that a four-member international body would be established by the British and Irish Governments. That body will be responsible for reporting annually on progress towards ending continuing paramilitary activity and reporting on the implementation of the measures of the three Administrations. It will also consult government and relevant agencies and groups. The British and Irish Governments signed the treaty required to provide for the body on Tuesday 13 September, and we understand that supporting regulations have been laid before the British Parliament and that the Irish Government will bring forward proposals for implementing legislation before the end of the year. The aim is to have the commission in place by the end of this year. The Executive will nominate two members to the body in due course.

In relation to the work of the SIF programme, I think that the schemes being developed across the North are of immense value to local communities. It is not a top-down process. People at grass-roots level are deciding what they think is best to meet the needs of their communities. At the beginning of the process, when SIF was mooted and launched, there were suggestions from people in at least one of the opposition parties that this would be a slush fund for paramilitaries: it is clearly nothing of the sort. People have seized on the situation and on one person in east Belfast, but that does a grave disservice to the good and decent people throughout the country who work day and daily to ensure that the lives of the people in the community they come from are enriched by delivering valuable programmes.

Let us get away from the nonsense that this is directed at paramilitaries; this is directed at communities, and the communities are making the decisions. Of course, there is a wide range of representation on the steering groups to ensure that whatever safeguards are required are there, as well as the auditing processes that we, as a Government, conduct on all the programmes.

Mr Nesbitt: The Minister said that the east Belfast SIF advisory panel included members of the statutory services and representatives of the business community. The Executive Office website lists eight people, none of whom represent the business community or are members of the statutory services. Would the Minister like to revisit his claim?

Mr McGuinness: I would be prepared to send the Member the names.

2.15 pm

Mr McGuigan: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answers and for detailing the work of the Executive's action plan. Following on from his answers, may I ask how he and the First Minister will ensure that the work of the Executive's action plan on these activities complements and brings added value to the work already ongoing at community level?

Mr McGuinness: As we all know, dealing with paramilitary activity, criminal activity of any description or organised crime requires a collaborative approach, and the report of the three-person panel specified that. It has to be an approach that engages all the key public stakeholders, and they must all work in partnership with communities. Community input is vital to the full implementation of the recommendations. More importantly, it means delivery agencies listening to communities and understanding the impact of criminality on community life. Innovation, co-design and community partnership working must define the implementation of the 43 recommendations.

There has been a lot of criticism in the past that there was no plan to deal with this unacceptable situation, which, unfortunately, still exists in our society. This is a plan; this is a very serious attempt by the Executive, supported by others, to ensure that we continue to bear down on it. Of course, a key role in that has to be played by the Police Service, which is enthusiastic about this, up to the task and absolutely believes that it can be effective only if it gets community support. Rather than trying to chip away at this, the Opposition would be better employed in weighing in behind it and giving it and the police the support that they deserve.

Ms Bradshaw: In light of the First Minister's willingness to stand and be photographed beside self-admitted paramilitary figures, what credibility is now left in the Executive commitment to the disbandment of paramilitary groups?

Mr McGuinness: I have no doubt whatsoever about the First Minister's commitment to the disbandment of paramilitary organisations — none whatsoever — and I do not think that she has any doubt whatsoever about my commitment to stand against them. Anybody who is involved in a paramilitary organisation or criminal gang is working against the interests of the people whom we in the Assembly represent. Yes, there are people out there who are still dedicated and committed to trying to bring these institutions down and plunge us back to the past. I saw how, rather pathetically, an attempt was made to portray what was happening in east Belfast as something other than putting in place a work programme that was about giving employment opportunities to people previously unemployed, giving them a real opportunity to go on to full-time employment. As far as I am concerned, that is a valuable programme. If people are contributing to that in a positive way, alongside other representatives from the community, that is to be welcomed. If we were to employ a rule of thumb that everybody who was involved in conflict in the past has no role to play in the future, I am afraid that there would be no future for any of us.

Mr Speaker: Mr Nelson McCausland is not in his place.

Paramilitary Groups: Disbandment

4. **Mr T Buchanan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the progress made on the disbandment of paramilitary groups. (AQO 464/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: In July 2016, the Executive published an action plan, 'Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality, and Organised Crime', which set out the measures that we will take to implement the panel's recommendations. Work is under way to take forward a number of measures this year and to develop detailed costs of programmes to be put in place from 2017-18 onwards.

Mr T Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he advise the House whether he is satisfied that enough is being done to rid our society of these paramilitary groups?

Mr McGuinness: The fact that we dealt with this in the Fresh Start Agreement and came to an agreement on how we need to move forward, with the support of the Irish and British Governments and, of course, the PSNI and the Garda Síochána, means that it is clear that we accepted that more needed to be done. I laid before the Assembly today exactly what plans we have put in place: the establishment of a four-person independent reporting commission. We will contribute two names to that; the Irish and British Governments will contribute two names. That is a determined effort by us, as a Government, to work collaboratively with everybody who agrees with us that paramilitarism, criminality and criminal gangs are a scourge on our society. We are absolutely determined to continue with this work in the belief that, ultimately, those who are in favour of peaceful and democratic processes will prevail over those who, through their criminality, try to undermine the potential of our society to deliver for themselves.

Mr Kennedy: What thought has been given to sanctions for any group that fails to disband by the end of the lifetime of this strategy?

Mr McGuinness: These are all matters that we will deal with in the time ahead. Consideration has been given, at every stage, to how we will deal with that. In the past, sanctions did not work. The only real sanction, when dealing with groups still committed to criminality and violence, is the will of the community, working with the Government, the PSNI and the gardaí in the South. We need to ensure that the ultimate sanction is one that puts us in the driving seat as opposed to those who are still involved in these activities. I have considerable confidence that the implementation of the strategy on tackling paramilitarism and criminality can work through the collaborative approach. That is the ultimate sanction.

Mr Lyttle: In a leaked version of the study commissioned by OFMDFM on investigating links in achievement and deprivation (ILiAD), there were findings that continuing paramilitary influence in our communities is having a corrosive impact on disadvantaged communities, creating negative role models through people prospering outside of regular education. Why did OFMDFM sit on the publication of that report since approximately December 2015? Given the significance of the findings, when can we expect publication of the report?

Mr McGuinness: When we agreed to establish a three-person panel to put in place a strategy to bear down on criminality in all areas, including areas of disadvantage, it was in the sure knowledge that those on the group — and I think that Lord Alderdice, John McBurney and Monica McWilliams did wonderful work — clearly identified in their work the issues that the Member referred to. We are dealing with it in a much more comprehensive fashion through trying to implement the findings of the three-person panel.

Mr Allister: What credibility have the Executive in purporting to promote the disbandment of paramilitary organisations when the deputy First Minister still denies the findings of last year's Government panel that his IRA still has its structures — though reduced — and is still

controlled by an army council? If half the Government deny the existence of one of the primary paramilitary organisations of our day, what credibility is there in pretending there is a policy geared at disbandment?

Mr McGuinness: Worse still is the pretence that there is an IRA when, quite clearly, the IRA has long-since left the stage and handed over the responsibility for the politics of the North of Ireland to the 108 Members in the House. We have loads of credibility, and it was tested at the election just a few short months ago, along with the Member's credibility. He was returned by himself; I was returned with 28 Members, and the DUP with many more.

Brexit: OFMDFM Paper

5. **Mr McGlone** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when Executive Ministers and their special advisers became aware of the report entitled 'Preliminary Analysis on the Impact of a UK Referendum on its Membership of the European Union'. (AQO 465/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: This analysis paper was not sent to Ministers or their special advisers. Following a freedom of information request to the Department we became aware of this work. The document was released on two occasions following freedom of information requests.

Mr McGlone: Which Minister or junior Minister, or indeed special adviser, was involved in authorising or instructing the civil servants that they carry out the report?

Mr McGuinness: I do not know that that question is even remotely relevant to the first question.

Mr McKee: Why did the deputy First Minister indicate he had sight of the paper, when the First Minister claimed to have only become aware of the paper when the freedom of information request was received by the Department?

Mr McGuinness: I do not think I ever claimed that I had sight of the paper. It was quite obvious in the answers that have been given since that neither the First Minister and myself were involved in seeing the outcome. The report was compiled by the European policy and co-ordination unit. Officials prepare a range of papers on a regular basis, many of which are working papers and do not form submissions sent to Ministers. Of course, in the absence of an agreed position, the report could not have been disclosed to the Executive, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister or the Assembly.

The important point is that it was not something that was rigidly adhered to in the context of the last Administration, which was a five-party coalition, because in that coalition there were countless occasions when at least two out of the three parties that did not take up seats in this Executive were leaking right, left and centre. That is not the way we do business. If a report is put forward for our consideration and if we get into a scenario where we are leaking against one another because the outcome of that report advantages one particular political party, then all confidence is lost within the Administration.

This was a paper that was not even completed, for the simple reason that a number of Departments that had been requested to contribute their analysis to the paper had not actually done so. We are not talking about a completed document. We are talking about a document that was

initially put forward by the head of the Civil Service. There is an awful lot of misinformation being propagated about this document.

Mr Anderson: The deputy First Minister has referred to the preliminary analysis report not being completed. Why was the report not completed?

Mr McGuinness: It was not completed because, as I said, a number of Departments that had been requested to contribute to it did not respond to the request. Therefore, because they did not respond, the document was not considered by the head of the Civil Service to be complete.

Ms Gildernew: The deputy First Minister may have partially answered my supplementary question, but can he elaborate on why the report was not seen by Ministers?

Mr McGuinness: Simply because, as I have said, the report was commissioned by the head of the Civil Service and was being compiled by the European policy and co-ordination unit, but it was never completed. Officials prepare a range of papers on a regular basis, many of which are working papers and do not form submissions sent to Ministers, and certainly never before they are completed.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Ford for a very quick question and a quick response.

Mr Ford: A very quick question: is the deputy First Minister aware of the timescales for answering freedom of information requests, and why was there such a delay in answering these particular requests?

2.30 pm

Mr McGuinness: I think I referred to that earlier when it was addressed by Stephen Farry. With the new Administration, which has been in place since May of this year, there is a duty and a responsibility to respond as quickly as possible. You should not read anything into the fact that the paper was produced as a result of the freedom of information request after the referendum date, because the key point is —

Mr Ford: Late.

Mr McGuinness: The key point, as the Member well knows, is this: we had a situation in the run-in to the referendum whereby the two Executive parties were on different sides of the debate. The Member can shake his head all he likes, but that is the reality. Even if the document had been completed and offered up to the First Minister and me, if there was no agreement about the publication of that document, I was not going to leak it because it was to my advantage, even though it would have been to our advantage. That is the way we work, and I understand that there are other parties here that have seized on this issue, that were part of the Administration and that, when they were part of the Administration, were leaking right, left and centre.

Mr Speaker: Members, that ends the period for listed questions. We now move to 15 minutes of topical questions.

PFG Targets 2011-16

T1. **Mr Allen** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the deputy First Minister accepts the

assessment of the investigative journalism website 'The Detail', which stated that only around 55% of the Programme for Government (PFG) targets were achieved in the last mandate. (AQT 336/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: My understanding is that the Programme for Government had success of something like 80-odd per cent.

Mr Allen: I thank the deputy First Minister for his brief answer. Do you accept that, beyond percentages, it was the big-ticket issues such as dealing with the past, the Long Kesh/Maze site, delivery of a state-of-the-art facility for the emergency services and the provision of goods, facilities and services that were not achieved?

Mr McGuinness: It is common knowledge that a number of issues were not achieved during the last Administration for various reasons. The Member mentioned the situation at Maze/Long Kesh. His party played a leading role in scuttling that project, because a key element of it was the removal of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society from the King's Hall to Maze/Long Kesh alongside the establishment of a peace-building and conflict resolution centre, which was opposed by the Member's party. It was not the only party to oppose it; other interest groups outside also opposed it.

Mr Allen: What about the state-of-the-art facility for emergency services?

Mr McGuinness: You should not speak when I am speaking; I am trying to finish the answer. The visit to Brussels, for example, which was led by the leader of the Member's party, saw at least half the delegation made up of people who voted for Brexit. I listened to the leader's interview afterwards, where he outlined the need for huge funds to be poured into infrastructure projects, yet one infrastructure project the Ulster Unionist Party had control over during the last Administration and that it had no intention of ever delivering was the A5. We are now going to deliver it.

Brexit: Rise in Racism

T2. **Mr McMullan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the deputy First Minister can comment on the implications of the EU referendum result on people from other countries who have come here to live and work amongst us, given that, like many other people, he will be increasingly concerned about the rise of racism during and after the EU referendum, with the language emanating from the Tory party conference not helping. (AQT 337/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: The EU referendum result has, unfortunately, resulted in significant uncertainty and worry amongst migrant communities regarding their legal status, rights and entitlements. It has also heightened fears of racism and hate crime. Of course, there is a duty on all of us in politics to show positive leadership.

Unfortunately, that was absent from the recent Tory party conference, which, ironically, was held at the part-EU-funded Birmingham International Convention Centre.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for his answer. What can we do to reassure migrant and foreign national communities that they are welcome here?

Mr McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Speaker, junior Minister Fearon will answer that question.

Ms Fearon (Junior Minister, The Executive Office): I thank the Member for his question. There is an onus on all of us to show support to our minority ethnic communities and our migrant workers. The majority of people in the North, as evidenced by the most recent life and times survey, want a welcoming, outward-looking and open society in which people feel a sense of belonging to this place. I stress that there is absolutely no place for racism in our society. People who have come to make their life here must be protected.

Just last week, junior Minister Ross and I attended the launch of the No Hate Here campaign in north Belfast, which was a PCSP initiative. That is an important example, because we are working hand in hand with the Department of Justice in developing a dedicated action plan as part of the community safety strategy to tackle hate crime.

Mr Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

UDA/Charter NI

T4. **Mr McGlone** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in the hope of an answer this time, to state the extent of the involvement of the UDA with Charter NI. (AQT 339/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: We have extensively covered that question in the proceedings today. I am disappointed that the Member thinks that the question was not answered, but, in my opinion, it was answered adequately. We put in place a SIF programme that has been of immense benefit to people all over the North of Ireland. The Member's party, from the outset, was opposed to it, describing it as a slush fund for paramilitaries, which does a massive disservice to all the good people throughout the North of Ireland who, day and daily, make a contribution to making life better for the people in their communities.

They have seized on one issue in east Belfast. Nobody is questioning the bona fides of the Charter group, which is charged with taking forward that aspect of the SIF programme in east Belfast. Nobody has questioned their bona fides whatsoever. They have seized on the name of one person who was convicted in the past, but that raises a wider question: if we were to disbar people who were convicted of incidents that occurred during the conflict from contributing to society, we would be running against the recommendations of the three-person panel, which dealt with that issue of reintegrating people into society. It was also about asking the First Minister and me to write to the US authorities so that people who were being denied a visa could visit the United States. In many ways, this represents a cheap, point-scoring exercise, mainly at the expense of the —

Mr E McCann: Will the Minister give way?

Mr McGuinness: We do not give way during Question Time.

Mr E McCann: Sorry.

Mr McGuinness: It is at the expense of local communities.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Minister for that answer. I do not regard my question as cheap. Is he aware of allegations that people have been forced onto the streets due to having drug debts to the UDA?

Mr McGuinness: I have no doubt that there are people in paramilitary organisations involved in that type of activity. I am also conscious of the so-called dissident groups in west Belfast who, day and daily, extort money from the business community in that area, as they have done in other parts of the North of Ireland. It should come as no surprise to anybody — it comes as no surprise to me — that there are still people who are active in the UDA and dissident groups who prey on society. The question is whether the people who are involved in the implementation of the SIF programme in east Belfast are doing so in a way that ensures that every penny of that money goes towards the cause that they have taken up in that area. In this instance, 300 people will be given work placements with a real prospect of getting a full-time job afterwards.

Brexit: All-island Implications

T5. **Mr Sheehan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implications of Brexit for the island of Ireland, taking into account next week's Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) meeting. (AQT 340/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: It is quite obvious that, in the upcoming discussions, we will make the case that, effectively, we are a special case. That is identified by the fact that the First Minister and I have written jointly to the British Prime Minister outlining quite a number of areas of concern, including our concern at the prospect that there might be a border of any description. It is also worth noting that, last week on RTÉ, Jeffrey Donaldson on two occasions made it clear that he thinks that the island of Ireland needs to be treated as a special case. He repeated that in Brussels 24 hours later.

We are a special case. The prospect of the Brexit negotiations impacting on the political, social and economic life of the people of the North is so profound that we have a duty to work together to ensure that the interests of the people we represent are protected. The best way forward in this — I do not know whether it is possible to do it — and the strongest hand that we can play in any negotiation will be if we can come to an agreement between ourselves and with the Irish Government on what the ask is from our perspective. We will get the first indication of where all this is going when the First Minister and I attend the meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee, which will be chaired by the Prime Minister on Monday next week.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will the deputy First Minister give any indication of whether any of our European partners are aware of the issues that face Ireland?

Mr McGuinness: The Member knows that I spent last Tuesday at the European Parliament engaged in 14 meetings, including meetings with some of the key negotiators on behalf of the European Parliament when the negotiations begin. I have to say that there was a very hard-line position towards the British Government from almost everybody I met. That does not mean to say that it will be a hard-line position when it comes to triggering article 50 of the Lisbon treaty. All of us who have been through negotiations know how all of this works.

At the moment, the important thing from our perspective is that there is an appreciation among the powers that be in

Europe of the fantastic achievements that we have had here through Peace and so forth in which they have made a major contribution. They are stakeholders in our peace process through the massive investments in INTERREG programmes, infrastructural projects, Peace funds and so forth. All that has contributed, along with all the other initiatives, to the transformation that has taken place over the last almost 20 years. People in Europe are under no illusions about the special nature of the problems that we have to deal with.

Programme for Government: Consultation

T6. **Mr T Buchanan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Programme for Government consultation process. (AQT 341/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: Things are going very well. We have been through the first phase of the consultation. *[Interruption.]* I hear some sniggering from those who are totally at odds with where the vast bulk of our community is. The stakeholders — the business community, educational establishments, the community and voluntary sector, the farming organisations — all appreciate the fact that they have been consulted not once but twice and will be able to have their say in the formation of the Programme for Government. In my opinion, it is going very well, and that appears to be much to the annoyance of some people in the opposition parties.

2.45 pm

Mr T Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his response. How will this encourage greater collaboration amongst stakeholders and small businesses, especially those in West Tyrone, a rural constituency?

Mr McGuinness: I would have been very surprised if West Tyrone had not been mentioned in that supplementary question. Obviously, a collaborative approach is very important. We have often said that, even against the backdrop of our phenomenal success at a time of world economic downturn, when we have managed to bring in more foreign direct investment, mainly from the United States of America, than at any other time in the history of the state, the backbone of our economy is our indigenous businesses all around the North, including those in West Tyrone, Fermanagh and South Tyrone and Mid Ulster. I absolutely appreciate the massive contribution that they have made. They are very appreciative of the consultative process and the outcomes-based process that we have engaged in, and I am sure that their voices will be heard loud and clear at the end of that.

Mr Speaker: Time is up.

Finance

Corporation Tax

1. **Mr Carroll** asked the Minister of Finance whether he has any plans to lower corporation tax to below the current 12.5% rate in the Republic of Ireland. (AQO 474/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): My response to question 1 is no.

Mr Carroll: I thank the Minister for his quick response. Given the fact that the effective corporation tax rate in the

South is, in reality, 3% due to loopholes, if the Minister's intention is to harmonise corporation tax across Ireland, is he not entering into a race to the bottom that will lead the Assembly to an effective rate of 3% as well in order to achieve that harmonisation?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his supplementary. The answer to that is no as well. If we equalise corporation tax on the island to 12.5%, that is my intent and my resolve. You can be quite sure of this: when we reduce the level of corporation tax in order to create thousands of new jobs — 32,000, we predict, by 2033 — we will ensure that everyone pays their full taxation commitment. On top of that, I will emphasise to the business sector that it has stewardship of business in this part of the world. If tax is reduced, we want the increased profits to go back into investment, R&D and building better businesses.

Let me say this to the Member: I stood on the border at Newry last Saturday with Protestants and Catholics, unionists and nationalists, small business representatives, representatives of the farming sector and representatives of the third sector. People had gathered because they are very worried about the implications or ramifications of Brexit. I looked around for Mr Carroll to see whether he was standing with the workers, the small businesspeople or the social enterprises that have done so much to build up our communities, and he was not there. When it comes to standing with those who are working to create a better society, especially those in the border region who suffered long and hard over many years and are now enjoying the benefits of an open border, I can assure them that we will stand for job creation and with those who will benefit by obtaining employment in the time ahead, and we will stand resolutely for a shared and prosperous society in the future.

Mr Smith: With Brexit likely to be implemented in 2019, has the Minister received any advice on whether the Azores ruling now even remains applicable? Will he give us a commitment that he will push to ensure that the €275 million cost to the Northern Ireland block grant in 2020, for instance, can be avoided?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank Mr Smith. I think that he asked two questions, but I will get to both of them. First, he is right that the Treasury, before it abandoned ship after the EU referendum and stopped talking to us, said that the cost to the block grant would be £270 million. I can assure Mr Smith — I will be asking every Member of the Assembly to support me in this — that when negotiations restart — I am meeting the Chief Secretary to the Treasury next Monday, which will give us a chance to say that we need this concentrated engagement again — I will be saying that it is unacceptable, that it is too high, that it factors in issues that we do not believe are relevant and that we will fight for an affordable, fair and proportionate deal.

I can assure him that, in the time ahead, while this is a matter for the Executive fighting to ensure that we get the best deal possible, there is a role for every Member of the Assembly. This was supported by all the parties and signatories to the Fresh Start Agreement. When I meet the Chief Secretary to the Treasury next Monday, I will be saying that we should have this engagement because we need a runway into a reduction in corporation tax and we want to get the maximum benefits for job creation. I hope that those parties that signed up to Fresh Start will remain resolute and supportive of my efforts at that time.

Ms Hanna: I thank the Minister for his answers. He and a previous Member to speak acknowledged the impact that a Brexit would have on our corporation tax strategy: it would leave it in tatters. Will he consider incorporating a sunset clause in any corporation tax proposals, so that if the prevailing context does not mean that we get these promised new jobs, at least we will not have to continue taking a hit from the public purse?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I do not know whether the Member read the papers at the weekend, but with the EU referendum and the discussion around a Brexit, there is certainly increasing uncertainty coming out of London, rather than clarity, in relation to the intentions of the British Chancellor. Let us not run away from the challenge in the time ahead, and let us not count our chickens before they are hatched.

Regarding the Azores ruling or sunset clauses, if we are speaking to the international business community and asking it to provide a vote of confidence and an investment in us by locating new business here, the last thing we need to do is to have a series of caveats in relation to the corporation tax strategy. We need to stay firm. Mr Hammond has been unclear about the level of corporation tax going forward, so that may change. If there is a change in our status within the EU, we will respond to all those things positively and constructively and, hopefully, as a corporate body, as an Assembly.

I will be in San Francisco at the end of the month to speak to potential investors. We should not say to them that our message is now getting mixed. It should be a very clear message. The Fresh Start Agreement commits us, as an Executive, to introducing corporation tax at 12.5% in April 2018 in a way that is affordable to our budgets, and I am confident in and committed to that goal.

Mr Speaker: I must inform the House that questions 3, 8 and 13 have been withdrawn.

Non-domestic Rating Review

2. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Finance how he plans to take forward the recent review of the non-domestic rating system. (AQO 475/16-21)

7. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the review of the non-domestic rating system. (AQO 480/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: With your permission, a Cheann Comhairle, I will answer questions 2 and 7 together.

I plan to take this work forward in ways that will stimulate economic activity, tackle dereliction and help our struggling high streets. These are my priorities in reforming the non-domestic rating system. The rating system is a distribution mechanism and it does not share the rates out as fairly as it could. I want to make changes so that those who clearly can pay do so and those who need help and assistance can get it. I also want to look at ways of widening the tax base. The Member will be very aware of why we need to bring in additional funds. I also want to widen the tax base to help ease the pain for those who are paying more than they can sustain. The Member will know from his experience in Bangor that, sometimes, businesses go out of business and many businesses blame that on the rates burden. It is about trying to get that balance right.

A major area of concern is the continued relevance and affordability of all the reliefs and exemptions we provide through the system. I refer to this as “spray and pray.” I do not think it is directed enough, and I will be bringing forward proposals on how we can be more precise with our rate relief and rates assistance.

I have listened to the business community and councils on the subject. I plan to deliver a step change in responding to this important review. I intend making a statement to the Assembly in the week beginning 14 November setting out a series of options for reforming the system. These changes will need legislation. Therefore, the Member and the Assembly will have a full opportunity to consider and, indeed, shape the reforms, and I hope I can count on the Member's support when we get to that point.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer and the positive points he has made. I appreciate that he knows Bangor and the North Down constituency quite well, as I understand he ran there as a candidate some time ago. Will the Minister give us an assurance that he will do something — he already mentioned this, I suppose — to address the high level of retail vacancies in town centres in North Down, especially in Bangor, where we are trying to regenerate and rebuild?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Member will not remember this, but there was a Pickie Pool in Bangor, and I am old enough to have been swimming there in my youth, long before I stood with some fame in an election there, in, I believe, 1997.

The commitment is this: we all know we need to really give a boost to town centres. I travelled to Bangor, and it was a little better than the last time I was there, as is the case with Newry, Dromore and sometimes parts of Belfast. We need a thriving high street and a thriving retail sector, so we have to take actions to support that. I have to tell the Member that I am supportive of the proposition made by our friends in the tourism, hospitality and independent retail sector. I gatecrashed a meeting of the Finance Committee last week when their representatives were presenting, and I am sympathetic to it. As we move forward, instead of having very broad reliefs, perhaps we could look at targeting support towards businesses that are in independent retail, tourism and hospitality.

Mrs Dobson: Will the Minister acknowledge that the true extent of the damage caused by last year's flawed re-rating process may never be known? Given the extent of the errors made, as evidenced through the number of appeals, what guarantees will the Minister give small businesses that a situation like that will be avoided in the future?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for her question. I meet business people all the time who benefited from the redistribution of the rates burden. Of course there were losers, but there were also winners. Among those you might refer to as “losers” in this were the large supermarkets and some of the very profitable petrol stations-cum-supermarkets. I agree with that redistribution; it was the right thing to do. More than help and assistance, an enhanced partnership is needed between us and small business in the time ahead to try to produce the strong, vibrant high streets and town centres we want to see.

I meet many people who appeal their rates, and I certainly encourage anyone who feels they should appeal to do so. I would not accept and neither would my colleagues in Land

and Property Services (LPS) that every time someone appeals it means there was an error.

Mr Cameron: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. I thank him, too, for sending us down memory lane with the Pickie Pool. I remember swimming in the shallow end some time ago.

Is there an intention to retain the small business rate relief programme?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for her question. We should reform it; it is too general. I am a supporter of the back in business relief, whereby if a building or premises has been empty for a year, we give rate relief to those who occupy it. We should look at what our friends at Ulster University and Oxford Economics refer to as geographical reliefs. Perhaps instead of saying everyone is eligible for a small business rate relief, we should look at how we could zero in and focus on geographical areas. That will take more research and may require some type of test case.

The bottom line is this: the rates can be a tough burden. We need to make sure we are not hindering business through the rates. We need them to contribute to the services we provide, but we could do a little more to get the balance better.

3.00 pm

Mr McCartney: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Will the Minister provide an update on his plans to tax derelict land?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat a Chomhalta as an cheist sin. I thank the Member for his question. At this stage, it is only a proposal, but some in my Department have been looking at the suggestion of a tax on derelict land. We want to get it right. The wonderful 16-acre Sirocco site in Belfast city centre has been empty since 2005, 2006 or 2007, yet we have managed to get no duty or tax on that land. If there had been an obligation on the banks or on the equity fund, Cerberus, that owned it, that would have spurred the rate of development. Therefore, if we could find a way to tax derelict land and derelict properties — an assessment by LPS, in conjunction with councils, has revealed that, at the last count, there are 1,700 derelict properties — that could be a way of making an extra contribution to the tax base. It will take a little research first, and I have asked our friends in Oxford Economics to do more research on the issue.

Mr McPhillips: Does the Minister plan to impose a punitive rates system on charity shops? Will he give a commitment not to impose any rates on charity shops, such as St Vincent de Paul, which provide an excellent service to some of the most deprived in our society?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Thank you for the question. Like the Member, I am a big fan of our charities, but we need to make sure that landlords are not dodging their rates obligation to pay 50% rates on an empty shop by putting in a charity. I know that the Member would not appreciate that either. We need to get the balance right. Charity shops help to bring people into our high streets or small towns, in particular, when times are tough, so we need to make sure that there are a certain number of charity shops. I think that the Member will agree that, when we meet retailers, they say that there has to be a balance. We cannot have our high streets just made up of charity shops.

I have engaged with the charity sector, and we may look at a way of saying that they make some contribution. It could be minimal, but, in England, Scotland and Wales, I believe, it is around 20% or perhaps even less than that. We should have an engagement. We need to make sure that we do not inhibit the great work that charities do; in fact, we want to encourage that work. There may be a way to do that in the time ahead. I have an open mind. I look forward to discussing with the Member and the Assembly the best way forward in that regard, but I have not made my mind up.

Mr Lunn: In relation to the Minister's previous answer about derelict land, will he agree with me that there is a severe danger that the Maze/Long Kesh site might qualify under that description if something does not happen fairly soon?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I would love to get some rate-paying businesses, institutions or corporate bodies on that site, and I travel in hope in that regard.

Rates Bills

4. **Mr Stalford** asked the Minister of Finance to outline how Land and Property Services provide an explanation to individuals of how their rates bill is calculated. (AQO 477/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. Each rate bill issued by Land and Property Services gives detailed information on how the bill was calculated. The bill is essentially based on the statutory valuation of the property; in other words, the capital value of a domestic property or the net annual value of a non-domestic property. The district rate and regional rate relevant to the calculation are quoted individually. The rates assessment is then shown and is calculated by multiplying the capital value or net annual value by the sum of the district rate and regional rate. The time period that the rates bill relates to is explained, with any balance brought forward from previous years shown separately.

There is more here for the Member, but I think I am getting to understand his point. This is complicated for many businesses that receive their rates bill. We go to some lengths to explain the system in the current rates bill, but I welcome any suggestions as to how we could do even better.

Mr Stalford: Does the Minister appreciate the sense of bewilderment that people face when the bill arrives and there has been a significant increase from the previous year, but they do not see any commensurate increase in the service that is provided? When we served together on Belfast City Council, our council sent people a rates bill that showed them how their money was being spent and how the bill was calculated. Does the Minister think that that is something that his Department would be prepared to roll out Northern Ireland-wide?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his supplementary. I will make two points. Invariably when you and I meet businesses that have received their rates bill, they are not sure what it is for. There is a lack of information that part of it goes to central government to fund hospitals, fix the roads, encourage investment and so on and that part of it goes to councils to pay for the many services that they provide, including leisure centres and picking up the bins. So, we could do a better job of explaining the global question around rates. We could also do a better job of

showing business ratepayers that we appreciate what they are doing. I do not know if bewilderment is too strong, but, if the Member would find it useful for me to meet any of the retail or traders' groups in his constituency to discuss how best we could explain what the rates are for and how they can appeal them or understand them better, I would be happy to do that.

Mr McNulty: I thank the Minister for his answers to date. How many rates bills were reduced following reassessment in the last financial year?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I could not tell you that off the top of my head, but if you are referring to non-domestic appeals we can certainly find the answer for you.

Mr Boylan: When is it likely that LPS will introduce electronic billing?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: When the Member for South Belfast was talking about the detail in rates bills when they are received, he was referring of course to the paper version. It is my wish that we have electronic billing for those who require or request that, and we are moving in that direction. We had a meeting last week about trying to speed up the pace of the digital revolution in Land and Property Services. I believe that we will get there. It also happens that the software system that we are using is quite outdated. I have cleared the funding for a new system that will be 21st century fit for purpose. As part of that, we should be able to introduce e-billing by 2019 or 2020.

Mr Aiken: Can the Minister provide an update on the level of rates arrears across Northern Ireland? Furthermore, can he detail how much of the debt has been written off over recent years?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I am happy to get the exact figures for the Member. The good news is that our rates arrears are at their lowest since the crash. That is testament to the hard work of LPS. I think that the Member will accept that there is a balance in these matters. We want to make sure that everyone pays the money that is due, and we want to make sure that the burden is shared equally and evenly, but we do not want to close down good businesses because they have difficulty paying their rates. We try hard to get the balance right, including organising a system of payments for those who are in arrears. I am happy to get the exact figures for the Member, but I know from the last briefing that LPS was pleased to report that arrears are at their lowest in six or seven years.

PEACE IV/INTERREG: Letters of Offer

5. **Mr McGuigan** asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the issuing of letters of offer to successful applicants to the PEACE IV and the INTERREG programmes. (AQO 478/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Both the PEACE IV and INTERREG Va programmes, which were approved to the value of €269 million and €283 million respectively, have opened for project calls. A number of applications under INTERREG have progressed through to final decision. I am pleased to report that 17 applications have been approved to a value of approximately €120 million. I said that to the House in my last Question Time. Those are all INTERREG projects.

The next stage will be for the Special EU Programmes Body, as the managing authority for the programme, to

issue letters of offer to successful applicants. My officials are working with their counterparts in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Dublin to agree the detail of the letters of offer. I had a positive discussion in that regard with the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Paschal Donohoe TD, on Thursday past. The statement by the British Chancellor, Mr Hammond, on 3 October guaranteeing their share of finance to projects approved prior to any Brexit, if it happens, is a welcome development. The clarification provided will facilitate full commitment of expenditure for both PEACE IV and INTERREG programmes and the issue of those letters of offer.

I would like to stress to the Member that the assessment process for applicants is continuing at pace and that decisions on funding will continue to be taken. The key steering committee meetings, for example, to consider support for victims and survivors and sustainable transport are scheduled for the coming weeks. None of us is under an illusion that there is not some trepidation about the future among bodies and institutions that are applying for funding, but my message has been that we want to expedite applications and that we will fight to make sure that all the money that they are entitled to is paid. I am confident that is where we are. I am also very hopeful that those letters of offer will issue in the short weeks ahead. On 28 October, I will bring together in Antrim many of the groups that have applied for Peace and INTERREG funding to try to give them an update and to make sure that they know that we are working very hard to ensure that the letters of offer are issued and honoured.

Mr Speaker: I remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

Mr McGuigan: I thank the Minister for that fulsome answer. Can I ask for a wee bit more information on the meeting in Antrim and on how else he intends to engage with recipients of Peace and INTERREG funding?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I had a very successful engagement, I thought, with the organisation CO3, which represents chief executives in the third sector, the week before last, to hear their views and their hopes for the future in relation to EU funding. I am focusing, as the Member may be aware, on Peace and INTERREG money. Many other Departments access EU funding, including for the CAP payments and the social fund. That has been a big help to those who are involved in further and higher education, including organisations like the Prince's Trust, which I have also met in this regard. In Antrim, I will bring together people and organisations that have applied for Peace and INTERREG moneys. It will be useful to hear about their plans from them; to explain to them what has been going on in my Department in our negotiations with London, Brussels and Dublin; and to assure them that we will get the result that they want in this regard.

Mrs Overend: Does the Minister agree that this relaxation of time pressures possibly presents an opportunity for applications that were originally submitted in a rushed manner to meet the Chancellor's November deadline to be reviewed and potentially resubmitted to ensure that they are fully able to access all available funding?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for her question. If the application is not correct, it would not have passed the steering committees. Some applications have gone back. There is a little bit of space now for people to return. We

have asked some people, including councils, to come back with more information and more authoritative analysis of their needs. That will happen in the coming weeks. We have a little bit of space. I have to say to the Member that, although the process has been more rocky than any of us would wish, the criteria are there and applicants will have to make sure that they fulfil the criteria and that the applications are wholly kosher if they expect the letters of offer issued against their bids.

Mr Ford: We know that the Treasury has guaranteed funding for agricultural support until 2020, which is not much of a guarantee given that the UK could not leave the EU before 2019. The Minister talked about expediting the process for the other grants. Has he any indication that the Treasury will also expedite the application and ensure that things are not held up in the Treasury so that groups in Northern Ireland will not lose out?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: It is almost as if the Alliance Party wants to give me more powers. My influence with Mr Hammond is not just as great as I would like it to be, but I am meeting the Chief Secretary to the Treasury next Monday, along with my counterparts from Wales and Scotland, and we will say that the Treasury needs to make sure that the EU funding, which has been held up a little bit more than any of us would have liked, is expedited. The Member raises the wider question of the receipts in relation to agricultural payments to what he would refer to as the UK. Nine per cent come here. If there is a Barnett consequential, it would be 3%. There are really hard questions there among the many hard questions to the British Government and the Treasury. Are they guaranteeing — they have not done so yet — that 9% of the budget for agriculture would come to the North if there is a Brexit?

Marriage Equality

6. **Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Finance for an update on his plans to achieve marriage equality. (AQO 479/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for her question. I am in favour of marriage equality. That is why I am determined to make what progress I can in this mandate to put it on the statute book. I would like to proceed by way of an Executive Bill and will, at the earliest opportunity, seek Executive agreement to consult on the issue.

I have met the Love Equality consortium on three occasions, as well as the wider LGBT sector. As the Member will know, the consortium has been exploring the possibility of a private Member's Bill. I have written to the four potential sponsors of such a Bill to advise them of my intentions, and I have offered to meet them.

3.15 pm

Mr Speaker: We have time for a quick supplementary and response.

Ms Seeley: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the Minister for his response and, indeed, his support for marriage equality. What allowances does he propose to make for those who do not want to participate in same-sex marriage ceremonies?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I endorse the approach of Naomi Long, one of those behind a private Member's Bill, who said that there will be a need for collaboration in the time ahead. My

intention is to provide the same level of protection to clergy and church bodies as has been included in the legislation on same-sex marriage in other jurisdictions within these islands.

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We now move to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Budget Process: Openness

T1. **Mr McNulty** asked the Minister of Finance whether he feels that the Budget process that he has outlined, with little to no scrutiny, is consistent with best practice in openness and with the 1998 legislation, and added that he was delighted to hear that the Minister was, like him, at the border last week, albeit that he did not see him, whereas he could not have been missed, given that he was the one waving the EU flag. (AQT 346/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. I am usually at the back at these matters; he may have been at the front. I noticed that other politicians were at the front, including my great friend Declan Breathnach from County Louth. I commend him on that demonstration — I presume that he is referring to the one at Carrickcarnon. I thought that it was a great coming together of politicians — you do not see that often enough — not to mention all the other sectors.

I am totally confident and certain that the approach that I am taking to the Budget is absolutely compliant with all legislation. It is the best way forward. The uncertainty emanating from London meant that there was no way that we could have brought forward the intended three-year resource Budget for 2017-2020.

Mr McNulty: Thank you for your answer so far. Will the Minister commit to a condensed Budget timescale and agree additional sitting days and Committee meetings in December to ensure that elective representatives can give fair scrutiny?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: That is a fair question. The Member can be assured that whatever is needed to allow the Assembly and the Committee to have adequate and proper input will be done. I am working on a timescale that is dependent upon how many shocks and unknowns are in Mr Hammond's statement of 23 November. I do not want to overemphasise it, but there is real uncertainty about what his intentions are on a series of matters.

You can certainly receive a guarantee from me that whatever time the Assembly or the Committee needs to consider those matters will be given. I think that it will be adequate and might be a little bit more than what was received last year in what were, of course, also extraordinary circumstances.

Social Investment Fund: Value for Money

T2. **Mr McGrath** asked the Minister of Finance whether, as the key custodian of public finances, he is satisfied that the social investment fund (SIF) represents good value for public money and upholds the standard of good governance that the Executive have pledged, especially given that SIF was given a substantial allocation in the June monitoring round. (AQT 347/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I cannot hear often enough that I am the chief steward or custodian of public finances, but, of course, it is a job for us all — that is why we are discussing

it — to make sure that the money we hold for the public is spent with an emphasis on value for money at all times. I am definitely in a different camp from those who expressed certain views about the social investment fund in the earlier debate. I am on record as saying that, for me, it was too slow, but I now see the money coming out.

I have stood in Sandy Row with some of those who have made a break from a very difficult past. I do not believe that they were the only people to blame for that difficult past, but I admire those who stand up and say, “The way forward is through wholly democratic and peaceful means”. I detect in some of this a bias against working-class areas. For my part, I will defend the SIF — I heard the debate earlier — and I will also work to ensure that the money gets out the door more quickly, because I agree with the Member that there have been too many delays and hold-ups.

Mr McGrath: I will continue to help the Minister. Does the custodian of the public finances agree with the deputy First Minister when he said that the UDA is still a current paramilitary organisation? If so, is he happy to fund organisations with active UDA members on their board?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I invite the Member to come to Sandy Row with me. If some of the people we will meet there had not made a break with the past, many more people would have died in this jurisdiction. These are people who resisted the wish of others to retaliate, if that is the correct word, when British soldiers were killed in Massereene, prison officers were murdered and police officers were murdered. They exercised — Martin McAleese, then senator, who spent a night on the phone to former loyalist paramilitaries urging them to follow the path of peace, has spoken about this. It is easy to mock, to deride, to have a class bias against people from Sandy Row and other areas. For my part, I stand with the peacemakers, but I also say this: if anyone, whether a white-collar or a working-class criminal, misuses one cent or one penny of European funding, central government funding or the SIF, I will make sure that they are brought to book. Just because someone has a past different from that of the Member does not mean that the person is not an upstanding member of society. I stand with those who are moving into the future. The Member — I heard this earlier — wants to push people back into their corners or boxes. There are no more corners or boxes in Belfast; it is a shared city, and I hope that we will all grow and share it together.

Historical Institutional Abuse: Compensation Payments

T3. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Finance, given that he will be aware that victims and survivors of historical institutional child abuse have today published their own expert-led proposals for a redress and compensation scheme that would include a common experience payment of £10,000 to all survivors, at an estimated cost of £20 million, with a saving of £10 million on expected litigation, to state whether the sum of £20 million has been included in the draft 2017-18 Budget that the Executive have decided to withhold from the Assembly Committees. (AQT 348/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank Mr Lyttle for his question. Of course, I was there today when he addressed the gathering of victims and survivors of institutional abuse. The report is only out today. I have received a copy.

It is much too early for me to respond. The Executive Office is leading on the matter, as you know. Since the presentation, since lunchtime, I have asked my officials to analyse the report and to speak to its authors, Quarter Chartered Accountants, before coming back with their views, which I hope to feed into the Executive Office expeditiously.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Finance Minister for his response, but should he, as Finance Minister, and the Executive not already have begun scoping the level and type of compensation that they may need to award and engaged with other institutions, such as the Church, which may also have a responsibility? Will he agree to meet with victims and survivors, along with the First and deputy First Ministers, to discuss the proposals in detail as a matter of urgency?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: As the Member knows, even as chief steward of the finances, I cannot speak for the First and deputy First Ministers. I have met the campaigners for the victims and survivors of institutional abuse on many occasions. They have my support, and I am happy to meet them again. I have asked officials to start looking at the possible ramifications of Judge Hart’s findings, because he has already said that there will be redress.

The Member will know that the Conference of Religious of Ireland, south of the border, contributed €128 million towards the settlement for victims of institutional abuse.

It is my firm view — my firm view — that the religious institutions that had custodianship of children in these homes right across the divide certainly have an obligation to make a contribution towards whatever redress has to be made in the time ahead. I look forward to the recommendations from the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I think there is no doubt that that will be after Justice Hart reports, but, as he knows, I am sympathetic to this case, and I look forward to seeing Justice Hart’s findings.

Trilateral Ministerial Meeting: Agenda

T4. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Finance to outline the agenda for the meeting of Finance Ministers and officials to be held on Friday 21 October. (AQT 349/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The good news is that we moved it forward to this Friday, so I think that is 21 October. I will meet the Finance Minister of Scotland, Derek Mackay, and the Finance Minister of Wales, Mark Drakeford, to continue the series of trilateral meetings we have agreed to have. We have agreed to meet in the council offices in Newry. I hope we will be able to involve some of the local councillors, the mayor of Newry and the chairperson of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. The whole concept of those trilaterals is to make sure we speak with one voice. When we speak with one voice, we speak for 10 million people. We will have our meeting on Friday. The visiting Finance Ministers will have a chance to see a little of the border region, as well as Belfast the night before, and to meet some representatives of the community and business sectors. Then we will come together and try to plan the best way to approach a series of issues with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in London on Monday.

Mr Sheehan: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I am aware that the Minister met the Basque Finance Minister in, I think, August. Has he continued to engage with the Basque Government?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an cheist bhreise a chur faoi Euskadi agus faoin chaidreamh atá againn le hEuskadi. I always enjoy saying the name of the Basque finance Minister, Ricardo Gatzagaetxebarria. I met him in August. I am pleased that, in line with the cooperation we have had with Professor Bengoa, he is keen to keep a level of cooperation with us and will send three officials from his Ministry to the trilateral meeting to observe and have some meetings the evening before and through the rest of that day.

It is worth noting that the Basque Country — the Basque autonomous region — where the Finance Minister serves is an economic powerhouse. They have a different system from ours, in that they raise all the taxation and then give to Madrid 6%. There is a spirit of entrepreneurship and enterprise there from which we can learn.

Renewable Heat Incentive: Executive Finances

T5. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Finance to outline the effect that the scandalous £1.2 billion cost of the renewable heat incentive scheme mess will have on Executive finances, given that, in his evidence to the Finance Committee on 5 October, he said of the former Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister Jonathan Bell, "I am so busy in the Department of Finance because no one did more damage to our finances than Jonathan Bell through the renewable heat incentive, and I am cleaning up his mess". (AQT 350/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for her question. Never has a Committee session been listened to so avidly on the day, but I am glad that, afterwards, it is being recalled as well.

The Member can be absolutely certain that issues over the renewable heat incentive will be tackled expeditiously by the Executive. It falls to the Minister for the Economy in the first instance. Even with the hyperbole and exaggeration from the Opposition, I would be amazed if the cost of the overrun of the renewable heat incentive were £1.2 billion. It is my intention to work with the Economy Minister to make sure we sort out the issue as soon as possible.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his assurances that he will sort out the mess, but how much does he plan to set aside every year to clear up the DUP Minister's mess?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: We have set aside £20 million and placed it at the centre as a contingency fund for the renewable heat incentive. I suspect there will perhaps be a call for another £6 million. I am heartened by the fact that, as you know, the PAC, which is chaired by your colleague Robin Swann, met last week and is investigating the matter as well. I am also heartened by the soundings coming from the Department for the Economy. Not only is PricewaterhouseCoopers investigating the matter, but I think that everyone understands that, whether it is £10 million, £100 million or whatever, it is vital that we get to grips with it.

We all understand that money is tight. I am sure that there are many groups in the Member's constituency and across the jurisdiction putting in bids for money that need it, and I think that the Member expects that I would try and staunch any loss from the renewable heat incentive as soon as

possible. In working with the Economy Minister, that is my intention.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Chamber to take its ease for a few minutes while we change the top Table.

3.30 pm

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

Ministerial Statement

Sustainable Schools Policy and Area Planning

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): Mr Deputy Speaker, with your permission I wish to make a statement on 'Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools', known as the sustainable schools policy, and the Education Authority's draft area plan, which is being launched later today at, I think, around 5.00 pm.

My Department's sustainable schools policy, which is implemented through the area planning process, focuses on providing children and young people with high-quality education that meets their needs and enables them to achieve their full potential. This is entirely in line with our draft Programme for Government and its identified outcome that:

"We give our children and young people the best start in life".

My Department is leading on four supporting indicators focused on improving child development, improving educational outcomes, reducing educational inequality and improving the quality of education. It is my aim that every pupil will have a first-class experience at school and fulfil their potential. Regardless of which sector a pupil is enrolled in, all pupils deserve equality of access to high-quality education.

The educational experience of our children and young people is greatly enhanced when they attend schools that are educationally and financially viable. The sustainable schools policy is a framework for assessment of the sustainability of primary and post-primary schools. The six criteria and supporting indicators clearly illustrate what a sustainable educational experience should look like. Schools must deliver a broad and balanced curriculum, offer extensive extracurricular activities, have high-quality pastoral care systems and have the confidence of the communities they serve.

In primary schools, pupils should be in a class with no more than two year groups, but, ideally, they should be in single-year-group classes. They should be able to interact with peer groups and have the best chances to prepare for successful transition to post-primary school. In post-primary schools, the curriculum should provide a wide range of pathways to meet the needs and interests of all pupils. Where there is a sixth form, this too should be offering a broad and balanced curriculum and should be sufficient in size to be self-funding. Pupils should have the best chance to succeed and attain to prepare themselves for life as an adult and contribute to our community.

Many of our schools demonstrate these characteristics, and many of our children and young people thrive in them.

However, there is still a significant number of schools that are struggling, for a wide range of reasons, to deliver the best for their pupils. That is particularly evident in the primary sector, and, despite the efforts of teachers, it becomes harder to deliver high-quality education if pupils are taught in composite classes. There are still too many

small primary schools with more than two year groups in a single class.

Similarly, in post-primary schools, there are challenges in providing the range of subjects needed to offer effective pathways to further education, training or employment for our young people. There are too many schools with too few pupils to generate sufficient funds to deliver the curriculum to an acceptable level. It is a real issue, particularly in schools with very small sixth forms. As a result, limited available resources are being spread too thinly in an attempt to ensure that, in small schools, every pupil has access to the curriculum. While this approach protects pupils' educational well-being, in some cases it has, without doubt, propped up schools that otherwise would have been unsustainable. That is not a recent development, and what I am saying to the House today is not entirely new. It is a legacy due to the lack of strategic planning to proactively address the growing problem of too many unsustainable schools. That is something that is not sustainable for the future and cannot continue. I believe that effective area planning is the solution, and I am determined that there will be a renewed focus on strategic planning to ensure sustainable provision across Northern Ireland.

We need to see an accelerated and more dynamic approach to area planning, which is in the best interests of our children and young people, to deliver the Programme for Government outcomes and benefit our economy and society. The sustainable schools policy envisaged a network of schools delivering, where needed, creative and innovative models of provision through collaboration and federation. However, the appetite to demonstrate this has not been evident, and there are opportunities that should not be missed. My officials have been working with all those who have a statutory or advisory role in area planning to develop and embed new area planning governance arrangements. I am content that the position that we are in has addressed the concerns raised about the previous area planning process and the area plans published by the former education and library boards. Issues such as silo planning, lack of engagement with all sectors, and a failure to clearly communicate the key strategic issues facing our schools are impacting on our children and young people's educational experience and opportunities. The guidance clearly sets out the roles and responsibilities of the statutory planning authorities and key contributors to the area planning process.

I welcome the work undertaken by the Education Authority in its role as the overall statutory planner of education provision. The authority has been leading the development of a draft strategic three-year area plan for the primary, post-primary and special education sectors, the text of which, as I already said, will be published at 5.00 pm today. It has been supported in this work by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the other sectoral support bodies, such as the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG), the Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC), and more recently, at my request, the Governing Bodies Association (GBA), representing the voluntary grammar sector.

All sectors have engaged in this process to identify the strategic educational issues facing the primary, post-primary and special education sectors and not simply focusing on their own sector. This draft area plan is different: it is the

first regional area plan covering all of Northern Ireland. It is a strategic plan that focuses on the persistent and thorny issues that need to be addressed across Northern Ireland and in each local government district.

For the first time, planning will have input from all educational sectors, at all levels, in effect discussing the future shape of provision around the same table, collectively, at the same time. There is no doubt that this will present a major challenge for all our education sectors and must be embraced equally by all sectors to find sustainable solutions, both within and between education sectors. It also takes account of the Programme for Government, community planning and, in particular, the constrained financial position that we are likely to be operating in. It sets out the high-level actions needed in all sectors to address the issues over a period of three years from April 2017 to March 2020. The area plan confirms that, in some areas, we have too many school places for the number of children and young people available to fill them; in others, it highlights that there is a sufficient number of places but they are not necessarily in the right place. The challenge that faces almost all local government districts is that we have schools that are too small to adequately provide for their pupils and ensure that they have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. I will say it again: this is something that cannot continue; the status quo is not an option.

While this draft area plan is a new start, I do not think that all issues can be addressed and actions implemented in the three years, given the scale of the challenge, but I know that we need to make a start. We need to start with the issues that are impacting most on children and young people's educational experience and future prospects, and we need to tackle unsustainable provision in all sectors. Therefore, by the end of the planning period, I expect actions to address the issue of primary pupils being taught in composite classes of more than two year groups. Ideally, I would like to see communities with a vibrant sustainable primary school where each pupil is in a class with a single year group. I expect to see proposals to deal with post-primary schools that are failing to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for pupils in years 8 to 12. It is not acceptable that these pupils are denied opportunities because their schools are too small. I would also expect to see proposals to deal with the issue of small sixth forms. By 2020, no pupil should be in a sixth form with fewer than 100 pupils that cannot offer a full range of courses. These are very big challenges, but they need to be tackled and to be tackled now.

I know that changes to schools are emotive and difficult for communities and can lead to lengthy and expensive litigation. This will sometimes require difficult decisions to be made, and it will require mature discussions and approaches from everyone involved in education, not just from within the sectors and schools and, indeed, not just within the House. There has to be a mature consideration of this by everyone. I also know that simply doing nothing or doing little is not really an option. We have to focus on how we provide children and young people with access to a quality education and the opportunity to be happy and successful citizens contributing to our economy and community.

I have said, and probably rightly so, much of the challenges, but I strongly believe that, with challenge,

comes opportunity, and, as a community in Northern Ireland, we cannot afford to miss this opportunity. The consultation on the draft area plan for 2017 to 2020 will run for eight weeks from 5.00 pm today and provides our community with the opportunity to look at education provision differently. Communities have a chance to shape education for current and future generations. Communities will want the best for their children and young people. Communities will ask whether the current provision is strong and sustainable. Is what they have the best for their children and does it equip them for life in the 21st century? If there is any doubt about that, what can be done? Is there a better way? Communities need to ask whether they want a strong educational presence in their community. Do they want certainty for their children and their parents? Is one secure sustainable school better than two or more schools that are constantly facing sustainability issues?

I want local communities and their elected representatives to consider the Education Authority's area plan and to make their views known. I hope that the draft area plan will be a catalyst for discussion about quality education provision in the 21st century. I hope that the focus is on the strategic issues and not on individual schools. In many ways, there will be the opportunity for people to look at individual schools at a later stage in the process. Once I am satisfied that the strategic issues are understood and agreed, the school managing and planning authorities will prepare a final area plan, taking into account the views from the consultation. This will be supplemented by an annual action plan each year for the lifetime of the three-year area plan. Those annual plans will provide details of the actions to be taken to address issues in local areas and at local schools.

Should there be a proposal for change in any school, local communities will be consulted and their views taken into account. I can assure you that the focus will be on providing quality education and pathways for all pupils. Pupils' needs must come first, and if that means that, within our school estate, some schools have to close, I am prepared to take those difficult decisions.

I cannot stress enough the importance of this consultation for the future of our children and young people. In these constrained financial times, we have to act to maximise the impact of our available resources. We need to be realistic about the quality of the network of schools we need to provide and can afford.

Finally, I urge all of you to engage your constituents on the matter of education provision and help them understand what is needed and why it is needed.

3.45 pm

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for the statement. I have a two-part question. First, is the new plan based on any review of the calculation of empty school desks? Surely, if we are basing the new plan on something that itself needs to be reviewed, it is based on inaccurate information. Secondly, can the Minister assure the House that this round of area-based planning does not make the mistake of previous rounds, which, with individual sectors acting alone, lacked an overall strategic direction?

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for her questions. We are trying to make sure that the figures are accurate not only for the present but, when the Member reads the document

from the EA, she will see that it provides projections, particularly for the school-age population of each of the 11 areas, as we move forward to 2024.

When we are providing a solution, it is important that it is not simply what is fit for purpose in 2016; it has to take account of what the position will be as we move ahead, because we have to anticipate where the pressures will be. It is clearly the case that, over the next number of years, the overall school population of Northern Ireland is likely to grow by about 4%. There will be geographical divergence, with growth in some areas and a reduction in others, and that will also have to be addressed in the area plans.

I make it very clear that all sectors need to buy into this. I completely agree with the Member that this plan needs to be strategic, and that is why it is strategic. Members will find that, because the idea is to produce something that is strategic in nature, not a single primary school or post-primary school in the mainstream sector is named. It involves all sectors, and it does so at every level, whether it is drafting at a local level, operational at the working group level or the strategic planning group.

The draft plan and its proposals have been approved by the Education Authority board, which has representatives from a very wide range of sectors, particularly all the main education sectors. It is vital as we move forward that there is buy-in from every sector. Otherwise, this will not work to the extent that it should.

Mr McElduff (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): Does the Minister have any plans to reduce or eliminate the small schools factor in the common funding scheme? What I am really searching for is some enthusiasm in the Department and the Education Authority for innovative approaches to the challenges facing small rural schools. Secondly, there is a reference to the first ever regional plan for special schools. Did it surprise the Minister that the Education Authority does not have a single database for children in early years for whom special educational needs have been identified?

Mr Weir: The regional plan is meant to develop a common system for special schools that will operate for ages three to 19. The aim is to try to make sure that provision, irrespective of where you live in Northern Ireland, is very much the same. There is a particular section that deals with special schools.

There is a major challenge for small schools. Across the board, there will be opportunities, when people are looking at this from a community base, to ask, "What solutions can be provided?" It will not necessarily be a case of one size fits all. It will inevitably lead to the closure of some schools, but there may be different ways in which things can be delivered. At post-primary level, for example, some schools are already operating in collaboration.

We have very much an open mind to how we reach particular points. It is about focusing on the support for children. As we move forward, we have to be similarly cognisant — I think that the Department will look at this as well — of the situations in different sectors. Potentially, there are some very isolated schools, and, if a particular school in a sector were to close, it would mean, from a parent's point of view, that the level of choice would not be realistic.

Lord Morrow: I am sure that the Minister will agree that parental choice is very important. How do you propose to safeguard that going forward?

Mr Weir: I recognise that part of it is about parental choice, and obviously there is a balance to be struck in relation to this. I think that most parents are realistic. I think that parents generally want to have the best for their children, so it is about trying to provide that level of support. At times, some people will have a slightly unrealistic view of what can be provided, so there will be some people who effectively would want a school on every street corner. That is not something that is doable. I am conscious that, on the matter of parental choice, we do not leave schools in any of the sectors in a position where the removal or closure of a school would effectively deny that parental choice. I think that we will be looking, as a Department, at how we can best facilitate that as well, and we may well be bringing some consultation directly on that issue as well. I think that it would be unrealistic in certain situations to see a school of one type close and there being quite a distance to a school of a similar type. I think that that has to be borne in mind as well.

Mr McGrath: I thank the Minister for his statement, and I appreciate the scale of the issue and the problem that needs to be addressed and which this is attempting to address. A lot of rural schools will be very worried about what they hear today, and a lot of rural-based sixth-form colleges that maybe cannot attract the large numbers will be worried. Can any assurances be given to people in rural communities that area planning will work with them, so that, if there are special circumstances that are uniquely geographical, those can be worked with rather than having a hard-and-fast line?

Mr Weir: As I said, it is not a hard-and-fast rule that states a particular numerical cut-off point. It is about trying to work with people to provide innovative solutions and also taking into account at times particular geographical considerations. On the flip side of the coin, we have to realise that the overriding support has to be in the best interests of children. Therefore, it is not a question of keeping a school open at whatever cost, even if that is not in the best interests of the children. I think that those considerations will be sensitive. When it comes to individual decisions, those will be driven by the annual area plans, and I think that those will be done in a sensible and sensitive way.

The other thing is that, whatever one's view of what the final shape of education provision will be 10 or 20 years down the line, I think that the pace of change will move more quickly than previously. This is not something that can simply happen overnight because there are certain practical constraints to that. That suggests that, as we move forward, the examination is likely to be focused on the very smallest, the ones that are most difficult to justify from an educational point of view. People need not think that, because they are at an exact particular level, they are either safe or, on the flip side, doomed for closure. It is not as straightforward as that. We have to have a driver to realise that we are spreading our resources, both educationally and financially, too thinly. We need to have something that can deliver for all our pupils in the best possible way.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his statement. Does he see any flexibility to the entitlement framework under the new area plan?

Mr Weir: I think that we have to look at that as we move ahead. This marries in very much with an agenda that says that we should look at different solutions, particularly shared solutions. I think that there are sensible drivers out there for greater levels of cooperation between schools, particularly at post-primary level. I know a number of schools that are already signed up to the shared education projects. They are developing arrangements, for instance on minority subjects, as a group of two or three schools where one school provides a subject. I think that there is a greater opportunity for that, and I think that that is more difficult to do at primary level because you cannot take five children from P7 at one school and simply ship them over to another school to have a slightly larger classroom. It is about trying to find innovative solutions, and I think that a range of solutions will be provided and that all of those will be considered.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Minister for his statement. Minister, in your statement, you referred to all pupils deserving equality of access to high-quality education and having the best chances to prepare for successful transition to post-primary schools. Will you ensure that all children, even those who will not be sitting a transfer test, will have that equality of access to high-quality education?

Mr Weir: Yes.

Ms Lockhart: I thank the Minister for his statement this afternoon. Can he outline the impact that area planning could have on the Dickson plan?

Mr Weir: I do not want to prejudge the impact on individual schools. There is some work to be done in Upper Bann to make sure that we have the correct configuration in that. I accept that, within the north Armagh area, the Dickson plan has delivered well for people, and therefore I commend the work that is happening there.

I am also keen to ensure that, as I mentioned in a previous answer, we have a level of respect in our systems for parental choice. From that point of view, whatever changes, if any, there are within a particular area, they will respect the Dickson plan. The Dickson plan is safe and is here to stay; it will not be threatened in any way by area planning. It will be the same for those who choose selective or non-selective education: there will be no prejudice against any schools on that basis either. So, it is about trying to ensure there is full respect for all the different sectors that are out there and all forms of educational provision.

Mrs Barton: Minister, can you assure me that area-based planning is not simply a smokescreen for pushing through a large-scale closure of small rural schools whilst letting the Education Authority take the blame? During the consultation, will cognisance be taken of rural proofing?

Mr Weir: Certainly, we want to look at what is best for all. On the question of the Education Authority taking the blame, I think it is important that we are all in this together. For any school, whether there is a closure, a merger or, for instance, a variation in its enrolment, all those will ultimately be classed as development proposals, and as such, the person who will have the final say on it legally will be me as Minister. I do not know whether Members

want to line up the headlines to blame me already, but I will try to take my share of the blame.

It is about trying to give the best provision for our children. There are sensitivities with rural schools. However, I got some of the figures, and they are reasonably stark. If you look, for instance, at the primary-school sector, despite the brilliant efforts of a lot of our teachers, you see that we have a situation where 19% of classes in Northern Ireland are composite classes. That means that the same teacher is trying to teach at least two year groups within the one class. When you drill down into that figure, you find that 177 classes in Northern Ireland are composites of more than two year groups, which means that a teacher is trying to teach to three year groups simultaneously or, in practical terms, teaching portions of them.

Due to particular geographical circumstances, those sort of things perhaps have to happen in some cases, but we all need to accept that it is not ideal for any of our children to be in a situation where three years are being taught all in the one go. That does not give our children the best opportunity and often puts them at a certain level of disadvantage compared with a child a few miles up the road who is in a single class for their year group. Certainly, everything will be rural proofed, and we will make sure there is no particular disadvantage in this, but we need to keep at the forefront of our mind what the long-term benefits are for our children rather than the pure defence of an individual school.

Ms Seeley: I am sure the Minister appreciates it is very difficult to question him on a 109-page draft we are yet to see, but I am sure he will offer us future opportunities to do so. I seek assurances from the Minister that the document is not merely a charter for closures and amalgamations.

Mr Weir: It is a high-level strategic document. It is about trying to look at the shape of the system. I have great confidence in the Member's ability to absorb over 100 pages at a very swift rate, and I will be free as we move ahead with this. It will go out to consultation, and the next examination of it will be when we get the consultation results in. It is an EA document, so it will be looking at any drafts, but it will need sign-off by the Department.

4.00 pm

We are talking about producing the final document probably about January. The idea is that, within each of the 11 council areas, annual plans will be produced. In many ways, the format is not dissimilar to that under the previous Minister. From that point of view, the significance of this is not so much that there is anything revolutionary in the idea of area planning; in theory, at least, there has been buy-in for that for quite a time. The difference is that, hopefully, we are getting all sectors to move together on this and examine it together. Secondly, there has to be a realisation that we have had movements on area planning until now, but it needs to move more quickly than it has in the past. We have to grasp that, for the sake of all our pupils.

Ms Gildernew: I too am going to ask the Minister about rural proofing. I thank him for his statement. Does he agree that we have excellent schools with outstanding inspections that might fall into that category of being unsustainable? Should the Department not concentrate on bringing failing schools up to standard? My children are in composite classes. They are in an excellent school. I

prefer them to get a quality education in a composite class than maybe a lesser education in a class where they are taught by a teacher for the year group.

Mr Weir: I understand the point made by the Member. There are a couple of answers to it. The sustainable schools policy that is being put forward has not been altered in that direct sense. Sustainability in terms of numbers is one key aspect. However, as I am sure the previous Minister would indicate, there are a range of factors that make up a sustainable school. It is not purely an issue of numbers.

We have some excellent schools out there which are very small; we have some excellent schools in terms of teacher provision. The problem is that, when you look particularly at multiple composite classes, in many ways, however brilliant the teacher is, they are always starting slightly from behind. It is not, I think, the ideal situation. In ETI inspections, there is a tendency across the board for the overall rating of schools that are very small to be at a lower level than the average, compared with bigger schools. Again, it can vary and you can get some very small schools with excellent ETI inspections, but I think that there are particular problems that are put in place.

There is an educational aspect to this and there is also, I have to say, a financial one. From the overall budget, money goes in, quite rightly, to try to make sure that there are educational opportunities for people in very small schools. However, money to support that is being taken away from the rest of the system, so it is not entirely a zero-sum game. It is a situation where there is a degree of loss. All those factors are taken into account.

Mr Lyttle: It is somewhat concerning to hear that the Minister does not think that there is anything dramatically different about this approach, given that the Public Accounts Committee of the House said that there was a need for “a root and branch review” of the previous approach. That was based on a Northern Ireland Audit Office report that found that there were 71,000 surplus places in our schools in 2014-15. The subsequent Public Accounts Committee report said that it was essential that the Department provided accurate numbers of surplus places and their cost to deliver the high-quality education that the Minister has rightly aimed for. I ask the Minister, therefore, how many surplus places currently exist, and at what cost.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for the speech he gave there. *[Laughter.]* I said that there is something radical about this in terms of the pace of movement. For the first time, we have all the key players around the table. What I am saying is that the concept of area planning has been there before. The fact that there is likely to be an overall reduction in the number of schools has been ongoing. One of the things that perhaps has not been noted is that, in the last 10 years, roughly speaking, there has been an overall reduction of about 110 schools across the sectors.

The Member asked specifically about the number of school places. Excluding superannuated places that do not count towards the total, the gap is around 65,000.

Once you add in those who are there on the basis of special needs, you find that the difference between the number of overall places and the number of children in the system is around 51,000, and that has been reducing.

I think that part of the purpose of this — I am very cognisant of the Audit Office report — is to be able to deliver the best educational outcomes for our children. Having that level of capacity is not particularly good. The Audit Office report talks about wanting a situation where the spare capacity in each sector is no greater than 10%. I will give the Member a breakdown of the concentration of spare capacity. At present, while there is still some work to be done on it, in the post-primary situation it is around 8%, and in primary schools it is around 18%. In some cases, that reflects a historic assessment of what potential enrolment figures should be, which is unrealistic in that regard. I think that development proposals will be needed, in some cases, to take those down. There is a desire across the board to grasp this in a mature fashion, to see change to the overall provision and to try to make sure that our resources are put into children, not buildings.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Thank you for your speech. I call Jim Allister.

Mr Allister: You seem to have some hesitation, Mr Deputy Speaker, but there we are.

I express regret that MLAs are being required to ask questions about an area plan that we have not yet been permitted to see. That may make things easier for the Minister, but it certainly does not make things easier for Members, although I suppose that that was the purpose.

In this statement, I see no reference to providing schools that meet local access needs. I am thinking of parents in Ahoghill — 13 families this year were unable to get their children into the local primary school. There does not, however, seem to be a thought about making schools more accessible.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to bring himself to a question.

Mr Allister: I also note the total lack of the words “rural proofing” in the Minister’s statement. Is that because, when it comes to wielding the axe, rural proofing will be far from his mind?

Mr Weir: I have to say that I have probably given this a great deal more thought than the Member. There is a degree of contradictoriness in his position. I appreciate that there are schools where there is a degree of pressure on places. On the one hand, the Member wants for there not to be an axe on any places, anywhere and, simultaneously, on the other hand, he wants expansion elsewhere, which I think would increase the level of spare provision in places.

I have seen a number of schools recently where I think there is a need across the board for some level of upwards movement in their provision and in the places they could allocate. I am not going to name any schools because those would have to come directly as development proposals. There is a process by which, if there is a need for additional places, there can be a development proposal or, if it is a short-term side of things, a temporary variation.

As for getting our numbers right, I said in part of the statement that, moving forward, this is not simply about the sheer number of places; it is about where there is a disjoint between what is being provided and what is available, which, as the Member would know if he had been listening closely, is part of area planning. That needs

to be addressed in area planning as well, and we have to do it in a sustainable way.

I have made a statement that the Education Authority is releasing later today. Given that, for instance, tomorrow is an Opposition day, the question was, "Do we release this and then wait possibly until next week before making a statement on it?". If that were the case, I think that the Member would be up complaining, "The Education Authority has released this, and we still have not had a statement from the Minister".

Alternatively, if we had released a statement on this at the first available opportunity, and it is not, in that sense, my document, would we have been criticised because we were jumping the gun? The Member seems, as with a number of things, to want to have his cake and eat it. I brought this statement to the House at the first available opportunity, and I am sure that the Member will forensically examine the document. Indeed, I have a spare copy of it here if he wants to get early sight of it. I can give it to him at 5.00 pm.

Mr Logan: Does the Minister have assurances from all arm's-length bodies that they will implement this policy at the desired pace?

Mr Weir: So far, in the drafting of this, the strategic group has the involvement at chief executive level of all the educational sectoral organisations. That is the first time that that has ever been done. It has received the full support of the Education Authority. I know that the House sought long and hard to make sure that the authority was fully representative of all the different sections of our society. So there is that degree of buy-in there. As we move forward, it is vital that all sectors fully embrace this. If we have a situation in which one sector is moving on ahead and another is holding back, that would be unacceptable. If this is to work for the full benefit of all our citizens, it needs, not just now but as we move ahead, full buy-in from everyone.

Mr Aiken: Will there be a capital investment to go along with the area plan or will the proposals be based on financial cuts?

Mr Weir: There are two separate issues there, so it is understandable that there will be a degree of confusion. As we move ahead, there will be opportunities for capital investment in schools. In a situation where there is a need for a new build or for investment through the school enhancement programme, that ultimately will be met. The issue, however, is about the impact on the school budget side of things, if you want to look at it financially. The bigger problem at the moment with the breadth of the school estate is on two levels. It is on the education level, as has been indicated, but it is also about the pressure that is created on the resource side rather than the capital side. We should end up with a more appropriate school estate in terms of numbers, and one of the other pressures from the resource side is that, at the moment, we do not have enough money to deal with all the school maintenance issues. Given some of the other pressures, that has been held at a level that is probably lower than it should be in an ideal world.

In a situation where we are trying to provide the best facilities for all our young people, it is a bit like performing the old variety act of spinning plates at so many ends of the spectrum. Realistically, you are trying to patch up so

many issues that you cannot do it in an entirely adequate way. That would be a better use of resources. It is probably more of a resource issue than a capital issue.

As we move ahead, particularly if there are innovative solutions that work for a community in a sensible educational way, there will be opportunities for some level of capital support. That is what has happened up until now as well.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): That completes questions on the statement. However, I remind the Minister that Standing Order 18A(2) requires him to make a written copy of any statement available to Members at least half an hour before delivering it in the Chamber. He failed to meet that requirement this afternoon. The statement arrived in the Business Office at 3.01 pm, so I will gently remind him of his responsibilities.

Mr Weir: I humbly apologise. To be fair, if that is the worst mistake I make in the next while, I will take the approbation of the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): We have a very contrite Minister.

Private Members' Business

EU Special Status for Northern Ireland

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes the current public concern arising from the European Union referendum vote; endorses the proposal of the Irish Government and others that there should be legal recognition of the unique status of Northern Ireland and the circumstances on the island as part of the arrangements to leave the European Union; believes that this is one mechanism that can safeguard the interests of the people of Northern Ireland, including future access to European Union funding opportunities; and calls on the British Government to fully endorse, and to negotiate for, this outcome in discussions on leaving the European Union. — [Mr Eastwood.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I call Paula Bradshaw. Ms Bradshaw, you will have four minutes, and you will not be allowed any additional minute should you take an intervention.

Ms Bradshaw: I support the motion. I would like to briefly emphasise some practical issues with regard to health that special status could help to resolve. First, the most directly practical issue is access to healthcare in other EU member states, notably for holidaymakers who have sudden illnesses or accidents. Currently, we have reciprocal rights through the European health insurance card. For example, residents in Northern Ireland will be looked after in Spain if they fall ill on holiday on the basis of EU citizenship and residence. Should the UK proceed to leave the EU, those reciprocal arrangements will no longer be in place. However, special status for Northern Ireland would enable us more easily to negotiate an opt-in whereby residents here would continue to enjoy these rights.

Contrary to what some Members said, us leaving the EU will have a devastating impact on tourism because people will find it more expensive to come on holiday here without insurance.

4.15 pm

Secondly, employment is a devolved matter, as is health, so there is no good reason for us to move away from working time directives as they currently apply in the health sector and beyond. The rights of staff, particularly in sectors where there is a significant — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. There is a constant murmuring from certain Benches. Please show some respect to an Assembly colleague when she is making remarks.

Ms Bradshaw: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

— vocational element to a career choice, should absolutely not be removed. A special status arrangement could protect these. Indeed, there is a strong case that retaining EU standards in areas such as these will be good not just for public-sector workers but for businesses, as goods and services exported from Northern Ireland will be known to maintain EU employment standards.

Thirdly, there is the development and licensing of medicines and medical research. This is trickier perhaps,

but, if reciprocal rights are agreed and employment standards maintained, there is no reason why such a special status arrangement should not include access to medicines licensed and developed in the EU, and to clinical trials data, on the same basis as currently. Importantly, it would also include continuing medical research in Northern Ireland available to, and potentially partially funded by, the EU. It is absolutely vital that a decision that had majority backing in England and Wales does not result in negative impacts on our medical research at, for example, the cancer research centre at Queen's, which is in my constituency.

Finally, we will need some form of understanding around cross-border services. Clearly, this would be easier if the UK were to retain in some form the customs union and the single market, thus retaining maximum free movement across the border. Failing this, special status, as outlined above, would surely help. We would also need to look at cross-border medical training standards and so on to maximise the potential for cross-border solutions to care, particularly for people with rarer conditions.

Special status would be good not just for our economy. More importantly, it is vital for our basic health and well-being going into the future. Today I therefore call on the Executive to agree a common platform for special status for health and other areas as a matter of urgency, and to develop a plan to ensure that Northern Ireland has the relevant influence in London and Brussels to deliver on it.

Mr Attwood: I will start with a few words of thanks. The first is to the Alliance Party for the thoughtful contributions of Ms Bradshaw and Mr Farry. There are things to build on there, I think.

Secondly, I thank Sinn Féin. Somewhat begrudgingly, sheepishly and negatively, they eventually said that they were going to support the amendment, and I will come back to any and all that.

May I also thank the DUP? I want to rely upon what Alex Salmond said after Theresa May made her hard Brexit speech at the Tory party conference, and I will paraphrase it by saying to the DUP, "We should be grateful to you. In your various contributions, you lifted the lid on your true intent and the emptiness of your programme". I want, first and foremost, to concentrate on that.

I remember being at a senate meeting of Queen's University a long number of years ago. I was sitting next to the vice chancellor, and he made a comment about the person who had just spoken, "There speaks a man who digs a number of holes and then jumps into the deepest one". That is the only way to characterise today's DUP contributions, which were remarkable in how stuck they were in the narrative of a post-Brexit vote that completely ignored the hard Brexit speech of Theresa May. I say to unionism and to any who voted in favour of Brexit, read what the DUP said today and draw your own conclusions about where your interests lay.

I will give you three examples —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will in a second. I will deal with some of the comments that Mr Stalford made, and then I will let him in. Mr Logan said that the DUP had a seat at the table because it had eight MPs. What sort of a seat at a table is eight MPs, when Theresa May has said that she will not

consult or give voice to the Parliament at Westminster in respect of article 50? Is that Theresa May's response to the letter of August from the First Minister and deputy First Minister asking for a seat at the table? I wonder.

Then we come to the comments of Mr Stalford, who relied upon the exercise of democracy which was the referendum to justify everything that flows from the referendum. If I were a Brexit Minister in London at the moment, I would draw enormous reassurance from what Mr Stalford said, because essentially the argument was that whatever London does, whatever the scale of its excesses, whatever the deficits that might exist around Brexit, we will swallow hard. What a way to conduct a hard negotiation when the British Prime Minister has said that it will be a hard Brexit. I will give way to the Member.

Mr Stalford: Thank you. The Member accuses us of ignoring the context of a speech given by the Prime Minister. Is it not a fact that the Member is trying to ignore the fact that 52% of the people who voted in the referendum gave their answer, and their answer is, "We are leaving the European Union"?

Mr Attwood: I find that another remarkable contribution because all the Member hears is what happened in June, and he does not hear what the Prime Minister said in September. So, let me remind the Member what the British Prime Minister said in her hard Brexit speech:

"the negotiations between the United Kingdom and the European Union are the responsibility of the Government and nobody else."

— [Interruption.] That is your seat at the table, Mr Stalford —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order.

Mr Attwood: through you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Then she added:

"We are not leaving the European Union only to give up control of immigration again. And we are not leaving only to return to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice."

Never in recent economic history have 20 words had such immediate economic impact, because therein saw the spiral in the value of sterling. If you do not believe me, listen to what Angela Merkel said — [Interruption.] Let us ignore the strongest voice in the European Union when it comes to the affairs of the European Union. What did she say in relation to that? She said that it was:

"a systemic challenge for the entire European Union".

In coordination, within days, two of the biggest German trade organisations made it very clear that the terms under which May had spoken were not going to be the terms under which there would be a Brexit deal.

What is remarkable is that in all the DUP contributions, including the remarkable one that referred to a few grey areas that we had to work out, nobody seemed to recognise that the game changed with the May statement and that, with the May statement and hard Brexit, the terms of withdrawal were laid down. The DUP does not seem to have realised that and the consequences of all that.

It was also really astounding that Jeffrey Donaldson was left out hanging in this debate. Remember what he said:

"What we're really looking for is a special deal for the island of Ireland which enables free movement of goods and people on the island, and preserves the institutions we've created under the various agreements".

Theresa May in her September speech gave her answer to Jeffrey Donaldson, and three DUP Members in this debate gave their answer to Jeffrey Donaldson. I wonder what Jeffrey Donaldson has to say about all that.

I want to deal briefly with Sinn Féin. Not for the first time, the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing. It is remarkable that, in what Martin McGuinness said in 'The Guardian' yesterday, he never once referred to the court case in Belfast to keep us in Europe or that he continues to argue to remain. I am not going to make a point about that because I know he makes the argument to remain. But do not pretend, on the basis of our motion, that the SDLP is somehow weakening on the issue of remain.

Let me remind John O'Dowd — he did not seem to remember this when he spoke earlier — that his own deputy First Minister called yesterday for special rules to apply to Northern Ireland. He said that Ireland needs to be treated as a special case by Brussels and so on and so forth. Those are the right arguments, even though Sinn Féin came to the right vote in a begrudging way. Let me put down this marker: just as the DUP put all its eggs in the London basket — we see where that is taking us — the Sinn Féin strategy is to blame London for Brexit and blame Dublin for not defending the national interest. Martin McGuinness hinted at that strategy in yesterday's article when he said:

"it is critical that we have an Irish government fighting our corner".

He is setting an Irish Government up to fail. That is their problem. Our challenge is to call out what the Tories in London are doing, to call out anybody who puts our national interest in jeopardy, as the petulant words from the First Minister in response to the all-Ireland forum on dialogue did and to call out anybody who plays politics with this and sets up any Government for failure, as Sinn Féin has done in my view.

I will move on from that. There is a position of strength in this debate. Stephen Farry was right to say we are building upon what happened last week. Let us work on that axis and maybe, sooner or later, the Ulster Unionists will recognise where the strength is and the DUP will recognise where the weakness is. The strength is the island and the response of the island. It is about recognising that the economic and other affairs of this island are so intimately connected —

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

Mr Attwood: — that, if we do not fight together, we will go down together.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 46; Noes 47.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Ms Dillon, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Ms Hanna, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCrossan, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Mr McMullan, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McNulty and Mr Mullan.

NOES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lyons, Mr McCausland, Mr McKee, Mr Middleton, Lord Morrow, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Smith, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Cameron and Mr Robinson.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Carroll, Mr E McCann

Question accordingly negatived.

Domestic Abuse, Rape and Sexual Crime

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this debate. Order. I ask Members who are leaving to leave quietly. As two amendments have been selected and are published on the Marshalled List, 15 minutes has been added to the total time. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to wind. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to wind. All others will have five minutes. Before we begin, the House should note that the amendments are mutually exclusive. If amendment No 1 is made, the question on amendment No 2 will not be put.

Ms J McCann: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses deep concern at the levels of domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime; encourages victims of these crimes to come forward; welcomes the increased reporting of domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime but recognises that a high level of under-reporting still exists; further welcomes the commitment from the Minister of Health and the Minister of Justice to prioritise addressing this type of crime; and calls on the Executive to work together to support victims and survivors and to address domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime.

I say at the outset that I am glad of the opportunity to bring this important debate to the Floor along with my party colleagues and that we welcome both amendments.

In a recent survey carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, it was reported that, out of all the European regions, Ireland had the second highest number of women avoiding places or situations for fear of being assaulted. Recent statistics released by the PSNI have shown a rise of 61% in sexual offences over the past six years, with a year-on-year increase. I and other members of the Policing Board questioned the Chief Constable on the issue in public session. Alongside the rise in the number of people accessing violent sexual images of children, the incidence of child sexual exploitation cases and the fact that one in every four women has experienced some form of domestic abuse in her lifetime, that has to be of concern to us all. While some of the increase in those statistics can be attributed to more people reporting these crimes, it is a well-known fact that domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime are still very much under-reported and hidden.

There is a need for political direction to ensure that a clear and consistent message that encourages victims to report these types of assaults is provided, alongside a coordinated approach that provides access to the services and support that they need.

4.45 pm

I welcome the recent statements by the Minister of Health and the Minister of Justice that they will make domestic abuse and sexual crime a priority for both Departments. In particular, I welcome the commitment to introduce legislation to deal with coercive and controlling forms of abuse, as well as physical abuse. The impact of domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime on individuals and families is devastating. Victims and survivors can be left not only with physical scars but with long-term effects on their mental health and

emotional well-being. It is important that mental, emotional and psychological abuse is recognised, as well as physical abuse. The impact is far-reaching, not only for individual victims and their families but for society in general. While it is those individuals who feel the worst effects on their physical and mental health, it has been estimated that domestic violence costs the Irish economy €2.2 billion a year in the South and £180 million here in the North.

Violence and abuse can take many forms. While victims can be male or female, it is mostly women and children who are affected, and 90% of perpetrators are men. Very often, children can be the forgotten victims of domestic violence. Many of them can witness violent attacks or be the victims of physical abuse in the home at a very young age. As we make greater advances in the use of the Internet, it presents more and more danger that our children and young people will be exploited and abused. There is a very real need to try to keep children safe on the Internet. Some of the large organisations with responsibility for the Internet and social networking have a role to play here as well.

Over the years, key areas of prevention have been identified as preventing it happening in the first place and changing public attitudes to it. Organisations such as Women's Aid have been involved in delivering programmes in schools to ensure that children do not believe that violence in the home is acceptable or normal behaviour. It is important that any public awareness campaign is coordinated in a way that provides support and access to services for all victims and survivors. Training programmes for organisations and agencies involved in tackling domestic violence will also ensure a more coordinated approach. There is no doubt that the sterling work carried out by Women's Aid and similar organisations, the availability of refuges and its 24-hour domestic and sexual violence helpline have saved and will continue to save lives. That partnership working and interagency support will help to ensure that this adequate provision of refuges and services to support those victims is maintained and developed.

It is a sad fact that violence against women and children has become almost endemic in our society. It is important for us to challenge the sexist attitudes that allow women to be treated as less than equal to their male counterparts. It is also important that we challenge the structural and societal inequalities that can result in women and girls in particular being discriminated against. As community and political representatives, we need to ensure that the policies and strategies of Departments are enforced with vigour and translated into action on the ground to combat these crimes.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Ms J McCann: Yes.

Mr Allister: Does the Member agree that a culture of silence often attends in the aftermath of these horrendous crimes? Indeed, is the Member a fit person to make this proposal since, in 2005, she was advised by Máiría Cahill of the allegation of rape against her and she did not report it to the police? Is that not the real test of sincerity and probity in these matters?

Ms J McCann: My response to that is well documented in the Chamber and outside it. It is disgraceful that the Member would use a debate like this —

Mr Allister: It is a disgrace that you did not report it.

Ms J McCann: It is disgraceful that you did that today —

Mr Sheehan: You are a disgrace.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order.

Mr Sheehan: You are a disgrace.

Ms J McCann: — when we are trying to send a clear message of support from the Chamber.

Mr Sheehan: You will use anything or anybody.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order.

Mr Allister: It is a disgrace that you did not report it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member has the Floor.

Ms J McCann: The PSNI and the criminal justice system have to make women and young girls feel safe and confident about coming forward to report these crimes. Survivors need to know that they will have access to justice and that the perpetrators will serve sentences that will reflect the devastating effects that their crimes have had on their victims.

I believe that we can send out a clear message from the Chamber today that domestic abuse, rape and sexual violence is wrong in all the forms that they take and that we will ensure, whether it is physical, psychological or emotional, that all victims and survivors have access to the support services if and when they need them.

Ms Bailey: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Leave out all after "exists;" and insert

"notes that an analysis of final prosecutorial decisions between 2010 and 2014 shows that in 83% of rape cases no prosecution was recommended; and calls on the Executive to work together to address domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime and to support victims and survivors of such crimes; and further calls on the Public Prosecution Service to work to improve rape prosecution and conviction rates."

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this vital debate and to move the amendment on behalf of the Green Party. I would like to thank the proposer of the motion for bringing further focus to this really important issue.

There are two amendments to the motion, and the second one, I feel, changes the intent of the motion by reducing any focused actions called for to deal solely within the realm of domestic violence over rape and sexual crimes. Given the Minister for Justice's recent commitments to bring forward legislation on coercive control, I feel that we should not lose sight of the great need to focus on, and include action on, the wider abuses of rape and sexual crime.

Before I was elected as an MLA in May, I worked for a charity, Nexus NI, and many of you will be familiar with it. The charity works to support the victims and survivors of sexual abuse and rape. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to that organisation and to others working in this field, such as Women's Aid, the Men's Advisory Project and a host of others. Many of those charities are under significant pressure in the current funding climate. They are operating significantly above their capacity and are delivering above and beyond what they are funded for. We have well-established evidence that the austerity

programme continues to disproportionately impact on women and children. The impact is seen significantly in this sector.

Prior to the debate, Members were provided with a briefing pack. Contained in the pack is research completed by the RaSe team in 2015 at my request for a statistical analysis of rape cases in the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. A key point from the paper states:

"An analysis of final prosecutorial decisions between 2010 and 2014 show that in 83 per cent of cases there were recommendations for no prosecution."

That is a shocking figure.

I am also aware that some Members have questioned whether they can support this amendment due to concerns about the wording used. So there is a need to understand what constitutes an allegation and what constitutes a case. I welcome the opportunity to explain this. I have spoken to police officers today in the serious crime unit in Garnerville to make sure that I am on the right tracks. An allegation is a claim made by another person. This can be made to a friend, a family member, a councillor or, indeed, the police. The difference is that, once received, the PSNI will investigate the allegation and build a case. Each case is then forwarded to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) with or without a recommendation for prosecution. It is the PPS that will make the final decision to bring a case to court. In 2011, the PPS received 440 cases of rape from the PSNI, involving 465 suspects. Only 218 of the cases received were recommended for prosecution. Yet, the same year, we saw only 77 cases brought to court by the PPS.

To clarify, all allegations of rape, or any crime, made to the police will be investigated whether the person making the allegation wants or does not want to make a case, because the PSNI has a commitment to public safety. Therefore, all reported rapes in the criminal justice system are cases. Given that 83% of those cases between 2010 and 2014 were not recommended for prosecution, it is no wonder that we continue to have such low reporting of sexual offences. You will come forward and report an allegation of sexual or domestic crime in the knowledge that, if investigated by the police and brought to the prosecutors, you are overwhelmingly likely to have your case dismissed.

In 2015-16, 3,128 sexual offences were recorded by the PSNI. That equates to almost nine sexual offences per day in Northern Ireland. That was only those that were recorded. It was an increase of 12.1% compared with the previous year. Over the same period, despite increased reporting and subsequent recording by the police, there was a drop in outcomes of 2.7%, with only 13.7% of recorded sexual offences leading to any outcome. Those outcomes included charges; summonses; cautions; community resolutions; penalty notices for disorder; offences taken into consideration; and indictable-only offences, where no action was taken against the offender.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Ms Bailey: Certainly.

Mr Allister: The Member, I presume, recognises that the test for prosecution is exactly the same in a sexual offence as any other offence, namely, whether there is a reasonable prospect of conviction. Is it not a reality that sexual abuse cases are mostly instances of one word

against another, which presents great difficulties to any prosecutor in determining whether there is a reasonable prospect of conviction? Is that not one of the underlying reasons why there is a disproportionate number of lesser prosecutions? It is not because of some systemic aversion to prosecuting but because the test, as it must be, has to be applied across the board, whatever the offence.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I remind Members that interventions should be concise.

Ms Bailey: I thank the Member for his comments. That is probably an issue to take up with the Public Prosecution Service to see how it can better work with the police to get a stronger case. The levels of prosecution in Northern Ireland are not comparable with those in jurisdictions in either the UK or Europe. Given the current context, Northern Ireland also sees a problem in the number of women in public life, and I am in no doubt that that is one of the main factors.

What about those women who become pregnant as a result of rape? In Northern Ireland, we are not human rights compliant with our laws on termination. Instead, we choose to further traumatise women by giving them no choice when they are choosing whether they want to continue with that pregnancy. I could easily read the statistics to show that a woman in Northern Ireland is actually more likely to become pregnant as a result of rape than she is of ever facing her abuser in a court of law.

What actions can the PPS take? In England and Wales, the Ending Violence against Women and Girls strategy has led to the Crown Prosecution Service recognising violence against women and girls as a key priority. The CPS publishes detailed breakdowns of data on sexual offences, which is something we do not yet do here in Northern Ireland.

I would like to make my first ask of the Executive. It is to ensure that the PPS provides a further breakdown of this data, which might go some way to addressing the Member's concerns. The PPS is a non-ministerial governmental department and should be accountable on this issue. The Criminal Justice Inspection conducted a thematic review in 2010 and followed it up in 2013. In the 2013 follow-up, it found that, of its 12 recommendations, seven were achieved, three were partially achieved and two were not achieved. They also committed to a full thematic inspection in 2015.

One of the recommendations not achieved was that the PSNI should take steps to improve communications and intelligence sharing between teams within the public prosecutions units. The other was that the police should fully adopt the principles and recommendations of the national crime investigators development programme and appoint appropriately experienced and trained tutor detectives to better support and supervise trainee investigators appropriately whilst they are undergoing training. Of the three that were partially achieved, one was on support staff for those investigating in this area, and the other two related to the PPS.

5.00 pm

This was in relation to ensuring videotaped interviews as a primary tool; the second was where counsel was instructed to hold conferences between prosecutor, counsel and police to explore ways of overcoming any

difficulties. The full 2015 review has still not happened, and it is within the gift of the Minister of Justice to instruct a review at any time. I urge her to instruct the Criminal Justice Inspection as a matter of priority. The impact on the life choices for many victims should not be ignored.

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

Ms Bailey: The Probation Board does much ongoing work, and other agencies help in dealing with the aftermath, but as a society, we need to hang our heads in shame at the disgraceful figure. When we acknowledge it and do nothing about it, we are complicit in it. I urge the House —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. The Member's time is up. Thank you very much indeed.

Ms Bailey: — to support the amendment.

Mr Durkan: I beg to move amendment No 2:

Leave out all after "type of crime;" and insert

"notes that the criminal justice system currently treats each reported occurrence of domestic violence as an individual, isolated act and not as a pattern of behaviour or an extended course of conduct; calls on the Executive to work together to support victims and survivors and address domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime; further calls for the immediate extension of the justice support worker scheme to all policing districts so patterns can be identified from victims making multiple reports; and calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce urgently legislation to criminalise such patterns of abuse and coercive control that victims are subjected to by their abusers."

This welcome motion should concentrate all of our minds and efforts on alleviating the suffering of the victims and survivors of these heinous crimes, and on reducing the number of people — women and men — subjected to this physical and mental torture in the first place. Our amendment adds to the motion, calling for immediate, practical and legislative steps that can be taken in a relatively small time frame that will have a really big impact in protecting victims from further sustained abuse. We also welcome the Green Party's amendment. I do not think anybody could oppose it; however, I regret that we do not have a motion or amendment combining the two before the House today.

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

The appallingly low rates for rape prosecution and conviction highlighted by the previous Member to speak are really shocking, in fact, they are worse than shocking — they are really saddening. While the motion quite rightly encourages victims to come forward, what confidence can any victim have that justice will be done; that it will be in any way worth reliving that anguish and pain? Some may find it even harder to bring themselves to report a rape, following the fallout of the Ched Evans case over the weekend. I am commenting not on the verdict but on the hysteria around it and the ill-informed opinions emanating from barroom barristers and cyberspace solicitors, not to mention the online and offline identification and abuse of the victim, which is sure to scare some people off actually reporting a rape. We cannot afford to let this happen. We need the PPS to work to improve prosecution and conviction rates to give victims and survivors faith in the system, and we all need to work together — not just the

Executive — to support victims and survivors, and give them back faith in humanity.

I will move on now to our amendment. There has been a very positive public response to Minister Sugden's statement early in her ministry that domestic violence and abuse would be a key priority during her tenure. Her announcement on 'The View' last Thursday night that it is her intention to capture coercive and controlling behaviour will also have been well received by any right-minded person — even one who had just drafted an amendment calling on her to do just that. However, far from being rendered obsolete as a result of this announcement, our amendment has become all the more relevant. The amendment asks the Minister to extend the justice support worker scheme to ensure that patterns of abuse can be identified, meaning that when she does bring the legislation forward to capture controlling and coercive behaviour, she will be able to criminalise patterns of abuse and coercive control. Coercive control is a calculated pattern of psychologically abusive and controlling behaviour, designed to isolate, manipulate and terrorise a victim into complete fearful submission.

If he were in the Chamber, this would all sound familiar to Mr McCann, who, and I do not think that this is any secret, is a huge fan of 'The Archers', after that show's gripping Rob and Helen storyline that did so much to highlight this very sensitive and important issue.

Sadly, domestic abuse is not confined to our airwaves, nor is it manifested only through physical violence. Often, physical attacks occur only after a victim has been cut off from support networks, emotionally abused and manipulated to the point that they are more likely just to accept physical violence or are too afraid to leave. Many of us will know people who have been through this. More worryingly, many of us will know people who are going through this, and we do not even realise it.

Studies have proven similarities between coercive control and political terrorism. We must salute the courage of victims who have managed to break free of the shackles of such relationships, and we must do everything in our power to give more power to more victims to do the same. We must also acknowledge, as previous Members have, the fantastic work of the many individuals and organisations that support victims: Victim Support, Men's Action Network, Men's Advisory Project, Nexus and more. Recently, a new organisation in my constituency that was set up to help victims of such abuse, La Dolce Vita, was awarded official charitable status.

I also make particular mention of Foyle Women's Aid for which this year marks its 40th anniversary. That is 40 years of helping women and families in distress, and, every year, it has to help more women and families in distress. I take this, and every opportunity, to re-emphasise to the Minister, and to the Executive, the need for Foyle Women's Aid's One Safe Place in Pump Street in my city and the need to support that much needed project.

Our amendment focuses upon extending the provision of the justice support worker scheme to all policing districts. We have consulted Women's Aid on this amendment and based the wording on its calls and on the calls of other groups. Those groups want to see the introduction of the scheme to all policing districts across the North and effective legislation to criminalise coercive control and

the pattern of abuse to which victims are subjected by their abusers. What are these justice support workers? They are specialist domestic violence support workers for victims, and they engage with police and the criminal justice system. There are justice support workers in only three policing areas here; two in Belfast and one in Derry supported through inconsistent part funding. It is a shame that not all victims of domestic abuse have access to that vital support.

The extension of the scheme would have a hugely beneficial impact on victims; it would enable better access to justice, facilitate early engagement with specialist support, reduce the re-traumatisation of victims and, ultimately, perhaps, save lives. The workers' role includes accepting referrals directly from the PSNI; acting as a liaison between victims and officers to ensure a coordinated and timely response to requests for information from victims; providing support to engage with the criminal justice system by acclimatising victims to the courts and meetings with solicitors; and encouraging engagement with police. Furthermore, these workers ensure that all possible additional avenues for support are communicated to victims and accessed if and when required. In connection with that, I have raised with the Health Minister the completely unacceptable waiting time for counselling services across our trusts.

There has been an overwhelmingly positive response to the impact of justice support workers from the police and, most importantly, from victims. Expanding their role, as our amendment proposes, has the support of Nexus, Men's Action Network, Victim Support, Men's Advisory Project, Women's Aid and others. It would be a shame if it did not now get the support of the Assembly.

Mr Frew: I support the motion moved by the Member for West Belfast and I support the amendments. I see merit in both. I agree with the comments of the Member that, if they could be conjoined in some way, that would bring a better and more complete amendment, but we are where we are. I think that the message has to leave the Chamber today that the House is in agreement that something more needs done.

I put on record early on that I support the Minister 100% in her statements that this is her number one priority. It is, indeed, one of five priorities that the Justice Committee has laid down for this mandate; to try to resolve this issue and to protect victims and survivors better when they are involved in this horrendous crime. Domestic abuse now accounts for two and a half times as many crimes as those linked to drugs. We have to sit up and take notice, and I believe that we have seen a trend, even since we came back from recess. First, in the very first week that we were back, there was the motion from my colleague Brenda Hale on stalking, and we now have this. The pressure on the Minister has been immense in this regard. I support the Minister in her assertions that she will tackle this and treat this as her number one priority.

I believe that the community and society out there demands of us that we bring forward new legislation, support it, certainly scrutinise it and make sure that, at the other end, we have good legislation that will keep people safer and ensure that people are brought to justice. At the minute, we are sitting with laws that were brought in during the 1990s. The Family Homes and Domestic Violence (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 is the legislative framework that allows victims of domestic abuse to apply for

protective civil orders and non-molestation orders in a civil setting, and the Protection from Harassment (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 is the legislation where victims of stalking have to look to.

That is my point. We need direct legislation to deal with this crime. This crime is complex. It is not just domestic violence. If we try to tackle domestic violence on its own, we will fail, and we will fail our victims and survivors. It is as much to do with coercive behaviour and controlling behaviour as it is domestic violence, because, if you have the fear of the violence, you will do pretty much what you are told to do, especially if there are young people in the house. It is essential that we tackle coercive control, and, if we tackle that, it will mean that there will be more convictions on the domestic violence front. We have no laws on stalking yet. We have to go and look towards harassment. That is not capable legislation to cover stalking. That needs to change, and I plead with the Minister that, when she is looking at this, she puts this together and tries to deal with the issue in one raft of legislation. We have no laws yet on coercive behaviour. That needs to change. We have been talking about this for so many years. The Minister has been in post for only a couple of months, but we have been talking about this for many years. Justice officials know that we have been talking about this for many years.

I will turn my attention to the Department. Where are our violent offences prevention orders (VOPOs)? The people who work in this field, protecting people on a day-to-day basis, are crying out for VOPOs. We have been promised them; we have not yet received them. Even when I brought amendments on coercive behaviour on Wednesday 10 February 2016 on the Justice (No. 2) Bill, I was given commitments by the then Minister that these would be going in very soon. I withdrew that amendment because I want good law, not bad law. I want to see action and movement. Cogs turn far too slowly, and people are becoming victimised as we speak. Although we do have SOPOs — sexual offences prevention orders — and can see how well they work, we need VOPOs in as quickly as possible. They can be issued even without the consent of the victim. A VOPO is a tool that is the essential piece in the kit in the toolbox and which our officials need to use.

5.15 pm

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

Mr Frew: I will end there.

Mr Beattie: I find this an incredibly difficult debate; I find it disturbing. As a father and a grandfather, I look at my daughter and grandchildren and imagine them being abused, and it really makes my blood boil and my stomach churn.

I welcome the motion. What is there not to support? Everything in it must be supported. Nobody will thank me for saying this — I already see the eyes rolling and the heads shaking, and I hear the sucking of teeth — but Sinn Féin's words do not match its actions. If Sinn Féin had started the debate by saying, "Do you know what? We got this wrong in the past. We're sorry, but let's move forward", I would understand it. The treatment of Máiría Cahill and Paudie McGahon was truly disgraceful, and they have to acknowledge that. I am haunted by the comment that

abusers can be so manipulative that some victims enjoy the abuse. It is terrible; it turns me. I do not want to dwell on it, but it is the elephant in the room, and it has to be addressed. Please address it.

I will very briefly dissect the motion, which states:

“this Assembly expresses deep concern at the levels of domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime.”

Absolutely, and we should all be standing up in unison and saying, “This has got to stop”. Sex crimes have soared by 60% in the last six years. You can look at different reasons for that, such as the ability to get online or online pornography, but whatever the reasons, we must address them.

Domestic crime accounts for 13% of all crime in Northern Ireland — 13%. The PSNI had to deal with 13,500 domestic crimes in the last 12 months. Remember, of course, that domestic crime normally happens about 30 to 35 times before it is even reported, so that is the tip of the iceberg. The motion continues:

“encourages victims of these crimes to come forward; welcomes the increased reporting of domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime but recognises that a high level of underreporting still exists,”

I say yes to all three.

It is important that we look at them. We look at them as statistics, but every one is a story. I recently listened to Terri-Louise Graham’s testimony, which I found incredibly harrowing. We all need to look at that to see what domestic abuse is really about and what coercive behaviour is really about. Recently, I met Alicia Perry from Women’s Aid NI — she is one of their new ambassadors — and I listened to her story. That is another story that we all need to know.

We need a strategy for this. I do not want anybody to have to report rape or domestic abuse, so we need a form of education, and I call on the Education Minister to instigate a programme to educate young boys at the age of 15 or 16 about what domestic abuse is all about and what rape is about — and tell girls that they have the power to say no.

I look to the Justice Minister and ask her to fast-track legislation on domestic abuse, because it makes absolutely no sense that somebody suffering from domestic abuse can be assaulted five times by the same person but have five different cases and have to go to court on five occasions. It does not make sense.

I look to the Communities Minister to commission public information adverts and leaflets, and to set aside housing so that when we have a case of domestic abuse, we can get the woman out with her children and put her in housing away from the problem.

The motion:

“calls on the Executive to work together to support victims and survivors and address domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime.”

Come on, let us get on with it. There are only two parties in the Executive, so let us get on with it. I welcome the Justice Minister’s recent comments about domestic abuse, just as I welcome the strong stance on coercive control taken by my friend Mr Frew, Chair of the Justice Committee, and his Deputy Chair.

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

Mr Beattie: I ask us all to look to Women’s Aid and involve them. I support the motion and the amendment of the Greens.

Mr Lunn: I thank Ms McCann, Ms Bailey and Mr Durkan for bringing the motion and amendments on behalf of their parties. We have no problem in supporting any of them, in whatever order they come up. I think that amendment No 1 will probably be called first; perhaps it will go through. That means no disrespect to amendment No 2, which is very thoughtful.

The crimes we are talking about are disgusting. They are serious, cowardly and mostly involve the strong on the weak. This is, of course, the element of control. I acknowledge that some men suffer in this way, but, let us face it, most of it is against women and children. That is the cowardly aspect of it.

Amendment No 1 refers to the 83% of rape cases that do not achieve recommendation for prosecution. I am not the first today to say that that is absolutely appalling. Frankly, I must ask what is going on in the Public Prosecution Service. If a woman is prepared to come forward — there are various reasons why women might not want to come forward — and take the very bold step of making this sort of complaint, I honestly believe that the success rate, at least of bringing cases to trial and making the charge, should be better than 17 out of 100. It is disgraceful. The amendment:

“calls on the Public Prosecution Service to work to improve rape prosecution and conviction rates”,

and is very valid. In the rest of the UK, certainly in England and Wales, there has been an attempt to do this. The PPS has acknowledged that there is a problem. It has acted on various recommendations and has gone into a more thematic examination of the reasons why they do not make this recommendation, but it has not produced an increase in the number of cases brought to trial.

I have that many statistics that my head is spinning. However, there were 470 cases of rape in one year here. I think that Clare Bailey mentioned that only 77 actually produced a charge and only a very small number produced a conviction.

I wonder why, in this more enlightened age, women who have been violated in this way and parents, on behalf of their children who have been abused, do not report in greater numbers. It could be just the fear of publicity; they do not want to have their names brought out in court. They do not want to have to appear in court. It could be a fear of the process or disenchantment, frankly, with the process because it is so plainly letting victims down. It could be the residual culture that exists in this country, that there is an element of shame or guilt. A wife who is perhaps abused in this way may still cling to the belief that this happened to her because she was not a good wife. I am not going to try to use the phrase “deserved it”, because that would be absolutely improper; but I think there is still in this country a wee bit of a feeling that a wife is secondary to the husband, and some husbands will take advantage of that.

The Minister, Claire, has promised that she will bring forward legislation on coercive control and domestic

abuse. I hope that she can do it inside the timescale and before next June, because she said that she would not bring any primary legislation through before then. When she brings it forward, it is only fair to point out that a considerable body of work has already been done by the Department. David Ford — I give him a plug — did a lot of work on this, so there is groundwork that she can build on.

Somebody mentioned the difficulty of getting a definition. There are very good definitions already on the record within the Department.

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

Mr Lunn: I hope that, as a result of this and of the stalking debate we had only two or three weeks ago, we will stop talking about it and actually take some action.

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

Mr Lunn: I support the motion and the amendments.

Mrs Cameron: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion today. Since 2007, I have been involved locally with Women's Aid in Antrim, Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne and Newtownabbey (ABCL&N), primarily in an attempt to raise awareness of domestic violence. I cannot praise the work of the staff and the volunteers highly enough in providing support to women and children in crisis situations. I take this opportunity to commend the CEO, Rosemary Magill MBE, who, despite dealing with personal adversity, continues to be the driving force behind the organisation in her single-minded approach to stamping out domestic violence.

The wording of the motion, of course, includes rape and sexual crime, which can be equally insidious, sinister and cloaked in fear. Indeed, only a few weeks ago, my colleague Brenda Hale brought a motion to the House on stalking. Those heinous acts are all founded on inflicting fright and terror on victims and are often perpetrated by those seeking to exert control over others.

When I first began my work with Women's Aid, I was told a story about an elderly couple in their eighties living together in a care home to accommodate the wife's dementia needs. The staff in the home became concerned about unexplained bruises that kept appearing on the elderly lady. They spoke to the couple's GP, who disclosed that there was a 60-year history— I repeat this: a 60-year history — of domestic abuse in the marriage and that the family was aware of it. What transpired was that the husband was repeatedly beating and raping his wife in the privacy of their room at night-time. I trust that everyone here today is as shocked as I was to hear that story. Although that is an individual case, I am quite confident in saying that there must be many, many such cases where that type of abuse is allowed to continue over a lifetime, with no one being prepared to act in defence of the victim.

It demonstrates the all-encompassing way in which domestic violence can manifest itself and become such an intrinsic part of someone's life that they cannot even see how awful the reality has become. Whether it is through physical violence, sexual violence or mental, emotional or financial abuse, domestic violence knows no boundaries and affects every age group, race, religion and class. It must also be said that, although the majority of victims are women, men should not be forgotten in the discussion on

domestic abuse. Although we recognise that, we heard from the proposer that the majority of victims are, indeed, female and that, in turn, their children are often used as a method to coerce the woman, which, of course, has lasting and damaging effects on the children.

Alongside Women's Aid ABCL&N, I recently formed an all-party group on domestic violence by way of engaging with the Departments on the implementation of the stopping domestic and sexual violence and abuse in Northern Ireland strategy to ensure that those issues are kept on the agenda. At our last meeting, on 27 September, we heard from the Department of Health and the Department of Justice, and I was incredibly encouraged to hear that the joint strategy has had a great deal of momentum and that both Departments are committed to the outworking of the strategy. I was particularly heartened to hear of the reconstitution of the inter-ministerial group, which had previously been formed but, in my opinion, had made little progress. I look forward to seeing the Departments of Health and Justice in their co-leadership roles to ensure the effective delivery of the five strands of the strategy.

I am also pleased to hear that the Department of Justice is reviewing arrangements for multi-agency risk assessment conferences for victims — or MARACs, as we call them — who are at a very high risk of domestic violence and that funding has been committed to those. I have had numerous discussions with the Minister of Justice, and I commend her on her public commitment and pledge to tackle domestic and sexual violence. I am aware she has instructed her officials to look at best practice on the issue across other jurisdictions to ensure our justice system is properly equipped and is capable of responding in an effective and efficient manner. That news can only be welcomed, and I look forward to scrutinising their findings and proposals as they work through the Justice Committee.

In closing, I am aware that the focus of my remarks has centred on domestic abuse, and I have only touched on rape and sexual crime. However, the message is the same: whether it is physical violence against a partner, unwanted sexual conduct, controlling or coercive behaviour or stalking, it must not be tolerated. We need additional legislation to tackle this subject, and we need to drive home the message that domestic violence, in whatever form, is not socially acceptable.

5.30 pm

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

Mrs Cameron: We must do all we can to deliver this message and, in doing so, provide the necessary support to allow victims to come forward and report the offender to the authorities. In turn, we need to ensure that those who carry out these crimes —

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

Mrs Cameron: — are dealt with swiftly under the law and that perpetrators are brought to justice. I support the motion.

Ms Boyle: I am proud to speak on this motion and to send out my support and that of my party to victims of domestic violence, not only here in Ireland but throughout the world. I

am also saddened to hear that some Members here would demean this highly emotive motion to score political points.

Domestic violence, in all its forms, is a crime, and, as legislators, we all have to work harder to tackle it. Domestic abuse may be psychological, physical, sexual, emotional, verbal or a combination of these. I also acknowledge that men can be victims of domestic abuse. Domestic violence is one of the only crimes where it can feel like the victim is being punished, rather than the perpetrator. Instead of receiving support, victims of domestic violence are often criticised. How often have we heard it? "It is her own fault", or "She should have left him the first time." That is easy for someone to say, but we must remember that, apart from the physical difficulty of escaping from a controlling, violent partner, women who have been abused, beaten and degraded have little confidence and their self-esteem is at rock bottom.

Women's refuges play a crucial role, and they are so much more than a roof over a head. Lives are transformed as specialist refuge workers support women to stay safe and provide them with any advice that they may need. Without adequate refuge provision, women who experience domestic violence will be faced with a stark choice: flee to live rough on the streets if they have no family support or remain with their abuser and risk further violence, or even worse, in some cases, death.

Escaping domestic violence is a traumatic and emotional process. My heart goes out to anyone who has to live with it. I, too, recently met Foyle Women's Aid to discuss its work in tackling all forms of domestic violence against women. Women's Aid provides support and refuge services for women and their children suffering from mental, physical or sexual abuse. As an MLA in a rural constituency, I am always very concerned about the plight of rural victims of domestic violence. Many rural women in this situation can feel particularly isolated and distressed, in the belief that they have no one to turn to. Women's Aid provides a critical lifeline to these women, and I am hugely appreciative of their outreach efforts into the rural areas. Many topics were discussed at the meeting, including cross-border initiatives, early intervention, the One Safe Place plan and the importance of domestic homicide reviews. Indeed, the PPS needs to review its test for prosecution.

Like others, I also recently met Alicia Perry, a strong, independent woman who has survived domestic violence, abuse and coercive control. Alicia met us to raise awareness of her campaign around Donna's Law. Donna was a friend of hers who, unfortunately, was a victim of domestic violence and died a few years ago. Donna's Law seeks to make domestic violence and abuse and, more importantly, coercive control a criminal offence here in the North of Ireland.

Domestic violence and abuse is happening at an alarming rate and, unfortunately, it is happening among many young people, including teenagers. Not all victims, unfortunately, are speaking out, because everything that has happened is trivialised and minimised by their controlling partners. Coercive control goes way beyond just controlling what their partners do. It is more about how they think about their family, friends, colleagues and, more importantly, themselves. I was also shocked to learn from Alicia that experts believe that domestic violence occurs in the LGBT community with the same frequency and severity as in the heterosexual community.

Society's long history of entrenched racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia prevents LGBT victims of domestic violence from seeking help from the police and the legal and court systems.

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

Ms Boyle: To conclude, it is clear that we need to do more to assist with the service provision and funding to this sector. I welcome the work that the Minister is taking forward —

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

Ms Boyle: — on this, and, as a member of the Justice Committee, I am happy to support her.

Mr Douglas: I rise as a member of the Justice Committee to support the motion and the two amendments.

Growing up on my street, I witnessed situations that were never called domestic abuse but which were a form of abuse, particularly violence against women. You would have had women going about with extra makeup on because their partner or husband had physically attacked them. For me, it was a culture of domination and control. Sadly, today we are talking about some of those issues. I think that it was the Minister who spoke of a psychology of domestic abuse. When I was growing up, there was that psychology of domestic abuse: the husband or partner would not allow his spouse or partner to go to the pictures, for example, or it was about controlling what friends they had, or the spending or non-spending of money. There was a whole range of such issues.

Looking back, that was domestic abuse, but I had never heard of the term until this last number of years. Sadly, we are still dealing with those issues, but the good thing is that we are debating them today, and it is more upfront. There may be difficulties for vulnerable people being able to go to the PSNI or to Women's Aid, but these things are now being challenged.

I was on the Internet today, and a BBC news bulletin of last week showed images of a young woman, Terri-Louise Graham, who was unrecognisable after the beating that she had taken in 2011. She was calling for us to do more. I welcome the Justice Minister being here. I also welcome her recent comments that tackling domestic abuse was her number one priority and that she was committed to changing the law. The Chairman of our Committee said that he was 100% behind our Justice Minister. I would say that I am 150% behind the Justice Minister; she will certainly have our support. I think that she has support throughout the House.

I looked up some facts and figures provided by Women's Aid — an excellent organisation, as my colleague Pam Cameron said — and the PSNI, and I was shocked at some of the statistics. I had heard some of them before, but to see them in writing was an absolute shock: in 2011, the PSNI reported that they responded to a case of domestic violence every 23 minutes. It is endemic throughout society, and, thank God, we are doing something about it. The police attend an average of 60 domestic abuse cases per day in Northern Ireland. I think that one of my colleagues spoke about the cost of domestic violence, and recent figures show that it is something like £180 million a year, so there is a cost to

this. There is also a cost reduction if we can address and combat it.

Of course, domestic violence occurs most commonly against women, but there is also a growing number of men; the latest statistics showed a 49% increase in domestic violence against men. It is against children as well because they are in the house when they see the abuse. They are in the house when that partner is controlling and abusing their spouse.

One of the most harrowing statistics that we have come across is that 30% of all domestic violence starts —

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

Mr Douglas: I will finish by saying that we are dealing with monsters in our society, and we should use every measure that we can to combat them. I support the motion and the amendments.

Mrs Dobson: Before I start my contribution, I ask Members to keep the two young girls who were knocked down in Banbridge this afternoon in their thoughts and prayers.

It is a tragedy that domestic violence and sexual crime is one of the most common yet least reported crimes in Northern Ireland. Of course, we are not unique in that respect, but, nonetheless, the fact that there are women and men today suffering violence at such endemic rates is absolutely heart-rending. I know from talking to PSNI officers how the initial bravery of the all too rare reporting of an incident can often dissolve, with many reports withdrawn soon after, compounding the misery and pain.

Domestic violence can manifest itself in many ways, but, most often, it is in the form of verbal or emotional abuse, with direct or implied threat of violence. The nature of the abuse means that it often recurs, sometimes for many years. So, it has a particularly cruel effect on victims.

I remember chairing a session of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians on domestic violence. An older lady presented to us with her personal domestic abuse experience, and she told us in graphic detail how her induction to married life was at the end of her husband's fist and how it took her 20 years to escape his grasp. The sad message of her presentation was that, from either gender, this is an all too common experience.

I am sure that there are people, particularly those with no experience of abuse, who ask the question, "Why would anyone stay?". It is a question that, I know, Members in this House have pondered, but I believe that it is too simplistic a question for what is often an incredibly complicated situation. We need to remember that tackling this form of abuse, whether it is physical or mental, is incredibly difficult because the aggressor is in or has been in a long-term relationship or marriage with their victim.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Dobson: Yes.

Mr Frew: I take her point. People ask the question, "How can you stay in that abusive relationship?". It is very complex, and, sometimes, with youngsters involved, it is a threat to them as much as anything else, but does the Member agree with me that if the Department were to bring in the domestic violence disclosure scheme to work

alongside the child protection disclosure scheme, some of those people may not end up in an abusive relationship if they have the right to ask before they endeavour into a relationship?

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

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Member for his intervention. Having spoken to constituents, I know that keeping their children safe is key and is a priority. Even in spite of the violence, as we know, many may still be bound to their partners by strong feelings of loyalty and even love. So, even more challenging are the circumstances where the abuser is the parent of their children.

Victims are torn as to what to do about the abuse or, understandably, may be keen to maintain the family unit and may see that as a more important consideration than their own welfare or even their own safety. The effects of growing up in the midst of domestic violence can be devastating for children. The feeling of fear and confusion that those poor children experience when they see abuse must be awful, never mind when the abuse comes from their parents. So, I ask the Minister if she is satisfied that all the required support mechanisms are in place to support these young people.

Domestic violence is not some sort of faceless crime where someone unknown can come and go. It is often a warped battle between feelings of love and absolute betrayal, but that does not mean that the justice system should not respond; it must, and it must plan a response for each individual case.

Unfortunately, however, as we have heard time and time again in this debate, the current rudimentary response is not working, and too many cases simply end up without punishment. One of the first places to begin to try to lessen the chances that a report could be withdrawn the next day is the immediate response after that report. I doubt that many things are more gut-wrenching than a victim leaving a violent partner, often breaking up the family unit, only to see the accused get off scot-free. It must be absolutely terrifying for them.

5.45 pm

Minister, I really hope that you listen to today's debate. You have said that domestic violence is your key priority. I hope that you will detail the exact steps that you will take to deliver improvements for the victims of this appalling crime.

Lord Morrow: I must say that I have listened to some very interesting comments from right around the House today. I was particularly struck by Doug Beattie, not so much by what he said as by the man who said it. Doug Beattie was a professional soldier, so he has come through a hard school and been in a war zone. It takes a lot of courage to do that. I listened very intently to him today, and he proved not only that he was a professional soldier but that he has a heart. He hit all the right buttons, and I commend him on that.

I had thought that my constituency was perhaps the worst for this type of violence but having listened to others from different constituencies, I recognise that that is not the case. I have made representations to the previous Minister, the existing Minister and the Chief Constable, and I am sure that others have made similar representations. It is very difficult to pick up your local newspaper without

reading about domestic abuse. Folks, the Assembly must not just talk the talk; it has to walk the walk. It is all fine everybody here saying in harmony that something needs to be done, and it does need to be done, but actions always speak massively louder than words.

We are very fortunate that, in Dungannon Court, we have a foremost district judge by the name of John Meehan. He has taken a particularly determined stance on tackling domestic violence and dealing with the perpetrators by coming at cases from the perspective of the victim. That is the way that he always comes across, and that is to be welcomed. He tries to encapsulate the trauma that they have endured. He is also very stoic in ensuring the safeguarding of victims through stringent bail conditions as cases progress through the system. I am not sure what it is like in other areas, but I want to commend that judge for the stand that he has taken and the determination that he has brought to the bench in dealing with these cases.

The sad and startling statistic is that, on average, victims will endure 30 attacks before they take action, if they take any action at all. That is a very alarming figure. It tells you something about society as a whole if victims have to be traumatised on an average of 30 occasions before they do anything. There must be a lack of confidence in the system if they do not feel that they can come forward and complain. I have worked very closely with a number of persons involved in the prevention of domestic —

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. I will be brief. Is the fact that we have no specific legislation on domestic violence and stalking one of the reasons why people do not have confidence to come forward?

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

Lord Morrow: I heard recently about a case in which a female stabbed her husband or partner, and he broke her jaw in return. What happens when that goes to court? I suspect that that is a 50:50 and will not travel anywhere. I do not believe that domestic violence always comes from one side, the male. It also comes from females, no disrespect to them, but maybe the prevalent side is the male side.

I want to say another thing. I believe that, at the heart and root of much of this violence, there is one word: alcohol. It is alcohol abuse. That seems to be one of the drivers of this domestic violence. It is not entirely that, but I believe that it is very prevalent. I learned that very much when I was taking a private Member's Bill through the House on human trafficking and exploitation. I got a real insight into incidents of violence. It was maybe of a different nature but very much akin. I was taught many things as a result of that. Is it any wonder that I was so enthusiastic about trying to get that Bill onto the statute books so that, in future, this type of behaviour would stop?

Let us show the world and our country that we are not just here to talk fine words but are here to do something about it. The Minister needs to show that determination. She has said that it is her number one priority, and I welcome that. We are all looking to her today to tell us in a very direct way what measures she intends to bring forward and how she will tackle this issue, because it is like a cancer in our society and has to be tackled. That cannot happen soon enough.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Before I call Nichola Mallon, I remind the Member that she has three minutes and advise her that I have to call the Minister at 5.55 pm. If you take any interventions, I will not be able to allocate you an extra minute.

Ms Mallon: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Home is a place where you should feel safe, a place where you can go after a hard and trying day and close the door and feel relaxed and protected. Yet, for many women and men, the reality is very different. It is the place that they fear the most and the place wherein lies the greatest danger. The proliferation of this abuse in our society is shocking. Incidents of domestic abuse have reached a 10-year high. According to the very latest statistics, police respond to 78 reports of abuse in the home every day. That equates to one report every 18 minutes. While it is positive news that the reporting of these incidences has increased, the truth is that domestic abuse and sexual crime is still significantly under-reported because of the nature of the physical and mental abuse and often the intimacy of the relationship with the abuser, especially when children are involved. It can also be because of the abuse of power and authority and the fear of not being believed or being vilified when it is a large institution, a perceived celebrity or an organisation against an individual.

As many Members have pointed out, domestic abuse includes violence but is not just violence. Psychological abuse and the exercise of fear and control can be as bad as, and often worse than, physical abuse, and it is shocking that, under our current legislation, an abuser can break the spirit and will of their victim and can ruin their lives via psychological torment without breaking the law. The SDLP therefore welcomes and commends the fact that the Minister has given a commitment to tackling this injustice by outlawing coercive control in the North within the ambitious time frame of one year. Tackling domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime is not the task of one body, but it requires one approach, and that is one of zero tolerance based on three strands: prevention, protection and prosecution.

My colleague Mark H Durkan outlined why we have included a specific reference to justice support workers in our amendment and why access to those workers for all victims is crucial. We ask the Minister to share with us her views on that proposal, which I can assure her has the support of Women's Aid, the Men's Advisory Project, Men's Action Network, Nexus and Victim Support NI. As I draw my comments to a close in the reduced time frame, I want to put on record that I pay tribute to all the organisations, staff and volunteers who work with victims, but, most of all, I want to pay tribute to the courage of the victims who have spoken out.

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

Ms Mallon: It is because of them, and because of those who are suffering this torment and have not spoken out, that we must act.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Before I call the Minister, I advise the House that, as the business on the Order Paper is not expected to be disposed of by 6.00 pm, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3), I will allow business to continue until 7.00 pm or until it is completed.

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): I thank the Members who proposed the motion and those who tabled amendments. I will say from the outset that I am happy to support both amendments, albeit that they are mutually exclusive. Domestic and sexual violence and abuse are issues that concern all of us, and I welcome the opportunity to debate this in the Chamber and the interest that has been shown from all corners of the House. I have already stated publicly that tackling domestic and sexual violence is one of my priorities as Justice Minister not just because of the harm it causes to victims but because of the wider societal impacts that domestic abuse has across Northern Ireland.

Domestic violence takes many forms. It can be mental and emotional abuse; controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour designed to isolate, manipulate or terrorise a victim into complete fearful obedience; physical and sexual violence and rape; or a combination of all those. It can result in death. None of those behaviours is acceptable. None should be tolerated. Domestic violence and abuse is not a one-off incident in an otherwise healthy relationship. It is an ongoing pattern of behaviour that can continue for weeks, months, years or even decades, and I think it is important to emphasise that physical violence does not have to be involved for it to be domestic abuse.

Slap me, punch me, kick me, but don't put me through one more hour of mental torture. Victims have told me they are almost numb towards the physical abuse. However, the psychological abuse that is imposed on victims is what tends to break them. Abuse, whatever form it takes, has a devastating impact on victims, and it is well-evidenced that the negative impact of psychological abuse and coercive control can be just as traumatic as the experience of being physically attacked. I know from speaking to survivors of domestic abuse that the compound effect of sustained physical, emotional, financial and sexual abuse can be totally life shattering.

Domestic and sexual violence and abuse can affect anyone, no matter where they live or how much money they have. Equally, perpetrators of domestic abuse are as likely to be lawyers, doctors, accountants, politicians and those who are unemployed. Domestic violence knows no boundaries. It does not discriminate with regard to age, marital status, race, ethnicity or religious group, sexual orientation, social class, disability or geography. It affects women, men and those from the LGBT community. Some Members speculated why people commit domestic abuse. It is not something I understand. Perhaps alcohol is to blame, as suggested by Lord Morrow. It could also be addiction, mental health issues or trauma. Perhaps the perpetrators were victims themselves.

Whether we realise it or not, every one of us in the Chamber will know someone who is suffering at the hands of a violent and controlling abuser. It may be a family member, a work colleague, a friend or even an acquaintance. Let us not forget the hidden victims: our children. I am glad other Members mentioned them. Statistics provided to me by Women's Aid indicate that, in 2006, approximately 32,000 children were living with domestic violence in Northern Ireland and, in 2014-15, 13 babies were born to mothers living in refuges. Clearly, that is evidence that we need to do more.

Many victims are unaware that what they are experiencing is domestic abuse. Some may argue that the abusive man

or woman has just lost control. The truth is that that person is very much in control and their actions are designed to intimidate and frighten their victim over a sustained period with a view to denying their personhood. I often hear the comment, "If it was that bad, why not just leave?" Other Members mentioned that. It can be extremely difficult to leave an abusive partner, and the woman may, for example, fear what her partner will do if she leaves, particularly if she has children. Evidence has shown that the point of separation is the time when a victim is most likely to be killed or seriously injured. She may not have access to money or anywhere to go or may not know where to turn to for help.

6.00 pm

When the victim is elderly or lives in an isolated rural community, seeking help can become even more challenging, for a variety of reasons. Often a woman's self-esteem and confidence have been totally eroded by her experiences. Her abuser may have convinced her that the abuse was her fault, that no one will believe her or that she is useless and will not manage on her own. One woman told me, "I covered it up for so long because I was embarrassed and ashamed. I am an educated woman, and I was ashamed that I had allowed it to happen." Another said, "Every time it happened, he made me feel like it was my fault, that I deserved it." One woman talked about how her partner had systematically isolated her from her family and friends, cut off access to her finances and prevented her from using a car. She said, "Even if I could have got away, where would I have gone? I had no one." Consequently, many victims, both men and women, suffer in silence, with no hope of an escape from their situation.

We have seen such tragedies in our own community in the recent past. Since 2010, 22 women and 10 men have lost their lives to domestic violence in Northern Ireland. In my view, the death of one person is one too many, and we must act now to stop this. PSNI statistics note that approximately 28,000 domestic abuse incidents were recorded in 2015-16 — the highest level recorded since the data series began in 2004-5. Around 3,000 sexual offences were recorded in 2015-16 — an increase of 11.3% compared to the previous year. In 2015-16 the number of rape incidents recorded increased by 5.8% to 780 and other sexual offences increased by 13.3% to 2,257.

I believe that this upturn in reporting illustrates an increase in victims' confidence in the support services available to them as they seek protection and justice through initiatives now in place, such as the multi-agency risk assessment conferences and the Rowan centre. This is to be welcomed. However, it is widely accepted that domestic and sexual violence continue to be under-reported. From talking to representatives from the voluntary and community sector, such as Women's Aid, who provide front-line services to victims of domestic and sexual abuse, and to the victims of violence themselves, I have learned that there are a number of reasons for this. Often, women fear the repercussions of coming forward. One woman told me that she did not press charges against her abuser for fear that he would "come back and finish her off" as punishment for reporting his actions. Another said she had endured so much already that she could not bear the thought of reliving her drama in court. She wanted her ordeal to be over so that she and her child could get on with the rest of their lives in peace.

That is why I am committed to enhancing the current justice system to encourage victims to come forward, safe in the knowledge that they will be protected not just from their abuser but from the trauma of re-victimisation. I take on board the comments made by the SDLP about the support services available. That is definitely something that we should consider because, as many Members noted, this is not for me alone, or for the Health, Communities or Education Ministers or even for the entire Executive. It is for this House and wider society in Northern Ireland to shine a light on this dark shadow.

Domestic violence is a unique crime that requires a unique response, and, as an Executive, we have already made efforts to address domestic and sexual violence and abuse through the previous tackling violence at home and tackling sexual violence and abuse strategies, which were published in 2005 and 2008 respectively. But we must do more. In March 2016, following Executive endorsement, the Departments of Health and Justice published the stopping domestic and sexual violence and abuse strategy, a new strategy to address both issues. The vision of the strategy is to have a society in Northern Ireland in which domestic and sexual violence are not tolerated in any form; where effective, tailored preventative and responsive services are provided; where all victims are supported; and where all perpetrators are held to account. It is a challenging vision but one that I believe is achievable if we work together as an Executive and an Assembly to effect positive change and improve the lives of thousands of women, men and children in Northern Ireland.

In producing the strategy, there was extensive consultation and engagement with a wide range of interested groups, including statutory, voluntary and community sectors and, indeed, the victims themselves. The consultation sought views on whether a specific offence should be created to capture patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour in intimate relationships, in line with the proposed new definition of domestic abuse contained within the draft stopping domestic and sexual violence and abuse strategy. Having considered the responses to the consultation, I have now committed to bringing a domestic abuse offence and a domestic violence disclosure scheme to Northern Ireland. In the light of the previous debate, I am also considering how we can incorporate stalking into the legislation.

This domestic abuse offence will recognise the repetitive nature, behaviour, and cumulative effect of domestic violence and abuse on victims and the devastating impact that it can have on mental health. The disclosure scheme will provide potential victims with the right to ask for the disclosure of relevant information that will enable them to make informed decisions about continuing their relationship. My officials will brief the Committee for Justice on these subjects later this month, and I welcome its views and opinions on how we can take this forward.

I am aware that significant work will be required to embed this new offence and that that will of course require the provision of training and guidance for all relevant criminal justice practitioners against the backdrop of a challenging financial environment and limited resources. Nevertheless, I assure you that I am committed to ensuring that the offence is implemented effectively in Northern Ireland, and my officials will work with practitioners to identify the training and resources needed as soon as possible.

In addition to the introduction of a domestic violence offence, I am committed to raising awareness and to achieving the changes in attitudes that are necessary to end violence against women, children and men. Ultimately, I want to improve the experience of victims so that they are treated as we would all want to be treated if we were in their shoes. I take Mr Beattie's point that this needs to be an education; it needs to be a change of mindset. We need to educate young boys that it is not OK to treat women in a particular way, and we need to educate girls that it is OK to say no.

The victim charter, placed on a statutory footing in November 2015, advises victims of crime about their entitlements as well as the standards of service that they can expect when they come into contact with the criminal justice system. It builds on the good work that has been done to date, including the setting up of a victim and witness care unit that provides a single point of contact for victims to receive information about their case and have their needs assessed for additional support.

We will shortly pilot the prerecorded cross-examination of vulnerable and intimidated victims and witnesses, which could include victims of domestic and sexual abuse and violence. That will enable victims to give evidence ahead of their trial away from the main courtroom and their abuser in a place where they feel supported.

The inter-ministerial group on domestic and sexual violence and abuse oversees the delivery of the new strategy. I am pleased to co-chair that group along with Minister O'Neill. As I co-chair that group, I will be fully engaged in the development of all future action plans. I anticipate that members of the inter-ministerial group can, by working together over the lifetime of the strategy, provide the direction needed to make a significant difference to these issues. A cooperative approach is essential if the awareness raising, early intervention and preventative action that are necessary to address these issues are to be effective.

I note the concerns raised regarding prosecutorial decisions and advise that that is a matter for the Public Prosecution Service to consider. I meet the DPP regularly and am quite happy to share the views of the House on this area. It is important that I say that moving this forward is not just a job for the Executive or the Assembly but for the wider criminal justice family.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for giving way. On that very point, there have been cases, for example, where someone who has been convicted of sexual abuse has got a lesser sentence by a number of years, been let out on probation and then been able to get themselves off the sex offenders' list because they did not complete their full term in prison. That could ripple down with regard to any statutory disclosure scheme. Will the Minister look out for and investigate such cases?

Ms Sugden: Yes. I appreciate the comments of the Chair of the Committee for Justice. Indeed, when we bring these issues to the Committee, I would be keen to delve further into the areas that he raises because there are difficulties in the system, and it is important that we acknowledge that if we are to be effective in trying to tackle domestic abuse.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight a facility for those who have experienced sexual violence. The Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre was established in May

2013, jointly funded by the Department of Health and the PSNI. It offers a range of services and support to victims of sexual violence. Since going live in May 2013, over 2,500 individuals have been referred to the Rowan, and I have no doubt that the excellent work of the centre has contributed to an increase in reported sexual crimes.

We have an opportunity to commit clearly to working together to address domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime. As elected representatives, we have the opportunity to raise these issues in our constituencies through, for example, ensuring that our offices are safe places for victims of domestic and sexual violence to approach and seek support.

In my East Londonderry constituency, my office has been designated as a safe place. The Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is taking forward initiatives such as the ONUS Safe Village initiative and the ONUS Gold Award status including the development of a workplace charter on domestic abuse —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Just to remind the Minister that it is coming near close.

Ms Sugden: — with associated training for staff.

We all have a role to play in this, because we are all affected by domestic abuse, and we have a responsibility to speak out against it: only then, will it end.

Mr Attwood: As my colleagues indicated, we will not be dividing the House on the two amendments, and we will be supporting the Green Party's amendment.

If you think about it, today should tell the narrative of this mandate. At lunchtime, victims and survivors of institutional and clerical abuse produced further proposals on financial redress, given the horrors that they experienced many years ago and continue to do so to this day. Here, at the end of the day, we have a debate on the abuse of men and women, and particularly women, in Northern Ireland society. So, a defining feature of this mandate should be what we are doing to support victims and survivors, whether they suffered historical or current abuse.

In that regard, I want to press the Minister on a number of points made during the debate. The first was referred to by my colleague Mark H Durkan, and it is the roll out of the justice support worker scheme across Northern Ireland. This is something that has been endorsed by charities and organisations working in support of women. I think that it is something that the Minister should endorse and encourage the PSNI to roll out.

The Minister referred to her commitment to legislation on coercive control. All of us endorse that. There is now a commitment for that legislation to be on the statute books in the course of next year. That is a challenging timetable and, therefore, I say to the Minister that there is a need to accelerate the processes around this to ensure that that legislation will be on the statute book when we stand in this place in autumn 2017 and that that which we all endorse will have happened.

The Minister read into the record chilling comments in respect of the number of children who are affected by, and are living in the environment of, abuse of a parent by a parent. That suggests to me that there is still more work that is required arising from Steven Agnew's Children's Services Co-operation Act to ensure that every remedy

and intervention is pursued regarding those who are the most vulnerable in those abusive circumstances, the very young in particular.

I thought that Clare Bailey's comment on the PPS publishing figures was very worthwhile. If the PSNI is reporting the highest number of cases of alleged abuse and real abuse since records began, the PPS needs to publish its records of what is coming on the far side of that reporting.

I ask the Minister to ensure, when she takes forward the panel report on the enduring legacy and influence of paramilitary organisations, that she looks at whether there is control of communities and individuals that is subject to paramilitary or other organisations when it comes to this issue in the lives of the people of Northern Ireland. There continues to be a narrative about the influence that is being brought to bear, including by people who claim to be associated, or are involved, with paramilitary organisations. They have a role when it comes to the abuse of individuals in our society. I ask the Minister, when she is taking that work forward, to look at that issue.

Mr Douglas referred to the bravery last week of Terri-Louise Graham, and he was right to name it. We are also right to name all those who have shown the same bravery, including, not least, Máiría Cahill whose voice is still loud, whose dignity is still clear and whose experience still endures as a warning to people in our society about the influence of those self-appointed people who think that it is their job to deal with these issues.

We do not play politics with this issue. We do not play politics with Máiría Cahill. We do not play politics with any person who is subject to abuse from any organisation or society.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

6.15 pm

Mr Attwood: It is for others to judge whether others stand in solidarity with her and with them.

Ms Bailey: It is very heartening to hear such support and understanding from the House today, as well as the Justice Minister's commitment to the work programme ahead. As a member of the Justice Committee, I know that the Committee is absolutely committed to working on this issue and looks forward to scrutinising and helping where it can to introduce legislation.

A lot has been said today about men and women, and about the impact of domestic abuse on long-term relationships. Suffice it to say that Nexus NI put out a report that states that one in four of us should expect to be abused at some stage in our life. Much of that abuse occurs in childhood. Nexus believes that a large number of our prisoners have suffered sexual abuse or exploitation. The links between poor mental health and childhood sexual abuse are well known. Clients present with suicide risks, addiction problems, low self-worth, depression, anxiety and a plethora of other ailments. Our current rehabilitation system addresses some of the symptoms of trauma, such as anger, alcoholism and drug addiction. However, the underlying cause of the problem is often left unaddressed. Maybe we could start looking at what is causing this abuse. Maybe it is not alcohol but learned behaviour in our society, given that it is so endemic.

I want to mention the Probation Board for Northern Ireland because it does really good ongoing work with convicted perpetrators. However, this work can be done only when perpetrators have been convicted, and, as the figures given today show, the majority are not convicted, their problems unaddressed. Our judicial system should be capable of doing much more, and it should do better as a matter of urgency because, as every day passes, new victims are created.

Mr Sheehan: Domestic violence is intentional and persistent abusive behaviour. As many have said today, it is an ongoing pattern of abusive, coercive and controlling behaviour that can include physical, psychological, economic, sexual and emotional abuse. Domestic abuse is, by its nature, not a single incident of violence in an otherwise healthy relationship. Domestic abuse is characterised by coercive control. Mark Durkan defined coercive control as a deliberate and calculated pattern of behaviour and psychological abuse designed to isolate, manipulate and terrorise the victim into complete, fearful submission. Unfortunately, coercive control is not currently a crime here in the North, and I welcome the Minister's commitment to introducing legislation within the next year to make it so. Many victims of domestic abuse say that the coercive control element of their abuse is much more difficult to endure and recover from than physical violence. This has been corroborated by victims and survivors of domestic abuse in other jurisdictions and across the globe. Indeed, numerous studies have shown similarities between coercive control and tactics used to control hostages, prisoners of war and concentration camp inmates.

The presence of coercive control in a relationship can be an effective indicator of the likelihood of serious violence, resulting in the death of victims. Some victims of domestic homicide do not have a history of previous physical abuse, but they were victims of extreme forms of coercive control. Let us remember that this is a serious issue: in 2014-15, there were six murders with a domestic motivation here in the North; in fact, 37.5% of all murders in the North were domestic-related. As has been pointed out, the PSNI responded to over 28,000 domestic incidents; 13% of all crime in this jurisdiction. These statistics are just the tip of the iceberg. Lord Morrow pointed out that it takes an average of 30 instances of abuse before a victim will report it. All of this shows that women are still more at risk of crime in the home than anywhere else.

The crux of the matter is that domestic violence is not, in itself, a criminal offence. Instead, perpetrators are charged with regular offences such as assault, criminal damage, harassment or false imprisonment, and the PSNI records that the crime had a domestic motivation for statistical purposes. The PSNI and the criminal justice system treat each occurrence of domestic violence as an individual incident. However, this is at odds with the nature of domestic violence, which is a pattern of abusive behaviour. The upshot of this is that most incidents of domestic violence are treated as minor crimes and misdemeanors, resulting in short or suspended sentences. The sentencing does not take account of the weeks, months or even years of psychological torture that the victim has been subjected to.

Pam Cameron gave us a horrendous example of a woman who had been abused for over 60 years — almost all of her lifetime being tortured and abused by her husband within her own home. Of course, we have recently heard the testimony of Terri-Louise Graham, who was subjected

to absolutely diabolical abuse in her relationship. Making domestic abuse an offence will send a strong message to perpetrators that they cannot act with impunity, and it will also send a message to victims that the abuse they have suffered will be taken seriously by the Executive and legislators here.

Innovative evidence collection approaches should be considered to secure convictions. These could include the use of a register, showing the number of times police have been called to a house, in order to build a picture of the frequency and nature of the abuse. There is also evidence that use of body-worn cameras by police has led to a rise in convictions. There is also a need for a domestic violence disclosure scheme, and, again, I welcome the Minister's commitment to introduce that into the legislation. The fact is that most perpetrators of domestic violence are serial offenders, and if someone in a relationship becomes suspicious, she or he would be able to go to the police and find out whether the person that they are now in a relationship with has a history of domestic abuse.

Statutory agencies also have a role to play in helping victims of domestic abuse. As an example, if someone is intimidated by paramilitaries and seeks to be rehoused, their case is designated as high priority by the Housing Executive. The same does not apply to victims of domestic abuse. Alicia Perry's name has been mentioned on a number of occasions today. She has been waiting years to be rehoused without success; there needs to be changes there. We must send out a clear message from the Assembly that there will be zero tolerance of domestic abuse and coercive control.

I commend the motion to the House. I support the two amendments. In fact, I think they both add to the motion. I welcome the Minister's commitment to look at justice support workers. The victims and survivors of abuse have spoken to me in glowing terms about the work they do and how much easier it is to navigate the criminal justice system with the help of those workers.

I will leave it there.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I remind Members that, if it is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses deep concern at the levels of domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime; encourages victims of these crimes to come forward; welcomes the increased reporting of domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime but recognises that a high level of under-reporting still exists; notes that an analysis of final prosecutorial decisions between 2010 and 2014 shows that in 83% of rape cases no prosecution was recommended; and calls on the Executive to work together to address domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime and to support victims and survivors of such crimes; and further calls on the Public Prosecution Service to work to improve rape prosecution and conviction rates.

Adjourned at 6.26 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 18 October 2016

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Aiken: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would like you to rule on the issue of whether it is appropriate for important documents that will have influence on debates in this Chamber to be released to the Assembly first, rather than to 'The Stephen Nolan Show' this morning, as was the letter from the Prime Minister, dated 14 October, to the First Ministers. It was not made available to the Assembly but could have influenced the debate yesterday.

Mr Speaker: The Member will know that I have in the past always encouraged Ministers to come forward to the House when there is something that they believe is relevant to be made available to the House. It will be my practice to continue to ask Ministers to come to the House when they have something to report.

Opposition Business

Housing

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this debate. As two amendments have been selected and are published on the Marshalled List, 15 minutes has been added to the total time. The proposer of the motion will, therefore, have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to wind up. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to wind up. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes. Before we begin, the House should note that the amendments are mutually exclusive. If amendment No 1 is made, the Question on amendment No 2 will not be put.

Ms Mallon: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes that, in June 2016, there were 37,347 households on the social housing waiting list, of which 22,986 were deemed to be in housing stress and 15,474 were deemed to be statutorily homeless; and calls on the Minister for Communities to commit to providing at least 8,800 new-build social housing units and 2,900 affordable housing units over the term of the Programme for Government 2016-2021.

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I want confirmation that, when the motion that is about to be debated was submitted to the Business Office, it referred to the years 2017-2021, and that, because of the internal procedures of the Business Office in respect of the names of documents — in this case, the Programme for Government 2016-2021 — the dates in the motion submitted by the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP were changed. In so doing, the Business Office did not consult the sponsors of the motion. I accept the ruling that you have made in that regard; namely that, because the motion has been published in that way, it will be debated in that way, but will you confirm that, when the motion was submitted, the effective dates were 2017-2021?

Mr Speaker: I sympathise and empathise with the Member's frustration in the matter. It is routine for the Business Office to correct official titles of documents, as they did in this case. The correct title of the forthcoming Programme for Government is the Programme for Government 2016-2021. However, it is your intention, I assume, to refer during the debate to the dates that you mentioned.

Mr Attwood: Further to that point of order. I thank the Speaker for his comments and clarification. If something is not in inverted commas, which is how I normally refer to an official document of the Government, such as the Programme for Government, the Business Office should assume that the words submitted in a motion are the words of that motion.

Mr Speaker: Again, I accept the point that you have made. However, let me be very clear: the proper procedures were followed by the Business Office. Let us move on.

Ms Mallon: As my colleague pointed out, on 4 October at 11.07 am, the SDLP submitted the following motion verbatim to the Business Office:

“That this Assembly notes that, in June 2016, there were 37,347 households on the social housing waiting list, 22,986 deemed to be in housing stress, with 15,474 deemed to be statutorily homeless; and calls for a commitment of at least 8,800 new-build social housing units and 2,900 affordable housing units over the term of the forthcoming 2017-2021 Programme for Government.”.

As my colleague pointed out, that motion, without any consultation with the SDLP or the other signatories, was changed by the Business Office, substantially altering its intention and outworkings. Regrettably, when the error that was made by officials was brought to the attention of the Speaker’s Office, it was not corrected, and the motion that appears in the Order Paper is not the motion that was submitted by the SDLP. However, the original motion is the one to which I will address my comments.

There are five human rights that are essential if each of us is to fulfil our potential: the right to food, healthcare, education, work and a home. I have argued, and will continue to do so, that access to a good-quality, safe and secure home is the anchor and the glue that holds the other facets of a person’s life together. Having access to a good-quality, safe and secure home increases your life chances multifold, especially when children are involved. Housing is, without doubt, an enabler for health and well-being and it is key to tackling disadvantage, driving economic growth and job creation and building a better environment and a more equal, shared and safe society that respects diversity.

Housing is both an end and a means, yet, sadly, it has not appeared in the draft Programme for Government as a strategic outcome. By the Executive’s own figures, as of June this year, as I pointed out, we had huge numbers of people on the social housing waiting list and deemed to be in housing stress. A staggering and shameful 15,500 people are deemed to be statutorily homeless.

The fact is that thousands upon thousands of our citizens are sitting in poor-quality, overcrowded housing not suitable to their needs. Citizens are living for months on end in hostels with their children or they are sofa-surfing at the discretion of friends and families. Meanwhile, their health deteriorates, educational attainment is challenged and economic opportunities are reduced.

Mr Stalford: I appreciate the Member giving way. Would she care to acquaint the House with what the figure for new builds was when the SDLP held the Department for Social Development?

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for giving me the opportunity. When the SDLP held the housing portfolio, we built more houses than any Minister prior or since. *[Interruption.]* Since I was elected to the House, we have debated two housing-related motions. The first was brought in the name of Mr Fra McCann, calling for reform of the common selection scheme, particularly in the area of the award of intimidation points, and the SDLP was fully supportive of that. The second motion was brought by the Ulster Unionists and ourselves, calling on the Executive to detail their structured and timed response to the reclassification of our 22 housing associations. That was a development of profound financial consequence for housing associations’ ability to finance and build critical new homes — the focus of the motion before us today — and the wider financial consequences for the Executive to carry out their functions with an additional £1 billion added to their balance sheet. Perhaps today the Minister will give us an update on how his negotiations with the UK Treasury are going in respect of a derogation; what contingency plans he has in place if legislation is not brought forward within that time frame; and how that might impact on the target of building new social homes.

It is right that we debate the issue that, above all else, is the game changer in tackling our housing crisis: that is, the need to make land available and to build new homes. It is not a vague indicator to “improve the supply of suitable housing”, which lacks definition and, as a result of using vague and ambiguous terms such as “improve” and “suitable”, leaves this indicator too open to subjective interpretation. We need a clear commitment to build a set target of new homes, which contains within that a commitment to build homes for complex needs and older people. That will ease the greatest pressure on the housing system: the shortage of supply, not least in my constituency of North Belfast.

Of course, to make that happen, land must be identified and made available. In response to a question for written answer that I posed on this issue, the Minister said that he had commenced a public land for housing project, to identify land suitable for reuse for housing. The SDLP welcomes that initiative, and I ask the Minister to provide an update to the House today on the progress of that project and what consideration he is giving to the vesting of land and the use of compulsory purchase orders, where and when required, to tackle the persistent obstacle of land availability to build new homes in real time.

We also invite the Minister today to share with us discussions he is having with local government to ensure that we maximise opportunities in the devolution of planning powers and the development of local area plans and, in particular, what plans he has to bring forward the transfer of regeneration powers to maximise the opportunity that lies within local government.

The truth is that thousands of our citizens are waiting — and waiting — on the housing list. Over 500 disabled households are waiting for wheelchair accessible accommodation, with no certainty or comfort in sight. Those families deserve better. The families living in hostels deserve better. They deserve more than honeyed words. They need to be given certainty and comfort, with a clear commitment to build an ambitious number of new homes each year.

In respect of the land supply issue, the Minister is aware that the Housing Supply Forum brought forward a series of crucial and meaty recommendations. We invite the Minister to provide the House today with an update on that report.

The Executive must give clarity on the impact of welfare reform on the many social housing tenants. Given that almost a half of housing association stock is already at or above the local housing allowance cap, we also ask the Minister to share with us his plans to protect those tenants.

We will undoubtedly face the question from across the Chamber of how we plan to pay for all of this. We have the money drawn down from the European Investment Bank (EIB), with which I know the housing associations that are party to that are keen to get moving. That will allow us to build some 5,000 new social homes. We also brought to the Minister's attention the potential for Barnett consequential from the home building fund that was recently announced at the Tory party conference. We invite the Minister to give us an update on that today as well.

10.45 am

My colleague will go into detail on the amendments before us, but I will make just a few comments. I have to welcome the honesty in the Sinn Féin amendment. It is the first time that I am aware of an Executive party being open about its failure to deliver, admitting that, since 2007-08, the number of people in housing stress has got worse. Although we welcome the honesty in its amendment, what I cannot understand is why Sinn Féin brought forward an amendment on housing without making reference to a single target of at least one new-build house. That will not bring any comfort to the many people who are struggling and waiting desperately on a new home.

The amendment also calls on:

“the Executive to ensure that the Housing Executive has the powers to allow it to build social homes”.

The Housing Executive has that power in legislation, but, again, we have no detail on how the Executive plan to finance that, so I look forward to hearing further detail on that from the party beside me.

I turn briefly to the DUP amendment. It refers to delivering:

“9,600 new social homes and 3,750 new affordable homes between 2016 and 2021.”

I am very interested to learn where those figures came from, and I would like to know exactly when and how the Minister made that announcement, because, as far as I am aware, it certainly was not made in the House, which leads one to suspect that it is in direct response to the motion brought forward by the Opposition today.

Mr F McCann: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Leave out all after “notes” and insert

“that since 2007-08 until today the number of households in housing stress has remained constant, averaging around 22,000 per year despite significant investment by the Executive in new social housing; calls on the Minister for Communities to suspend the house sales scheme to ensure that housing can be retained within the social sector; and further calls on the Executive to ensure that the Housing Executive has the powers to allow it to build social homes and to

work with housing associations to ensure maximum investment in social housing.”.

I support the Sinn Féin amendment to the Opposition motion on housing. The other day, I was reading on the Housing Executive home page that, up to 31 March 2016, there were 37,586 households on social housing waiting lists, of which 22,654 were considered to be in housing stress, and, of those, 12,202 were deemed to be statutorily homeless. I also read in the Department's housing bulletin that, in the year ending March 2016, some 18,628 people presented as homeless, and that, between January and March this year, 4,550 people presented as homeless. That is a drop of 296 over the same period last year.

Those figures hide a frightening figure about an issue that I have raised time and time again, and that is the number of people presenting as homeless who are not accepted as being homeless. They are mostly young people under the age of 25, many of whom are advised to go to the private rented sector, and, with no mechanism for tracking them, it is then difficult to understand the journey that they are forced to travel.

We in the Assembly have a duty to ensure that we do everything in our power to deal with the problem of homelessness. We believe that we constantly need to review how we can develop a strategy that allows us to deal effectively with this difficult and complex matter. Yes, we believe that we constantly need to deliver additional social housing units. Yes, we believe that there needs to be more investment to ensure —

Mr Stalford: I appreciate the Member giving way. He is absolutely right: we do need to build more social and affordable housing. It is important to put on the record that, in the period 2007-2011, 9,192 new units of social and affordable housing were commenced. In the period 2011-16, that figure was 12,359. That directly contradicts the answer that the lady from North Belfast gave me a few moments ago.

Mr F McCann: That certainly does not surprise me. Thank you for the information, and I will deal with that as I go on.

We believe that there needs to be more investment to ensure that new social houses can be delivered, but there are other ways in which we can tackle waiting lists. One such way — again, this has already been mentioned — is to encourage housing associations to look at new ways of raising finance to increase their supply. There are housing associations that have taken that step, and they should be commended for their efforts to increase the supply of social housing.

A chairde, whilst social new builds are seen as the most direct way of providing new, modern and accessible homes, we need to look at other ways of providing much-needed housing. Social new builds are not the only way in which housing providers deal with waiting lists. They also rely on the thousands of relets that become available every year. These relets happen because people give up their tenancies and move on, or because people die and their home becomes available for allocation.

At the moment, social housing providers have over 130,000 social housing units under their control, roughly 88,000 of which are in the hands of the Housing Executive and 40,000 in the hands of the housing associations. If you consider that over 100,000 houses have been lost to this

sector because they were sold under the house sales scheme, and then you think of the impact that having these homes still in the sector would have on waiting lists, we believe that the only way to protect what is left of the social housing stock is to suspend the house sales scheme. Many of the problems that we face with social housing supply can be put down to the constant sale of social houses.

Whilst there has been a serious decline in the numbers of houses being sold, any change in that would have serious consequences for the remainder of the social housing stock. Failure to act on this now could see the total collapse of the social housing sector in the years ahead. We should go down the road of the Scottish Parliament, which totally abolished the right to buy in July 2014. Tenants had up to 31 July this year to buy their home. The selling of social housing is now a thing of the past in Scotland.

Action is being taken in Wales by the Welsh Government, who have decided to restrict the house sales scheme by cutting in half the incentive. This is in front of legislation that will abolish the scheme altogether in this mandate. We need to follow this example of protecting what is left of our housing stock for future generations. I know that many in the House see the house sales scheme as a protected species, but we need to look beyond the perceived popularity of the scheme and grasp the nettle, which will ensure that we are willing to go the extra mile in protecting what we have left.

The other element of the amendment is the need to look at how we can bring the Housing Executive back into the housebuilding arena. It is my understanding that the Housing Executive retains the power to build but its lack of financial resources prohibits its ability to build. If we could find ways to tackle this problem, we could see the flow of additional social houses into the sector, and that would go a long way in dealing with the housing crisis that we find ourselves in. We need to put a strategy in place that looks at all possibilities. We should rule out nothing. Adopting our amendment, along with other strategies, will move the debate on and send out all the right messages that we are serious about getting to grips with long waiting lists.

Sometimes, it is easy to get up and continuously quote terrible statistics on homelessness and maybe get a few lines in the press, but when we are speaking about waiting lists, we should remember that there are faces behind those statistics. There are families in housing stress who know that, in their area of choice, it will be years before they are considered for a home. There are parents and their children lying in homeless hostels, sometimes for years, waiting to be housed. There are young people who are forced into the private rented sector under the shared room allowance who live their lives in fear because of the conditions and drug abuse that exist in many of these dwellings. Then, there are those who suffer from disabilities and live in social houses that are totally unsuitable for their needs. These are the realities of being homeless.

I encourage the Assembly to throw its weight behind the Sinn Féin amendment. I cannot understand where the Opposition motion came from. Where did they come up with the figures of 8,800 new social houses and 2,900 affordable houses? I have always believed that there are those who will opt for an affordable home, either through co-ownership or other options that might be on offer. I have also always believed that there is a huge difference in numbers between people on waiting lists for social

housing and people on waiting lists for affordable housing. However, the selective memory of some, certainly of the SDLP, never fails to amaze me when it comes to the delivery and development of housing matters. To listen to them, you would believe that the huge waiting lists appeared in recent years and this was down to Sinn Féin, but the facts tell a different story.

I was reading a departmental housing bulletin which makes interesting reading. During the reign of the SDLP in the Department for Social Development, between 2007 and 2011, the number of people who presented as homeless in 2010 was 20,158 and in the following year the figure was 19,737. The figure for 2015-16 was 18,628.

I also remember the removal of protections for areas of high demand, such as Derry, west Belfast and north Belfast by the SDLP's Margaret Ritchie, which has impacted in the delivery of social housing. I further remember the removal of grants for renovations, improvements and repairs. That has had a huge impact on the fabric of the homes of thousands of people who relied on those grants for urgent repairs.

These properties are fast becoming the slums of the future. Many of the homeowners are in no position to afford essential works, repairs or major works to bring their homes up to a decent standard. That decision by the SDLP Minister has had far-reaching consequences for —

Ms Mallon: Will the Member give way?

Mr F McCann: Sorry, I have only a couple of minutes left.

— for the less well off, who depended on those grants because of their financial circumstances. And where do many of them end up? They end up on the waiting lists, made homeless in their own homes.

Under her new housing agenda in 2008, the then Minister, Margaret Ritchie, extended the house sales scheme, which made it easy for people to buy their social homes, thus, again, putting pressure on the waiting lists. So, forgive me for being a wee bit cynical when I listen to the promises made by the SDLP and the figures it has plucked out of the sky —

Mr Allen: Will the Member give way?

Mr F McCann: No.

— to cobble together a motion for today's debate. This is like the debate we had last week, when they put a motion together from nothing to give the impression that they are truly concerned and interested in moving the argument forward. We have the same thing today. They come with figures that are questionable, as a colleague across the Chamber said.

Our amendment offers a good way forward, that will allow us to tap into more social houses and the retention of the social housing stock. I support the amendment.

Mr Bell: I beg to move amendment No 2:

Leave out all after "homeless;" and insert

"further notes the Executive's success in exceeding the last Programme for Government target by providing 7,669 new social homes and 4,685 new affordable homes between 2011 and 2016; and acknowledges the plans of the Minister for Communities to deliver 9,600

new social homes and 3,750 new affordable homes between 2016 and 2021.”

I should declare an interest in that I spent the formative years of my life with two wonderful parents in social housing accommodation. I believe passionately in the need for social housing. If devolution is to mean anything, it is that we have to do more and better, particularly for those most in need.

It is more in sorrow than in anger that I propose this amendment, given the abject inadequacy of the SDLP and Ulster Unionist motion, which was selling people short in social housing. It was selling them short, and this amendment is coming forward because we have to do better. This party, with this amendment, is not prepared to follow the SDLP and Ulster Unionist line of continuing to sell short the people most in need of social housing.

I support opposition. I thought we were going to get something challenging and invigorating. Instead, we have an amalgamation of the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP to sell short hundreds of people on the social housing list, yet they purport to say that they are their priority. Well, we are not prepared to sell those people short.

We understand the need: 37,347 people on a social housing list; 22,986 in housing stress; 15,474 statutory homeless. Even the figure of 8,800 they gave this morning is still inadequate and not good enough. The message coming from people in social housing need is that the Opposition need to get their act together and do better for them.

When I look at the vision of the —

Mr Allen: Will the Member give way?

Mr Bell: Forgive me, but I am actually going to stand up for people in social housing need, not sell them short.

When I look at the vision that people are in —

Mr Allen: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I take offence at your remarks. As somebody who cannot get up and stand up, I take utter offence at those remarks, and I would ask you to take them back.

Mr Bell: The point I was making is I am standing up, as you well know, for the people in social housing need. That was the only meaning I had in that, and I will continue to stand up for people in social housing need.

You will hear, when I go on, that part of the proposal that I want to see is for more wheelchair accessible social housing. Coming from a family with significant disability within it and with members who are wheelchair-bound, I know that we are not doing enough in social housing. The Ulster Unionist and SDLP motion does not do enough for disabled people. It sells them short.

11.00 am

Mr Aiken: Will the Member give way?

Mr Bell: Let me point out the inadequacies first. To bring forward the pathetic motion that they have, selling short the need of hundreds of people, speaks to me of people who want to talk the talk. This Government and this Executive are prepared to walk the walk. Look back at the record of what there was — I had the privilege of serving for five years in that Executive. We set ourselves a target of 7,500 new social housing units, and we delivered 7,669. What was achieved in terms of new units and affordability?

The target was 2,450, and we achieved 4,700. I suggest to you that that is the reason that the people of Northern Ireland gave us the mandate to govern them. Not only could we set a target but we could over-deliver on that target. Having got that mandate from the people, the last thing that we are going to do, and the last thing that we are going to allow, is for the people who are most in need in this society to be sold short by a so-called Opposition whose self-appointed senior leader and self-appointed, I presume, by definition, junior leader have not even bothered to turn up. They are not prepared to do that.

Let me move on to what we need to do. We need a delivery strategy. We have a First Minister who is focused on delivery, and we have a Minister who has a comprehensive vision not to do just what the audit tells him to do — by the audit, I am referring to the net stock of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. That audit — welcome to your Opposition — involves some 8,000 people, and the Minister comes to the House not just with the audit of need but with some 1,600 houses in excess of that audit by 2021.

I felt embarrassed for the proposer when she tried to defend the SDLP's record of 2007-2011, because, if you take those four years and the subsequent five years when our party had control, hundreds more new homes were built year after year by these Benches than by those Benches. What do they do? They come today with another record of failure and inadequacy. It is time for ambition. It is time for us to seize the day. It is time for us to look at how we can access money. I encourage the Minister: if we have housing associations, which can build two houses with the different facilities that they have, compared with the Housing Executive, which can only build one house, surely we should focus the energy on the housing associations, their capacity to borrow and the ability to build two houses, rather than focus on where there could only be one.

That is only one aspect. We have to look at finance. There is no unlimited supply of money. We have to look at where land is available, and we have to look at the area of co-ownership. Against targets of hundreds, in the past we have achieved targets of thousands. We also have to look towards how we can provide people who are most in need with the best advice possible tailored to their needs and a person-centred approach to their families.

I welcome and encourage the Minister to continue to put money into the housing advice service. I believe, and I have found it numerous times in my constituency, that when you get the right advice early on, significant problems, including homelessness — one report states that up to 500 people could be saved from homelessness with just the right amount of advice. Yes, people will say, “Why are you paying for advice?”. We are paying for advice because we believe that prevention is better than cure.

Housing is fundamental to shaping the needs of our society. The Minister needs to keep his mind open, and, thankfully, we have a Minister with an open mind who is not just prepared to accept an audited target but is prepared to look at possibilities, see what can be done, and exceed that 8,000 target by 1,600 in this mandate by 2021. That is the measure that we will go by. We will go by delivery. We will not accept the failed policies of the SDLP that were evidenced from 2007 to 2011, when hundreds of people, compared with the next number of years, were deprived of adequate need. We will not accept the lack of vision and the poverty of ambition of an Ulster

Unionist Party and an SDLP joining together to deliver less than what the Government will deliver. We want more; we want better. The challenge to all of us around the House is to unite behind this amendment because, through it, we will deliver the 9,600 new social homes and the 3,750 affordable homes. I encourage the House to get behind this amendment —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Bell: I will do, Mr Speaker.

By being behind this amendment, we will deliver more and better. Do not accept second best from what purports to be an Opposition.

Mr Allen: Like the previous Member, I declare an interest as an individual who was raised in social housing, so I will not take any lectures from him or, indeed, from any other Member, on the needs of those in social housing. Indeed, I will not take lectures on championing the needs of those with disabilities because I think that I full well understand the needs of those with disabilities. I will not sit here and take any lectures, thank you very much.

On the problem with housing, we need to ask four questions. What is the problem? What is the solution? What is the existing legislation? What are the proposed changes? As we have heard already, we know full well the problem: we have 37,347 individuals on the housing waiting list, of whom 22,986 were deemed to be in housing stress and 15,474 were deemed to be statutorily homeless. As the Member from Sinn Féin pointed out, yes, they are statistics, and I will take no lectures on the reality of those statistics either. I do not quote those statistics loosely. Like the Member and other Members, I see, day and daily, individuals who cannot access social or affordable housing. We, in the House, need to do all that we can to give them the opportunity to access that.

In 2013, the homeless charity Crisis carried out research that identified that Northern Ireland had a higher rate of homelessness than any other region in the UK. Indeed, the SDLP Member and my Opposition colleague pointed out that there are five basic human rights and that housing is fundamental to that. It is well established, for example, that poor housing is one of the biggest detriments to the health of any population.

In fact, recent research by NIHE identified a potential annual saving to the NHS in Northern Ireland of £33 million if targeted improvements were made to housing. Additional research pointed to the cost of homelessness to the NHS as being between £24,000 and £30,000 per annum per individual. Prioritising the prevention of homelessness and the improvement of homes therefore has cascading and multiple impacts on our health and public purse. Indeed, I firmly believe that we need to see cross-departmental working on this issue; we need to see all Ministers stepping up to the plate. As my party leader pointed out, when we had the Programme for Government (PFG) discussions, we should have been around that table, housing should have been put on the whiteboard, and we should have been discussing how we will collectively approach the housing crisis.

Ms Mallon: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allen: Yes.

Ms Mallon: Does the Member not find it interesting that Sinn Féin lectures the SDLP about its shortcomings when it took the housing portfolio, but, in nine years, Sinn Féin refused to take it because it clearly does not deem it important enough?

Once again, when we debate the critically important issue of housing, the DUP spends most of its time not addressing the substantive issues but attacking the Opposition.

Mr Allen: I totally agree with the Member.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Allen: I thank the Member for her intervention. I think that we will find that, across the House, the Executive parties critique for the sake of critiquing, but we never see delivery. When we start to see delivery, we will work constructively with them.

Mr Stalford: [*Inaudible.*]

Mr Allen: Does the Member want to come in?

Mr Stalford: Yes, I do; I am happy to come in. The Member made the point that people should have been around the table having discussions. His little lecture would be more believable were it not for the fact that his party could have been around the table but opted instead for irrelevance in opposition.

Mr Allen: The Member knows full well that we were around that table and would have continued to be around that table if he and his Executive colleagues were not escaping to the Castle for their secret talks.

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he not think that it is ridiculous for the Member for South Belfast to demean his colleagues in Westminster by suggesting that opposition is merely an irrelevance?

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Allen: I thank the Member for that valid point. I sat here not so — [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allen: I sat here not so long ago listening to a Member on the DUP Benches critiquing the Opposition for the way in which we behaved.

A Member: [*Inaudible.*]

Mr Allen: Yes; OK. Thanks very much for that.

In short, we need to build more homes. I will reiterate and point out that it is disappointing that our original motion was changed. I take on board the rationale and reasoning for that, but we should have been consulted. Our motion calls on the Minister for Communities to commit to prioritising at least 8,800 new builds. That is more than the DUP amendment calls for, because ours is four not five, remember.

We have moved to an outcomes-based PFG, and the fact that we have moved to that is a realisation that the previous Government were not working. We have had nine years of the DUP and Sinn Féin not delivering for our people.

I am quite happy to sit here and say that we are not totally faultless. We are quite happy to stand up and take the criticism. We are here and are prepared to deliver, instead of putting things forward when it was made quite clear to the Chamber that our motion referred to a four-year period and Members tried to put that down —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Allen: — based on a five-year period.

In conclusion, we do not support the Sinn Féin amendment as we do not believe in the suspension of the housing sales scheme. We are supportive of a review —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Allen: — and taking that forward.

Mrs Long: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion and the amendments. Social housing is an absolutely crucial part of our infrastructure and is a key public service. In my constituency of East Belfast, I have seen at first hand the impact that housing stress and homelessness have on individuals and families in terms of their health and well-being, and I am content to support the motion.

The challenges facing the private housing sector, reform of the common selection scheme and the recent reclassification of housing associations have all been debated in the Chamber, which, I think, reflects the fact that housing is important to everyone in the Chamber. Despite the nature of the exchanges this morning, I think that it would be more reflective of the concerns of people outside if we focused on the core issues.

The motion highlights the global picture on housing need. However, in my constituency, over 1,000 applicants face housing stress and 555 people are registered as homeless. Behind each of those statistics are individuals who are living in entirely unsuitable accommodation for their needs, are in overcrowded homes, are living from day to day sofa-surfing, in hostels and, in a number of cases that I have dealt with, sleeping in cars. That is a failure to protect human dignity, and for two reasons it is an issue that the Executive need to approach with urgency.

First, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency has documented that the population here is due to rise to 2 million by 2034, therefore increasing the pressure on housing. Secondly, given the financial uncertainty that the sector faces due to the recent decision by the ONS, there is an uncertainty in that sector about how it will continue to do the work that it has done to contribute to new builds.

Mr Allen: I thank the Member for giving way. As my colleague in the SDLP alluded to, perhaps the Minister could give us some feedback on the discussions that officials were at on Friday.

11.15 am

Mrs Long: I would certainly welcome any update that the Minister could provide.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mrs Long: Thank you. It is important that the financial flexibility that housing associations have been deployed to address housing need.

The Minister has informed the Committee and the House of his intention already to build 1,600 homes next year using the £106 million allocated by the social housing development programme. It was noted at his initial meeting with the Committee that the figure was less than the 2,000 recommended by the Housing Executive. However, Alliance is happy to support today's amendment from the

DUP, despite its best efforts to dissuade us, because the amendment shows an increase in its ambition for social housing. If that is prompted by an Opposition motion, congratulations to the Opposition for drawing it out. It is disingenuous for some to suggest that those figures were in the public domain prior to the debate. It is therefore a credit to those in the Opposition who have drawn this out into public discussion and seen that increase in ambition. That is something that we welcome.

Unfortunately, we will not support the Sinn Féin amendment, because it takes a broad-brush approach to what is, I think, a very difficult issue. In some localities, it would be helpful as a short-term measure to protect housing stock. It ignores, however, the contribution that right-to-buy has made in stabilising neighbourhoods and helping people get a foot on the housing ladder. I do not believe that the housing sector is clear that it is not the policy but how it is applied that is the issue. Instead of suspending the scheme, consideration could be given, for example, to reducing the discount available to tenants, ensuring that the debt burden of new builds is cleared before houses are sold, alongside a commitment that every home purchased will result in another being built and that the money will be reinvested in housing stock.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Long: I will.

Mr Agnew: Does she not appreciate, though, that continually selling off homes and then reinvesting, given that the homes are sold at less than market value, means that we are forever having to subsidise further, much more so than if we did not have the house sales scheme?

Mrs Long: Yes, we do have to subsidise, but the house sales scheme is good for building viable, sustainable and vibrant communities. It is important that people be able to get a foot on the housing ladder in the communities in which they have grown up and be able to contribute back to those communities. A broad-brush approach to stopping the house sales scheme is not the way forward. That will become clear from what I say next.

Alliance believes that there is a number of things that we can do to tackle the housing crisis that we are in. First, there are 20,000 properties lying dormant across Northern Ireland. A focus on returning them to use would not only add to the housing stock but reinvigorate communities that often find dereliction a real challenge, associated as it is with antisocial behaviour and other problems. A scheme to deal with that would be very welcome. Secondly, to create viable, sustainable and thriving communities, we believe that expanding the emphasis on development of mixed tenure housing is hugely important so that people in social housing are not stigmatised, are not cut off from the services that others enjoy, and are able and encouraged to progress in society. Finally, we need to look at the barriers to people being able to accept housing in which they feel safe. Intimidation, whether sectarian or within communities, continues to render people homeless, and we need to deal with shared housing to allow people to have more choice, not less.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

Mrs Long: I will, Mr Speaker. I was disappointed, I have to say, in the Minister's response that this is social

engineering. Quite the opposite. It is about maximising the choice —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mrs Long: — so that any person can live in any home, in any place, in safety.

Ms Gildernew: I am delighted to participate in today's debate. To a certain extent, I agree with Nichola Mallon's opening remarks: housing is a fundamental human right. Indeed, the issue of housing, or lack thereof, is the reason for my involvement in politics.

The Housing Executive was set up after the eviction in Caledon in 1968 and has worked to deliver the building and allocation of social housing for almost 50 years. However, in the SDLP's PFG submissions — six themed documents on poverty, infrastructure, justice, economy, health and childcare — social housing is not mentioned. It makes no mention of housing need or provision in rural areas.

Again, housing in rural areas has always been of great interest to me. I am on record numerous times during my time in the Assembly, in this Chamber and the Committee for Social Development, talking about the level of unfitness, particularly in my constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone. I was horrified when the then SDLP Minister removed the Housing Executive maintenance grant scheme and condemned many rural dwellers to live in accommodation that was not fit for purpose. I was aghast to hear that a scheme that was helping to bring houses up to a level of fitness in my constituency was done away with.

Around the same time, other changes in the allocation of the housing budget were to have unprecedented implications for the housing stock. For example, 2,201 house sales were completed during 2006-7, yet, in 2008, Margaret Ritchie chose to extend the house sale scheme. Further to that, she announced that she would provide funding for the purchase of off-the-shelf homes for private developers. Under this scheme, Clanmil Housing Association bought 40 private apartments valued in the region of £7 million, which meant an approximate cost of £175,000 per property. Who benefited from that? The developer certainly did, and so did the tenants, but was it the best use of public funding?

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Ms Gildernew: Yes.

Mr Stalford: Will the Member also appreciate that, as I recall, people in the Village area had been fighting for many, many years to get redevelopment and proper housing, and, at the time when the SDLP Minister was in place, they were told that there was no funding for that, but the same Minister was able to find funding to keep a big wheel at the side of the City Hall?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Gildernew: I am not sure of that. In fairness to the Minister, while I was preparing for the debate, I did actually see references to the Village and her commitment to try to bring the housing stock up in that area.

The difficulty with buying off-the-shelf houses meant that, yes, some tenants in Belfast benefited from it, but there was decimation to the budget that had a knock-on effect across the region. It meant that, in real terms, housing associations

had been given more than £130 million in taxpayers' money to purchase 1,400 homes and turn private developments into social housing. The collapse in the property market meant that the average cost of an off-the-shelf home in 2011 dropped to just £60,000; less than half of the original price four years previously, so that was a very poor investment in monetary terms from the public purse.

Taking that along with the extension of the house sale scheme, I found that there was a knock-on effect across the board and much less in the way of social housing available to constituencies like mine. The decimated Housing Executive stock, which, I understand, now stands at around 88,000, means that we do have a knock-on effect, and there is not enough social housing for many of the people who need it most.

Before I run out of time, I would also like to talk about the 70% of adults with learning disabilities who currently live at home with carers. That needs to be properly assessed. I ask the Minister to extrapolate the figures from the different trusts and bring in the need that is there currently; the need not just of people with physical disabilities, of which there are many, but of those with learning disabilities. They need to be factored into the waiting lists to ensure that we have a proper grasp of the need that is out there, and we can then find ways to meet that need and provide quality, affordable social homes for people right across the board.

Mr Robinson: The debate refers to one of the most pressing problems that many people experience today; that of finding social housing that is suitable for their needs and at a price that they can afford. The motion states that a further 2,900 affordable housing units are desirable. I would ask the Member who signed it to read the DUP's 2016 manifesto, which states that my party wants to see 8,000 affordable homes delivered in the Programme for Government period to 2020. That is 5,100 more than the motion states. I am sure that those who proposed the motion will be relieved to learn that. When it comes to new-build properties, there is no doubt that that is an important way of achieving —

Mr Allen: Will the Member give way?

Mr Robinson: You had your say.

— what the motion seeks. It is an important way of dealing with the 37,000 households awaiting homes.

I wonder whether those who moved the motion have had discussions with the Finance Minister regarding the funding of the new-build homes. It is an unpleasant reality that all plans need to be funded and that the financial cake that we have in Northern Ireland is already divided thinly. In the previous mandate, 2011-15, £400 million of public-sector money and £315 million of private-sector funding was spent, resulting in over 8,500 social and affordable homes being constructed during the period. That is a respectable record.

We also have to look at bringing empty properties back into use. In my town, I have seen quite a few void properties being repaired and returned to use and there was great appreciation from the families who were awarded them. When I look at this, I understand the value of that approach. There is also merit in looking at developing empty space above commercial premises. I appreciate that people moved out of our town and city centres due to the Troubles

but, now that the bombings and firebombings have ceased, the time is right to utilise empty domestic properties in the centres of towns and cities.

There is a need for social and affordable housing, but, to solve the current situation, we must look at all possible solutions. We must ensure that what finance is available is used in the best way to reduce the level of families needing a home.

I cannot support the motion.

Mr Dunne: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in support of amendment No 2 today. There is no doubt that there are real challenges that continue to exist as we try to meet the housing needs of our population.

A growing population, which is projected to reach two million by 2034 and 1.9 million in the next five years, reinforces the need to continue to plan and build in a measured and strategic way to ensure that the housing needs of our communities are met. I welcome the Minister's recent commitment to housing when he increased the budget for the social housing development programme, with the aim of creating 1,600 new starts this year. Every day in my constituency office, housing continues to be a major issue for many people, from young people seeking their first home through to the elderly person seeking suitable ground-floor accommodation in a sheltered housing scheme, if available. Demand continues to grow as Housing Executive stock continues to diminish as houses are sold off to tenants. That has given many people a great opportunity to get their first home.

There has been a real transformation in so many estates throughout Northern Ireland with the investment that has gone in through the Department, formerly the Department for Social Development. We should commend all the good work that has been done through housing associations and the Housing Executive as they continue to transform many estates, working with the local communities. In my constituency of North Down, I think of areas like Kilcooley, which is one of the largest estates in Northern Ireland, Whitehill, Bloomfield and Rathgill in Bangor, and West Green in Holywood. They have all benefited from major investment; it has helped to transform those areas. I recently had the pleasure of joining the Minister in Rathgill to see an exciting new Fold housing development being opened. That scheme, which had considerable consultation between Fold and the local Rathgill Community Association, will add to the housing stock in that area. Many new purpose-built quality homes have been constructed to meet the needs of many of our young people, the elderly and those with disabilities. I know how grateful many of the new tenants are who are living in those properties.

As of June 2016, there were 2,045 on the waiting list in North Down, and 810 of those were classed as homeless. This shows that more that needs to be done. However, we must continue to build on the progress that has been made to date.

11.30 am

Mr Allen: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dunne: No.

Co-ownership is also a great way to give young people an opportunity to own their first home. I commend the

efforts of the Minister with regard to that. It is so important, as young people try to meet the challenge of getting on the property ladder, with property prices still being excessive. We need to see investment in the supply of affordable homes for our young people. A lot of good work continues to be done. I want to put on record our thanks to the Housing Executive in the Bangor office, whom we work with on a regular basis, for the constructive work that they have done and continue to do in helping to meet the housing needs of the local people. More could be done to acquire land in areas of high demand like North Down through cooperation with our councils and other government agencies in relation to surplus land. I support amendment No 2.

Mr Attwood: I have a habit — probably a good habit — of wishing Ministers well, especially Ministers of welfare and housing, and I wish this Minister well. My memory of being housing Minister is that it is one of the most valuable pieces of work that you can do in government. I met the Minister of Education coming here this morning, and he said that he had a series of school visits planned. That tells the tale that going to schools, going to new-build housing or announcing housing plans is part of the best work of any Minister. I wish him well in all of that.

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

I was not planning to do this, but I have to comment on some of the earlier debate by making two remarks — on the new build figures and on waiting lists. In the debate this morning, there was a sense that it was 'Play Your Cards Right': "Higher, higher, higher" seemed to be the claim of some. In order to get clarity and break through the fog, let us look at what a DUP Minister said in reply to a question in the House about new-build social housing, going back to 1998. I will lodge the answer to the question in the Library. I hope that this Minister, from the same party as his predecessor Nelson McCausland, will not dispute the figures of the previous Minister and that nobody in the Chamber will dispute the figures of the previous Minister. What did those figures confirm? They confirmed that, in the years 2007 to 2010-11, when the SDLP had the housing brief, there were 8,394 new-build social housing starts. That includes new build, off the shelf, existing satisfactory purchases and rehab and re-improvement. That is Nelson McCausland speaking. Then he went further and said that, in the four years from 2011 to 2015, the comparable figure was 6,704. The facts from the DUP confirm that, in the four years when we were in the Ministry, compared with the four years since or the eight years before we were in the Ministry, new-build social housing starts were at their height of any mandate, of any Government who had responsibility for this area. I hope that settles the issue about the facts.

Mr Bell: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will in a second.

I want to turn to what Mr McCann said. He gave us further facts on what housing waiting stress and housing stress were in previous times. The one thing that he did not dispute was the figures in the SDLP motion, the figures that refer to 37,000 and more on social housing waiting lists, 22,000 and more in housing stress and 15,000 and more deemed to be statutorily homeless. He did not dispute those figures, which are the most acute in a generation. Therefore, whatever the figures were when

the SDLP was in government, they are far worse now and are deepening as we speak. Those two facts — the achievement in government and the size of lists now — should conclude the argument about facts once and for all.

Mr McGrath: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will.

Mr McGrath: There was also a reference earlier by Sinn Féin that there was nothing in the Programme for Government negotiations from the SDLP. In our submission, did we not propose three Bills on housing? Did we not also have an entire section of our document on housing?

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

Mr Attwood: I do not know where Michelle Gildernew gets her information; probably where John O'Dowd gets his. Yesterday, he did not know what Martin McGuinness had said the previous day, and, today, Michelle Gildernew does not know what we submitted to the PFG. I wrote part of it, and we set challenging targets for new-build and affordable housing, as, I am sure, the Minister is aware. I hope that Michelle Gildernew will reflect on that.

In conclusion, I want to ask a number of critical questions. If the Minister can answer them in a positive way — if not today, then subsequently — the new targets outlined in the DUP motion might be met. I welcome the new targets. The curious thing about them is that, pro rata, they are virtually identical to the SDLP's amendment. The figures that we propose over four years are, pro rata, identical to the figures that the Minister proposes over five. I think that the Opposition has proven their worth today, because they have smoked out the DUP, without reference, of course, to their colleagues in government, to the point where they have had to put hard figures on the public record in response to the hard figures proposed by the Opposition.

I will write to the Minister with a series of 12 questions that I have, and I look forward to his response, because, in that way, the figures —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Will the Member conclude his remarks?

Mr Attwood: — the operation and the implementation can deliver to address the stress and waiting lists in our motion.

Mr Eastwood: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I had absolutely no idea that you were going to call me, but thank you very much; I did not assume that I would be called straight after Mr Attwood.

First, I welcome the fact that this is the first day that we have had joint motions from the Opposition. We hear cries from across the room that the Opposition cannot get their act together, but we have today got at least two motions with names on them from the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP. I am also very glad, as Mr —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: Yes.

Mr Allister: Would the Member agree that this debate highlights the division between the two Executive parties? We have a Sinn Féin amendment castigating house sales that the DUP is patently not going to accept. In so far as

the debate highlights division, is it not a chasm at the centre of the Executive on housing policy?

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

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Member very much for his intervention. He must have seen some of the notes that I have in front of me. It is absolutely clear, given the criticism that comes from the other side of the room and sometimes from this side of the room as well that, "God, the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP do not agree on every single aspect of policy" — why would we? — "God, the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP have a slightly different approach to the European Union" — why would we not? *[Laughter.]* — "Oh my God, the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists do not have the same manifesto" — why would we? I will tell you what we do: we work together in the interests of democracy and in the interests of the House. That is why I strongly believe that the Opposition are having an impact.

As Mr Attwood has just pointed out, we have seen new figures from the Minister. We welcome them very much. The new figures from the Minister, the new commitment from the Minister and the new understanding that we need to build more social housing and more affordable housing to a level that is appropriate and required all say that the Opposition are working. They are pushing the Executive to do more and better things.

When we went into opposition, we did not say that we were just going to oppose everything for opposition's sake. In fact, we said the exact opposite. We said that we would work with the Ulster Unionists. We would work with any political party, either in government or outside the Government, to make sure that the Executive do the best possible things for the people who need it most.

It is strange; maybe it is deliberate — I am not sure, Mr Allister — but we have seen a real attempt in radio and TV studios and in this Chamber, and I am glad to see the two Government parties working together. Unfortunately, today, somebody did not get the memo. It is strange. It looks a bit like the last mandate. Maybe they have slipped up, and maybe we are going to see more of this to come, but we have two opposing amendments from the two Government parties.

Mr Allen: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: Yes, go ahead.

Mr Allen: Would the Member note with interest that, every time you refer to the previous mandate, those on the opposite Benches continually refer to the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP being in that Government, but they now no longer have that cover to blame the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP for their failure, and they will be found out for exactly what they are?

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Member very much for his intervention. Yes, of course we were in the last Government. The SDLP had one member of that Government, and for all the talk of the collegiate, partnership working that we now hear, there was not much of that when we were in government, I can tell you very clearly. There was not much of that. There was not much respect for our mandate, or the Ulster Unionist mandate, or the Alliance Party mandate around that particular Executive table, and if things have changed, I welcome that. I believe —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: I believe, Mr Stalford and Mr Deputy Speaker, that it is the fact of an Opposition that is forcing this Government to work together. We will see, when it comes to the final production of the Programme for Government, whether it is just going to be about bluer skies and greener grass or whether we are going to see some real commitments to the people; people in my constituency, people in West Belfast, people in North Belfast and people right across the North of Ireland who have been let down by nine successive years of bad government.

Hopefully, the Opposition will put those guys and these guys in their place and get them finally delivering for the people of Northern Ireland and that will make sure that people my age and of my generation do not have to leave our shores to find work or a university place. Hopefully, it is the Opposition that is putting the Government in the right place once and for all.

We welcome the move from the Minister to take our consideration and our proposals on board to change this desperate situation in which we need to build more social housing for our people.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I call Mr Steven Agnew. Mr Agnew, you have five minutes, if you choose to take it, but an intervention will not give you an extra minute.

Mr Agnew: I had thought that we had moved to the era of outcomes. Unfortunately, this debate has been very much about outputs — arguing over numbers; who built more houses than whom — when the reality is that, whether it was the last five years with the DUP holding the ministerial position or the four years previous to that with the SDLP, effectively there has been little change in housing need, housing stress and homelessness. There may have been some variation on a minor scale.

Effectively, what we have done is to keep a lid on the problem, but we have not got to the point where we have been able to address or tackle it. It is not just about those two parties. We have had five parties in government. Sinn Féin can criticise, but it has been the second-largest party in government for a considerable time. There needs to be collective responsibility but also collective action in seeking to address it.

I do not make those points to criticise the record of any party. I do so just to criticise the tone of the debate, which has not been particularly constructive. Sometimes, it is important in politics that we disagree; absolutely, that is what politics is about. But we actually do not disagree on this issue. We do not disagree that our levels of housing stress and homelessness are too high. We agree that we need to build more housing. We might disagree marginally around the issue of the house sales scheme, and I will come to that, but on the majority of the issues we agree. Yet to listen to the tone of the debate, it sounds as though we are at complete odds, and there is almost an accusation that some parties support homelessness — it is a wonderful thing, and we should have more of it. Nobody subscribes to that view. We all want to tackle the issue, and we should work together to do so.

11.45 am

Different approaches are laid out in the motion and in each of the two amendments. I accept what the SDLP said about how the figures in the motion were arrived at. However, that is the motion that we will vote on, so I am inclined to support the Sinn Féin amendment, because it talks about going beyond what we do currently to doing some things differently. It is my view that we should suspend the house sales scheme. Although house sales are modest at the minute, another boom in the housing market will undercut our investment in public housing. Look at the effect of the scheme over decades: in 1973, there were 155,000 Housing Executive houses, while today the figure is 88,000. In the past few years, when we have been building more than we have been selling, over the course of the right to buy scheme, as it is commonly known, we have sold off more than we built. That cannot continue, so it is right that we suspend the scheme.

It is also right that we look at options for allowing the Housing Executive to finance new builds again. Rightly, a call will go out asking me, “What have you done?”. I have commissioned research on what those options should be. Once that research is complete and I have had time to look at it, I will come back with my proposals for how that should happen. Right now, I want to support the principle of giving power back to the Housing Executive. There has been a call — I think that I am right in saying that the Minister, to be fair, is opposed to it — for rent convergence between the Housing Executive and housing associations. The reality that the Housing Executive would be able to borrow at a cheaper rate, given its 88,000 housing assets, weakens that argument. It can also help us to resist any drive to increase social housing rents in the Housing Executive, allowing it to raise finance in other ways, without putting an additional burden on those already on some of the lowest incomes.

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

Mr Agnew: We have to change what we are doing, but we should be working together, and —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member’s time is up.

Mr Agnew: — this debate has been regrettable.

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I welcome the opportunity to respond to the debate. From the outset, let me reassure Members that my motivation to deal with housing issues is very much grounded in my experiences as an elected representative — I was a councillor from 2005 — and the experiences of all my colleagues in a party that is very much grounded in the working-class community. My motivation is not based on the Opposition. It is not based on the Opposition tabling a motion to which, within a couple of days, we came up with an amendment that increases the ambition. If the Opposition believe that that is how government operates, that is why they are in opposition.

I want to make clear what my motivation is. My motivation is based on being in Seymour Hill a number of weeks ago and seeing the damp conditions that people in the tower blocks have to live in. It is based on the experience of being in the home of a young girl who, sadly, paralysed and in a wheelchair as the result of a car crash involving

her boyfriend, had faced delays in getting adaptations to her home because of the failure of the housing association responsible, which led to my intervention. My motivation is based on Nichola Mallon bringing a constituent to me who is also struggling to be housed. That is what drives me to tackle housing issues, not the politics of responding to the Opposition.

Ms Mallon talks about “honeyed words” not being enough, but you will not get honeyed words from me when it comes to dealing with housing matters. You will get hard work. I appeal to Members: hysteria will not achieve what we want to achieve, but what I heard from some in the official Opposition was more hysteria than a real solution.

The most considered contributions to the debate from oppositionists came from two Members who are not in the official Opposition — Ms Long and Mr Agnew — and they spoke about how we can deal with this.

I appreciate and understand the need for the two official Opposition parties to try to have relevancy. We, as a party, want them to be relevant because we negotiated that there would be an Opposition through Fresh Start, so we want the Opposition to work. I think that Members should reflect on how they have added to the debate when it comes to dealing with what is a very important issue.

Let me get to dealing with the substance around the issues that Members have raised. Hopefully, I will address most of the points that Members have brought to the Floor, and, time permitting, I will deal with some more specific ones.

The motion allows me to recognise the success of previous Ministers in exceeding the last Programme for Government targets on social and affordable housing and an opportunity to set out my ambition to do even more during the current Programme for Government period. Increasing housing supply across all tenures is an important issue. While the private housebuilding industry continues its slow but steady recovery, it remains important for government to provide more than its fair share of new housing supply through additional social and affordable homes. In the last five years, the Executive, including, I acknowledge, the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP, did an excellent job, setting ourselves targets of starting 7,500 new social housing units. Not only did we meet that target but we exceeded it, starting 7,669 new social homes over that period. There is a similar story on affordable housing, where we helped almost 4,700 households take the first step to owning their own home, against a target of 2,450. That success should rightly be recognised and applauded, and, for that reason, I support amendment No 2, tabled by my colleagues.

I am keen to build on that success and do even more, particularly around social housing, during the current mandate. The Housing Executive has statutory responsibility for assessing housing need, and, using the net stock model, it has identified a need to build 1,600 social homes a year to meet population change. That equates to 8,000 homes between 2016 and 2021, and I have already committed to building to that level as a minimum. However, I want to be even more ambitious than that, and, as long as enough funding is available, I want to start 9,600 homes by March 2021. To achieve that, we will have to maximise the potential of the existing delivery system, and, for that reason, I welcome the new delivery strategy developed by the Housing Executive

in partnership with my Department and the Federation of Housing Associations. As well as improving the way in which the social housing development programme operates, the strategy aims to increase the land bank available for social housing development and encourage housing associations to take on bigger sites.

Amendment No 1 calls on me to ensure that the Housing Executive has powers to build social homes: I can confirm that it already has those powers. However, for reasons of affordability, the Housing Executive no longer builds. It could only build if its income from rent or other sources, such as house sales, allowed it to do so. The Housing Executive's current income falls short of what is needed to maintain its existing 88,000 properties, and I believe that that is where the priority should first be. Also, it does not currently make financial sense for the Housing Executive to build homes. With their ability to borrow commercially, housing associations can deliver almost two houses for every one that the Housing Executive could deliver using grants alone.

Mr Beattie: I thank the Minister for giving way. Has he engaged or will he engage with the Ministry of Defence, which has now scheduled its surplus housing stock in Aldergrove to be demolished next year? That is housing stock that could be used for homeless veterans, families leaving the services in transition or, indeed, given the debate that we had yesterday on domestic abuse, as emergency housing for families involved in domestic abuse.

Mr Givan: Of course, the Executive negotiated with Her Majesty's Government to have transfer of surplus properties, and a lot of that has come from the Ministry of Defence. In my constituency, surplus housing is being provided. That is an ongoing programme that we are working on. The point is well made about making sure that, when the properties become available, they are used. It comes with its challenges. There can be a significant number of houses released, and managing that process is something that a community at large needs to be able to do. I will touch on how we need broader support from the community to make the changes that we want to make.

Amendment No 1 also calls on me to suspend the house sales scheme. My officials have just completed a policy review of that scheme, and I will consider options for its future shortly. Whatever I decide, I am keen to ensure that I support aspiration, helping those with the necessary desire and financial capability to move into home ownership. I am also mindful of the need to ensure that we have sufficient homes available for those who need to rent.

It is right to be ambitious, but delivering 9,600 new social homes over the course of the mandate will not be easy. Money will never be endless, land in areas of high need is in short supply and we face community opposition to social housing development in some areas. Communities sometimes need that extra bit of reassurance, and I would welcome support as we look to build new homes across Northern Ireland.

As the motion recognises, affordable housing can also make an important contribution to meeting housing need and demand. My Department has also been able to secure £100 million in government loan funding for Co-ownership, which helped support 725 families into home ownership last year. We have also extended the number of affordable housing products available through the affordable home

loans fund, including a rent-to-own scheme. Taken together, those initiatives mean that I aim to deliver 3,750 additional affordable homes over the mandate.

Ms Mallon: I appreciate the Minister giving way, seeing that he has already given way once during his response. He will be aware that Members have asked for clarity on where the increased figures before us have come from. Will he point us to where he has publicly announced the increased figure prior to today's debate, or will he have the maturity and the honesty to admit that they have come in response to the Opposition motion before him today?

Mr Givan: The Member has met me to discuss these issues, and I note the change in tone when we are in the Chamber compared with when we are in a private environment. It is an issue that we are dealing with. It is one that I have been engaging on throughout the Programme for Government with my officials and in the Executive, and it is a priority for us to deliver more housing. Does the Member really believe that we came up with the figure in response to an Opposition motion? That is not how government works. Mr Attwood, who is very familiar with the need to provide housing, knows that you simply would not be able to provide the figures in response to a motion, when you have to go through the processes of engaging with officials, housing associations and the Housing Executive so that you can provide a credible figure that you can stand over. It is not simply a case, as Mr Attwood indicated, of "Raise me higher" and "Who's got the best cards?". That is not how politics works, and it is not how the delivery of housing works.

Mr Attwood: Will the Minister very briefly give way?

Mr Givan: I will, Mr Attwood.

Mr Attwood: Would you, at least, concede that it is a curious coincidence that the figures being proposed by the SDLP over four years are in and around the figures that you now propose over five years?

Mr Givan: Curious indeed, Mr Attwood. Mr Humphrey wanted me to give way.

Mr Humphrey: Does the Minister agree that sometimes there is a difficulty with the Housing Executive's role and responsibility on regeneration? Therefore, does he agree, having visited the Building Successful Communities areas in north and west Belfast with me only a few weeks ago, that this is a really good pilot and a good example of how it can be rolled out across Northern Ireland. For example, in lower Oldpark, where 26 derelict houses have been brought back to life, confidence in the community has increased and the environment has massively improved. We have 10 houses being built on the front of the Oldpark Road and 15 affordable planned for Cliftonpark Avenue. This is an example of how the Executive can work when they are supported by the Department to work on the joined-up approach that the Minister talked about earlier in his speech.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. I remind Members that interventions ought to be short and concise. Minister, you are losing time.

Mr Givan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. That visit demonstrated to me the importance of that programme. One of the arguments made by previous Ministers, when the DUP did not hold the Ministry, was that there was not enough need, whilst areas were allowed to continue into

dereliction. Of course, who wants to move into those areas when you are not improving that environment?

The DUP, having implemented this new programme, has regenerated a number of those areas, particularly in north Belfast, and now you have people on waiting lists wanting to get into them. That has been as a result of DUP Ministers implementing that and of the representation made, not least by Mr Humphrey.

12.00 noon

In respect of how we can take this forward, I want to do more. Let me finish by highlighting another area. The Department is responsible for the St Patrick's Barracks site in Ballymena, and we are developing plans that include the provision of social, affordable and private housing, all with a shared-housing ethos. I know that Mrs Long is not here at present; she touched on this issue in regard to comments that I made previously. Let me be clear. I support shared housing, but it is about creating the conditions and environment where people want to share housing. It is not about forcing people and it is not about manipulating a waiting list, on the basis of religion, to deprive people who need a house. I am very clear about how I want to see shared housing developed. I am keen to see more mixed-tenure housing of that type. I have asked my officials to develop proposals for how that can be achieved, potentially using money within the Fresh Start Agreement earmarked for shared housing.

Building new housing is clearly important, but housing need can also be met in other important ways. The private rented sector has a role to play, and, later this year, I will publish proposals for consultation on the future role and regulation of the private rented sector. Preventing homelessness is also of critical importance. This year, I am investing almost £1 million in housing advice services, to help over 7,000 households take action on serious housing issues and directly prevent homelessness in almost 500 cases. The Housing Executive is also rolling out a housing options service across its office network. It aims to provide a more holistic service to those with housing issues and take early action to prevent homelessness. Where possible, prevention is always better than cure, and I am also investing funding, through Supporting People and the homelessness strategy, in helping to end the cycle of homelessness for those who have found themselves homeless on a regular basis, including on the streets. I have seen some of that work at first hand, and it helps people to turn their lives around.

In conclusion, increasing the supply of housing across all tenures is a vital issue. I will do all that I can to increase the supply of social and affordable housing, but I cannot do it alone. I need the support of all in the Chamber to encourage local communities to embrace the opportunities that new development brings. I need the support of councils to zone enough land for housing and deliver a high-quality planning service. It will not be easy, but I want to be ambitious and for all in the Chamber to share that ambition and help deliver significant numbers of social and affordable homes over this mandate.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): It is always a pleasure to see people in the Public Gallery. It is a particular pleasure for me to welcome the principal, staff and pupils of Bessbrook Primary School to the Public Gallery. All politics is local.

Mr Stalford: I would like to associate myself with the comments the Minister made regarding the contributions from the Member for North Down Mr Agnew and the Member for East Belfast Mrs Long. Whilst I did not agree with everything that both of them said, I thought that they were measured and sensible contributions that had useful ideas in them.

Like the Minister, I spent a long time in local government — 11 years, in fact. Like him, I have long experience of dealing with constituents who have encountered all sorts of difficulties, whether presenting as homeless or seeking improvements or adaptations to their properties. All of us, if we are doing our job properly, have had experience of that: constituents who are plagued with damp-ridden properties and people who have been waiting for a long time to get into housing. Like the Member for North Belfast, I agree that a home is a fundamental right. Stable and secure communities, families and societies are reliant on a supply of housing that is of a high standard. A recent survey showed that 40% of housing on the mainland was insufficient in the quality of housing provided. I do not think that the figure is comparable for Northern Ireland. There is a huge problem not only in the need for new builds but in the need for improvement and adaptation of existing properties.

House-building is important. An important and simple question to ask in the debate is this: is it better to build 9,600 social units or 8,800 social units? If the answer is that it is better to build 9,600 than it is to build 8,800, Members should support the amendment that we have tabled. It is unfortunate that some of the broad agreement — Mr Agnew referenced this — on these issues and on the need for action in these areas has been drowned out by some of the contributions in the debate, but perhaps all will be well when we get back into the Committee and have further discussions on the issues. I think, sitting on the Communities Committee as I do, that there is agreement across all parties on the need for action in these areas. If there is a bit of knockabout in here, that is the nature of the game, and people will see it for what it is.

I agree with the Minister: the notion that a motion tabled by the Opposition would, in some way, direct a Minister to change his housing target is laughable. I think that they know that; when they stand up and say those things, I think that they know that. The proposal from the Opposition shows a lack of ambition. I am glad that the Government are going further than the Opposition hoped, and I therefore welcome the chance to discuss that.

Mention was made in the debate of outcomes-based accountability. I welcome the shift to outcomes-based Government, as it is a positive route to go down. I think that, as a Government, we should be judged at the end of our five years on whether we met the targets that we set. I am happy that our target for house-building is an ambitious one that goes further than the Opposition suggested. I hope that, at the end of our five-year term, we will have delivered on it, and people will be able to look at our record, like a report card, and see that we met that target.

I disagree with the idea of ending the right-to-buy scheme, as the right of people to own their home should be encouraged. We should encourage people who wish to get on the property ladder if they want. I believe in the right of people to own their home and not to live their lives as clients of the state, paying the state rent, and upon their death having —

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: Yes, I will.

Mr F McCann: On the right to buy, I have no doubt that it is a popular scheme, but when you look at the destructive impact that it has had on the social housing stock over many years, you can only come to the realisation that it needs to cease. In Scotland —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to be brief; Mr Stalford's time is already up.

Mr F McCann: In Scotland, they did a review and changed it, and in Wales, they did a review and changed it. That has to be the way forward for us. It will be interesting to listen to the Minister's review when it is —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask Mr Stalford to address that immediately because I cannot award him an extra minute.

Mr Stalford: OK. I will be very brief on that. I believe in a mixed housing market. I do not believe that the state should be the sole provider of housing.

Mr McCartney: We will not be supporting the motion. Having listened to the Minister's contribution this morning, which we welcome, and to the contributions from the DUP, we will be supporting its amendment and not calling a division on our amendment.

One of the striking aspects of the motion is that you get a sense from the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists that they somehow believed that, once they opted for Opposition, all that went before did not exist. It is as if there was no time before a certain date. For them, day 1, year zero was sometime in June 2016.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: I do not get an extra minute, so the answer is no.

However, the reality is that, no matter how hard they try or no matter how many times they say it, other people will remind them of the positions they have taken on particular issues.

So, even today, the motion states that by 2021 there should be 11,700 new homes — 8,800 social homes and 2,900 affordable homes. We received no explanation or rationale as to why the proposers came to those particular figures. I suppose the secret lies in what they have recently said.

In their May 2016 election manifesto, just a few short months ago, the Ulster Unionists talked about the need to build 10,000 new social homes by 2021. There is no reference as to how they got that figure, but it is premised on a waiting list of 44,000. Today's motion states that the number on the waiting list is lower than that. We are not sure whether the motion is an SDLP motion or an Opposition motion, given the earlier point of order, but we are now told that in a lesser timescale they want to build more houses than was stated in their target in May and we are provided with no explanation. The only thing that has changed is that they are now in opposition and think they can say whatever they want and it sounds good.

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

The SDLP held the housing portfolio, so, with the benefit of the inside track, so to speak, you would think that its

figure would be worth noting. But when you look at its Assembly manifesto, you see that there was no real figure, no approximation. There was a vague, indeed, clever reference to the regional development strategy. It talked about the need to increase provision but there was no reference and no baseline. Now, in October 2016, there is a very precise figure. This world of opposition is a very wonderful place.

Nichola Mallon talked about the great need in North Belfast, and Colum Eastwood is to be congratulated for perhaps the most impromptu speech he ever had to make. To have your name down for a motion and then say that you did not know you were going to be called to speak is some admission in itself. However, he went on to say that there was also a great need in North Belfast, West Belfast and in his and my constituency of Derry. There once was ring-fencing for social housing in those three areas because of the need, which was well-identified. Fra McCann pointed out that many people thought that it was the sensible approach; where there was great need, to go after it. That scheme was brought to an end by the SDLP, initiated by Margaret Ritchie and then processed through by Alex Attwood. In case Colum feels left out, he was the undersecretary at the time.

For us, it is a very clear statement. We are part of the Programme for Government. In our manifesto, we set a minimum of 10,000 social homes, and that is what we will be tested on. That is what setting outcomes in the Programme for Government will do. We will be tested on what we say. It is very important for the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists to learn this about opposition. They remind me of the story of the person who grafted a hump on to a horse, called it a camel and expected everybody else to believe it was a camel. When you bring a motion to the House, it will be tested and scrutinised, and you will be reminded of what you have said in the past. We will certainly call your camel a horse because it is a horse.

Mrs Palmer: At the outset, I welcome the Minister's intention to give an undertaking to build more new houses in this term. Although the causes of and the solutions to the issue that the motion grapples with are complex, the issue itself is simple. There is a desperate need to increase housing supply. There is not one person here who would disagree with that statement.

Every day, in every constituency office amongst us all, there are people who are in desperate need of housing and housing needs. We have families who have no homes and do not feel as though their children can be raised in a normal societal settlement. The lack of supply is having a dire impact on their health and education and is causing social problems. I thank Nichola Mallon for raising that issue.

12.15 pm

There is only one way in which to address the problem: we must build more homes. We must increase capacity for the many thousands in housing stress. At the moment, we are delivering too few new developments, and the slow pace of public land release, coupled with the inflexibility of needs assessment, means that we often build 10 homes when we need 100.

Northern Ireland's status as a low-wage economy complicates the issue. The recent scandal of the much-lauded government-supported help-to-buy ISA scheme,

which provided very little help to buy owing to a fatal flaw with the bonus, only exasperates the situation. The increasing private rental costs and shortfalls in housing benefit combine in a perfect storm to maximise housing need. Once again, it seems as though the Bank of Mum and Dad must rescue young families hoping to buy their home or pay rent. That is not an acceptable position. When we consider the prevalence of one-year tenancy agreements, it is hardly surprising that so many feel that their house is not their home.

There is a need for innovation in housing supply. We need more one-bedroom flats for older people and more two-bedroom houses with expandability. Again, the inflexible needs analysis needs to be modernised. Why can Northern Ireland not lead the way in exploring smart home technology that reduces crime, delivers energy-efficient outcomes and adapts to the needs of families and the disabled?

Housing should be backbone of local regeneration. It can be the catalyst to support inward investment in construction, infrastructure and employment and to build communities. Now is the time to look at the potential of pension schemes to finance housing programmes.

Nichola Mallon highlighted the cry from some DUP Members about there being financial constraints. There was certainly no difficulty in squandering over £1 billion on the renewable heat incentive. Just imagine how many homes that might have built.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mrs Palmer: Perhaps the Minister can update the House on the progress of the long-awaited review of the Housing Executive.

Mr Allister: The Member may be interested in an answer to a written question from me yesterday on the renewable heat incentive scheme, which states that the anticipated cost in the upcoming year is £37 million.

Mr Aiken: Thirty-seven million?

Mr Allister: Thirty-seven.

Mrs Palmer: I thank you for that intervention.

Forgive me, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker, for being a little bit parochial for one moment, as the Minister was. I would like to talk to the Minister as a fellow Lagan Valley representative. Minister, in our constituency there are 988 people in housing stress. There are 159 social houses being built in Lagan Valley. We must build more for the sake of those 829 people, and the many more across the Province. Fra McCann gave us the figure of 22,654 households being in housing stress. That just shows how important housing is.

Minister, housing is a plural, and you have the opportunity to give a massive boost if you are bold and brave enough to embrace new solutions that support people and offer them a home.

I thank Alex Attwood, who certainly put to bed the nonsense about statistics and damned statistics across the Chamber. All Members had statistics to suit themselves, but the statistics here are as Alex Attwood stated. Yes, we can all play games around statistics.

I pay tribute to my colleague Andy Allen, who took some abuse from my left. It was pretty hot at times, but he held his own in determining that he works solidly on social housing in his constituency.

I admire it that a man who has the disability that he suffers from champions disability and social and affordable housing in his constituency.

I remind Mr Bell of the figures that are being debated in the Chamber. The period 2007-2011 was a four-year term, and 2011-16 is a five-year term. You can work it all out, but I do not want to get fixated on figures; I just want to have a sensible debate here today about how we move forward and about the importance of delivering new solutions for housing in Northern Ireland. The Minister said that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive had the right and the power to build, but, unfortunately, at the time of the existence of the Housing Executive —

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Palmer: I will in a second. Unfortunately, at the very beginning, the Housing Executive was funded fully from the public purse, and the decision was taken that the Housing Executive would not be able to avail itself of full housing funding. There is an opportunity here to split the Housing Executive into two entities. One would become one of the largest housing associations, de-shackled, along with the housing associations, as we move forward. I believe that the Office for National Statistics is setting the scene for where the housing association movement will be. Why not de-shackle the Housing Executive as well and allow it to bid like anyone else for the new build programme and reduce the housing association grant and make it more competitive for all developers to challenge to build new and affordable social housing. I bet you any money that social housing would be built at a far better price. I am happy to give way.

Mr F McCann: I thought that I had moved into the SDLP there. Your last statement is correct. Whilst the Housing Executive retains the right to build, the lack of capital or financial resources means that it cannot, but it could be a game changer.

We are all talking about statistics this morning, but I said that behind the statistics are faces of families, young people and children in hostels and overcrowded homes. That is why we should never lose sight of the fact that this is happening. It is faces, not statistics, that we should be dealing with.

Mrs Palmer: I hear what you say. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has a stock of 88,000 and, as one of the biggest commercial small business portfolios, would have the capacity to borrow on the strength of that if the shackles were removed to allow it to become an independent housing association as a charity, just like all the other housing associations. It is all in the detail, and it is for the Minister to solve that detail and to try to deliver far better housing for Northern Ireland. I welcome the motion today.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I remind Members that, if amendment No 1 is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and negatived.

Question, That amendment No 2 be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes that, in June 2016, there were 37,347 households on the social housing waiting list, of which 22,986 were deemed to be in housing stress and 15,474 were deemed to be statutorily homeless; further notes the Executive's success in exceeding the last Programme for Government target by providing 7,669 new social homes and 4,685 new affordable homes between 2011 and 2016; and acknowledges the plans of the Minister for Communities to deliver 9,600 new social homes and 3,750 new affordable homes between 2016 and 2021.

Mr E McCann: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In terms of the Standing Orders of the House, can you explain why, again, neither Member from People Before Profit has been called in the debate? The same thing happened yesterday in relation to the debate on withdrawal from the European Union, on which we were very anxious to speak because we have a distinctive point of view, different from that of other parties, and we want to be able to express it. Can you tell me whether the ruling comes from the Speaker's Office? Has it been imposed on the Speaker's Office by a Committee of the House? Is it based on precedent? Is it based on protocol? Will you explain this to us? We have 13,000 first preference votes between us. We believe that that is a mandate to express our point of view in the House. We are not being given the opportunity to do that, and I would like an explanation.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed the principles of the debate. In a debate, it is not possible to get all Members in, but I am happy to take your points to the Speaker.

Cancer Services: Deterioration

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up —

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): On a point of order. It is on the debate that we are about to begin. I believe that there are factual inaccuracies in the motion that has been tabled for discussion, namely the fact that it refers to 6·7% of breast cancer patients missing the 14-day target. That is wholly misleading. The true picture is that the 6·7% is for urgent referrals for suspected breast cancer and not for people who have been diagnosed with breast cancer. That is not to mention the inaccuracy of stating that our services are in crisis. Four of the five health and social care trusts have extremely strong performances against breast cancer targets. The Southern Trust has a strong track record in meeting the 14-day target and has had a well-publicised dip in performance in recent months. The reasons for that are due to previously highlighted staffing issues, including the untimely and tragic passing of a senior doctor in the Southern Trust. The motion also quotes 392,000 as the total number of people on waiting lists. Again, that is little more than a back-of-the-envelope calculation, adding up all waiting list figures for outpatients, inpatients and diagnostics. That misrepresents published statistics. For those reasons, I ask the Members opposite to reflect on the inaccuracies that I have highlighted and ask them not to move their motion on the basis of the fact that it is highly inaccurate.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister has put her point of order about a potential inaccuracy on the record. It is a matter for the proposers of the motion whether they wish to move it.

The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 15 minutes to propose and 15 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members will have five minutes.

Mrs Dobson: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the recent publication of cancer waiting times, which revealed that the crisis affecting cancer services in Northern Ireland is continuing to deteriorate; further notes with anger that, in June 2016, only 6·7% of breast cancer patients in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area were seen within 14 days, despite the target being 100%; accepts the importance of timely diagnosis and treatment of cancer, as any delay can reduce the likelihood of a successful outcome; notes that these figures are symptomatic of the wider unprecedented crisis engulfing the Northern Ireland health service, with 392,000 people now on waiting lists; and calls on the Minister of Health to intervene to ensure that patients receive swift, safe and sustainable healthcare and to ensure that patient safety is not further compromised.

I welcome the opportunity to move the motion in the Chamber today. I also welcome the fact that the Minister is here to respond. When I moved a motion on cancer waiting times last October, no Minister was available to respond. It was at the time of the in/out Ministers. Now that the Executive have found a newly forged unity and we, alongside the SDLP, have formed the official Opposition,

it is wholly right that we raise in the House the issue of cancer waiting times, their impact on all our people and the actions taken to address the waiting times crisis.

Last November, much was made of the additional £40 million that was secured in the monitoring rounds to specifically tackle waiting times; indeed, the then Minister, Simon Hamilton, claimed that it would allow an extra 10,000 to 15,000 operations and treatments to be progressed. It is with absolute exasperation, however, that the Ulster Unionist Party has now learned that £18·5 million of that £40 million was not spent on waiting lists and instead was redirected to plug the gap on other pressures in the health service.

My party warned at the time that the trusts were not given enough time to use the money on waiting lists and, sadly, that appears to have come true. That is an absolute disgrace, and all those responsible for raising patients' expectations only for them to be later dashed should be ashamed of how they played politics with our health service.

12.30 pm

The people with suspected or diagnosed cancer, whose lives are entirely in the hands of our health service, are often genuinely terrified about what the future holds for them. They simply will not care about what MLA from which party said what. These are men and women, young and old, who are going to be given a diagnosis that will rock them and their loved ones to their very core. They will experience a sense of fear that they never knew they could. This debate should be held in a manner that we would be comfortable with any one of those people sitting in the Public Gallery above us watching and observing.

One year on from our motion that called on the Health Minister to ensure that cancer services are adequately organised, funded and resourced, we received the most recent figures from the Minister, which show regression rather than progression. That performance in relation to breast cancer waiting times has been described by the Minister herself as "shocking", and she has expressed her regret at those figures. That was two weeks ago in the House, when a question for urgent oral answer highlighted that, in June of this year, only 6·7% of breast cancer patients in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust were seen within 14 days. Later today, in Question Time, we will likely hear the number of women who were not seen within the target of 14 days and who then were tragically given a breast cancer diagnosis. We know that that number is 121 in the Belfast Trust for last year, but the Minister has so far refused to answer as to the situation in the Southern Trust.

Of course, as the motion suggests, the reason that targets exist is because any delay can lead to a reduced outcome. Failure to diagnose cancers at an early stage can mean much harsher treatment is needed. It can make the consequences of treatment that much more difficult, and it can severely impact the chances of someone recovering and living well when their treatment ends. That is especially the case for cancer, a truly wicked disease that thrives in a vacuum of delay.

The recent Northern Ireland statistics show that, between 2010 and 2014, 18% of cancer patients were diagnosed at stage 4 and had a one-year survival rate of just 33%. In comparison, 22% of patients were diagnosed at stage 1

and had a much higher one-year survival rate of 95%. For breast cancer specifically, Cancer Research UK states that around 99% of women will survive for five or more years after diagnosis if diagnosed at stage 1, compared to just 15% at stage 4. It is all fine and well to talk about statistics, but, as I have indicated, delays mean the difference between life and death.

Yes, the delays for breast cancer patients in June in the Southern Trust were particularly awful, but they were by no means the only problem. The Northern and Belfast Trusts have also experienced frankly appalling cancer performances. The problem there, like the problem in the Southern Trust, primarily came down to personnel rather than capacity. A single vacancy or absence due to sickness quickly snowballs into intolerable situations, such as that experienced in the Southern Trust, where only 15 of the 224 people were seen within the red-flag period in June. Of course, when one trust recruits a new key staff member, the problem often transfers to the trust that he or she has just come from. The issue of displacement is one that I feel has not been properly investigated by the trusts and the board. I urge the Minister to look into that point.

Something as simple as ensuring that each trust has an effective succession plan for key posts could prevent many of these delays developing in the first place. Until such fundamental measures are taken, the system will remain crippled and broken due to its lack of resilience.

I remember well, as I stood in the Chamber to move my private Member's Bill, the Human Transplantation Bill, being told not to bring emotion into the Chamber. I remember well the cries that went up, "We cannot bring legislation based on emotion". That is what is wrong with the Assembly: there is not enough emotion; there is not enough care for those whom we are elected to represent. Given the very real pain being forced on our constituents because of decisions taken or, perhaps, most importantly, not taken by Ministers, from whatever party, it is right that we, as elected representatives of the people, bring their emotion into the Chamber. I make no apologies for standing up for the mother who waits week on week, month on month, for scan results or for the grandmother spending months waiting on surgery. We all know that cancer tears the heart out of families and shows no mercy whatsoever. While I can speak from the perspective of losing my grandmother at the age of 41 and my best friend in January, who was only 48, I know that some Members can speak from personal experience. Cancer touches too many lives — far too many lives.

I want to put on record my appreciation for the work of Professor Mark Lawler and others in pioneering research. I had the privilege of viewing their work first-hand over the summer. Whilst we have expert nurses, consultants and cancer specialists, they are being placed under mounting pressure.

It is fitting that we are having this debate in Breast Cancer Awareness Month, when our fantastic charities, including Cancer Focus, Macmillan and Action Cancer, put their shoulder to the wheel across Northern Ireland to fundraise and to raise awareness of early diagnosis. There are far too many charities and charity heroes to name here today, but you all know who you are and the life-saving work that you are doing in October and throughout the year.

However, their efforts are not being matched by Government when it comes to diagnosis and treatment.

For instance, I ask the Minister whether she is content that an integrated plan is in place to balance expectations raised by the public health campaigns and the need for people to be seen by the right person at the right time. There certainly does not appear to be a balance. We know that in October there is an increase of around 40% in the number of women coming forward for a breast cancer check-up. That is to be welcomed. We cannot then feign surprise when there is a dramatic spike in diagnostic demand following those major awareness campaigns. Better patient safety and better cancer outcomes are exactly why money is targeted at the campaigns. However, what really galls me is when bodies, such as the Health and Social Care Board, sordidly —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to bring her remarks to a close. Excuse me, you have 15 minutes. My mistake.

Mrs Dobson: — try to use that increase in demand as some form of twisted justification for a subsequent reduction in performance. I appreciate that the trusts will take part in a workshop next week to look at longer-term solutions. However, workforce planning, led by the Department, is absolutely critical here. The right cancer specialist, in the right place, is what is needed to banish, or at least to lessen, the worry and concern that all families with a loved one waiting on a cancer result or treatment experience. More importantly, there needs to be a reduction in the period between initial discovery, diagnosis and treatment to improve outcomes.

Time and time again, the issue of cancer waiting times has been raised in the Chamber. We heard the words "disappointed" from Minister Wells in 2015, "silence" from Minister Hamilton in last October's debate, and, last week, "shock" and "regret" from Minister O'Neill. When, after all those condemnations of the service that they lead, will they turn from words to action?

When are these actions going to turn back the tide of lengthening waiting times and reduce the pressure on key front-line staff who, along with patients, bear the brunt of ministerial and departmental dithering?

In her response, the Minister will no doubt explain that, next week in this House, she will publish the Executive's plan to reform the local health service, but when will we see the longer-term stable budgets that will allow health managers to effectively plan for future service delivery; longer-term budgets that will allow cancer consultants and specialists to know that support will be there for them and that short-term funding solutions, which lessen the problems only for them to return again, will become a thing of the past? The fact that, as we stand here today, people are having their health compromised should be enough to shame the Department of Health and the Health and Social Care Board into action. The fact that these words were spoken in the Chamber 12 months ago and that the most recent figures show waiting targets being failed by the trusts is a matter of shame hanging over the Executive.

People who are living with cancer cannot afford to wait. Indeed, the Health and Social Care Board is on record stating that:

"increased waiting times for assessment may result in delayed diagnosis of a serious or life-threatening

condition with reduced likelihood of a successful outcome."

We are dealing with matters of life and death, but the most frustrating thing is that we and the public across Northern Ireland are simply being asked to accept failed targets; accept that another 12 months have passed without improvements; and accept the regret of the current Minister of Health and the disappointment of the last. Words become hollow when actions do not follow. In the House today, we should be primarily focused not on lists, percentages and spreadsheets but on the humans behind the statistics; the young woman who faces delay with her breast cancer treatment or the grandmother who watches her children knowing that she may not be around to see them grow up. I am sure that every MLA in the House will come down with case after case of constituents who are all desperate and have been told that they must wait a lengthy time. I know that I am. Each case tugs at the heartstrings.

I have only skimmed over one of the problems facing the local health service. If I had much longer, I would not be able to cover the sheer scale of this unprecedented crisis. I am sure that many Members wish to speak. They will understandably each raise situations that affect their constituents. It is not the intent of the motion that the Minister takes any concerns that are raised as personal criticism; rather I ask her to acknowledge that in addition to those who, every day, receive the earth-shattering news that their fight against cancer has begun, the 225,000 outpatients, the 70,000 inpatients and the 100,000 people who are waiting for a diagnostic test deserve better than they are getting now.

I will leave my final word for the staff who are emotionally drained and demoralised. They are in no way to blame for the crisis. They are the very people who hold the system together. Collectively, they form the final line of defence against total collapse.

I take no pleasure whatsoever in speaking on this topic in the House. I commend the motion to the House in the hope that action will be taken to resolve this crisis.

Ms Seeley: Cancer touches the life of so many on this island and indeed right across the world. In recent times, I have lost three relatives to cancer. I have no doubt that I am not alone in that. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the sterling work of the Marie Curie nurses who look after the terminally ill. It is also worth noting that this month is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. I want to commend the work of Action Cancer in its screening efforts. I encourage all women, particularly those who are over 70, to book a screening appointment today. I have also been hugely impressed by the lobbying efforts of Margaret Carr, public affairs manager for Cancer Research.

From charities to nurses, surgeons and clinicians to health trusts and, indeed, the Department of Health and Minister, tireless efforts are being made, day and daily, to improve the health outcomes of cancer patients. We should never underestimate the commitment and dedication of our healthcare professionals. However, that is precisely what the motion does. Its focus is on statistics that the Minister herself published as part of an overarching report on cancer waiting times earlier this month; statistics that she admitted in this very Chamber were simply not good enough; statistics that she was extensively questioned on

and provided detailed answers to a matter of days ago. Sadly, our friends in the Opposition were not listening on 4 October when the Minister addressed the very issues detailed in the motion before us today.

12.45 pm

The Assembly has already noted the recent publication of cancer waiting times. Indeed, the Minister noted that the figures are the result of wider systemic pressures in our health service — pressures that she has committed to alleviating. Let us not kid ourselves: this is not an unprecedented crisis. The trends of increased and sustained demand are due to an ageing population and increased referrals, and that goes back years. That is largely due to increased awareness resulting in early detection and enhanced outcomes.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Ms Seeley: As the Minister stated, four out of our five health trusts are doing better than the targets set.

I will give way.

Mr Beggs: Is the Member aware that, in the previous year, in March 2015, only 27% of those requiring urgent breast cancer referrals in the Belfast Trust were seen within 14 days? This is not something new; it is repeating itself. Does she accept that there is a problem that needs to be addressed?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Tá nóiméad breise ag an Chomhalta. The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Seeley: Thank you. I thank the Member for his intervention. Of course I accept that the problem is not new. The Minister accepts that the problem is not new. I welcome the fact that the Minister will address the problem with much gusto.

The Minister has already been questioned on Southern Trust figures. She not only detailed actions taken but noted subsequent improvements — improvements that the motion chooses to ignore. That is nothing short of appalling. I took the time to contact the Southern Trust. It assured me that the problem highlighted in the motion was a temporary one as a result of staffing issues and that the matter has since been resolved. The trust is now back at 100%. It is for that reason and because of its flawed nature, not to mention the complete lack of proposals in the proposer's opening remarks, that we are unable to support the motion in its current form.

The Opposition seem to be keen to cry from the sidelines, offering nothing by way of substantial proposals to problems that they identify. It is hugely unhelpful to scaremonger by suggesting that patient safety has been compromised. Frankly, it is an insult to our hard-working and devoted healthcare staff. The recent actions of those in our health trusts to address issues in the Southern Trust are an example of what can be achieved when trusts work together, providing additional clinics and extending working hours. That, of course, highlights the need for cooperation, as opposed to competition, between our trusts. Trusts need to help each other out, sharing resources and good practice for the well-being of all. Health outcomes should not be a postcode lottery. However, when trusts do exactly what we ask — responding to and dealing with perceived crises in a positive and timely manner — they should be commended, not ridiculed, in the Chamber.

I welcome the Minister's response to the question for urgent oral answer on 4 October on this very report, in which she assured Members:

"everything is being done to ensure that those referred are being seen as soon as possible." — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 118, p181, col 1].

That is the message that we should be sending out from the Chamber today. It is a message of assurance to all those with suspected cancer and their loved ones that our Health Minister, health trusts, healthcare professionals and hospitals are not only aware of the issue but doing all that they can to improve the outcomes for those diagnosed with cancer.

Despite huge changes to our demographics over the past 20 years, our health service has remained static. That is the real issue. I therefore welcome the Minister's comments from earlier this month when she said that she is minded to work towards the delivery —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring her remarks to a close?

Ms Seeley: — of a cancer strategy. I urge the Minister to move swiftly to transforming how we deliver services to ensure better outcomes for all.

Mr Poots: Cancer is such an important subject to discuss. When discussing it, we should not engage in political bickering. We need to look for solutions and look to address the issues at hand.

As someone who has served in the role, I wish the Minister well in tackling this issue on behalf of all of us. It is critical that we continue with much of the good work that has already been achieved.

On the first day of the previous Assembly, I recall that I was confronted by the Pink Ladies, a group which many people from the city of Londonderry will know well. They were here wanting to know why Altnagelvin cancer unit, the radiotherapy unit, was not proceeding. I agreed to go and meet people in Altnagelvin and to look at the finances. The first decision that I made as Minister was to proceed with that cancer unit and change the decision that had been taken by the previous Minister, because cancer is too important to play politics with. The money was there to do it. It is being done, and it will deliver a service, not just for the people in that vicinity but for people in Donegal. It will also relieve the radiotherapy service that is available in Belfast City Hospital. The truth is that this unit in Altnagelvin is not just a service for people in the west of Northern Ireland; it is a service for all the people in Northern Ireland. People from the west were travelling for two hours to get 15 minutes of radiotherapy and then travelling for two hours back. People were telling me that, when it snowed, it was actually an all-day route for 15 minutes of care. Those people will not be using that service, and therefore it will create greater availability for people in greater Belfast and the eastern part of Northern Ireland. It was absolutely critical that that happened. With the growing numbers of people who actually require cancer care, we simply could not have coped if we had not proceeded with that particular facility.

I would like to pay tribute to the people who are carrying out research in Queen's University and work very closely with the people in the Belfast City Hospital cancer unit.

For around 20% of those key cancers, research-based drugs are being made available to people. That is one of the highest anywhere in the United Kingdom. For breast cancer, which we have referred to, we have amongst the best results anywhere in the United Kingdom, and the message should not be going out there —

Mr Clarke: I appreciate the Member giving way and the point that he is making about the best results. However, in this motion today, and I think that the Minister has outlined its flawed nature, we are not talking about people with a diagnosis, we are talking about people actually going to be diagnosed or otherwise. We are not talking about the sufferers here.

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

Mr Poots: We are achieving the best results in the United Kingdom. Do not let the message go out there that we are providing some second-class cancer care services because we are not. It is critical that we do not rest on our laurels and that we still focus on delivering better care and better results. Any trust can have a particular problem at a particular time because they are dealing with people who have key specialisms. When someone has a specialism in oncology, you just cannot go down to the local broo office and pick up someone else to replace them. It is not as simple as that, and people should not make contrived simplistic arguments about that. These are people who have key specialisms and who are incredibly hard to replace, and trusts will work very hard to replace them as quickly as possible because that is their responsibility.

We are spending more on cancer drugs than ever before, and there are some absolutely superb drugs coming onto the market. We are doing more with the cancer treatments that are available. For example, a few years ago, stereotactic radiotherapy was not available in our radiotherapy units; we were sending people to England to get that. Now that is available in Northern Ireland. Tremendous strides have taken place, and I think that there are huge opportunities.

I just want to say something on staff morale. My wife has worked in cancer care, in oncology and haematology, for over 25 years, and I do not detect this low morale from her or her colleagues. I do detect a huge commitment to provide the care for people who really need it. Whenever we bump into people in the streets who receive that care, as we regularly do, they say how wonderful our staff are, how wonderful the care is and how brilliant the treatment for cancer is here in Northern Ireland. We can always do better and we need to support the Minister —

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

Mr Poots: Thank you. We need to support the Minister to ensure that we continue to do better.

Ms S Bradley: I welcome that the Minister is here during this critical debate. I am acutely conscious that there will be people who are inside the two-week window and are living with the torture of not knowing whether they have cancer. I am sure many of us in the House have travelled that pathway with people, even if it is not at first-hand, and the two-week window cannot be overlooked. In many cases, people get the good news that they do not have cancer, but let us not brush over the fact that they are

trying to get on with their daily lives. They are mothers, fathers, sons and daughters, and there is a whole plethora of stories behind each one of those individuals, and nobody is here to suggest that the care that they get, when they finally make it to the healthcare system in Northern Ireland, is not second to none. Not only are they getting good healthcare, they are receiving a caring service. Having spoken with professionals along that path, I could not fault it anywhere: from going through the door, through the treatment, the service that was afforded by Health and Social Care here in Northern Ireland, and I would not want any slight on the debate to suggest otherwise.

During the two-week window, when people are living in that torturous situation and are asking, "Do I have cancer or do I not?", they have access to very little. Remember, most of them will already have had their third or fourth appointment with their GP before the referral was made. Away from that, they are trying to carry on with everyday life. They have no news to break because they do not know what is happening and they are doing their own, if you like, Google research. We have all been there; we have all done it. They look at the stages of cancer and find themselves asking, "If I have it, what stage is it at?" There is a delay.

Most people outside the House are not watching what the 14-day target might be; most people are unaware of it. It is not something that they talk about casually, day to day. Most people would like to think that, once their doctor has noted them as an urgent case, they are in safe hands. Quite frankly, this is one figure that I just cannot get past: 6.7% of women presenting with possible breast cancer as an urgent referral in the Southern Health Trust have been seen. That figure cannot be overlooked.

Mr Sheehan: Will the Member give way?

Ms S Bradley: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Sheehan: Will the Member accept, therefore, that the 6.7% refers to people with possible breast cancer, but that is not how it is worded in the motion. It states:

"In June 2016, only 6.7% of breast cancer patients".

Do you accept that that is wrong?

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

Ms S Bradley: Thank you. The 6.7% refers to the people who have possible cancer.

Mr Sheehan: Is it wrong or is it not? Is the motion wrong —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member should not be making comments from a sedentary position.

Ms S Bradley: Are you suggesting that the two-week window is of no importance to the group of women who are not in that 6.7%? I think not. That two-week window, when those women are trying to get on with their daily lives not knowing — not knowing — whether they have cancer; not knowing whether they have stage one, two, three or four; not knowing what their future is —

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Ms S Bradley: No, I will not give way because my time is limited on this.

— and not knowing what is ahead of them: that is where the health service is not meeting their need. That is where the fall-down in this Government is. There are people in Action Cancer and Marie Curie who are lifting those women through that difficult time. They are the point of contact. This is the point where the health service is failing people in Northern Ireland. I suggest that, rather than get into defensive mode, we at least acknowledge that that is happening and it is not good enough.

1.00 pm

We have heard about that 6.7%, although the Member for Upper Bann did remind the Minister that these are her figures that she is questioning. These figures have been released by the Department, as she rightly said. The Minister cannot come here and question her own figures and try and put a slant on it. It is time. The time is not tomorrow; it is not next week. The time is now that we deal with this problem. The time is now that we bring the solutions to the table, rather than going into defence mode and saying that it is not actually a problem. It shocks me that I actually am listening to that type of rebuttal across the Floor of this Chamber. I know and accept — I have a certain level of sympathy with the Minister — that this is not an easy Department, but the Minister will forgive me if I reserve the greater part of my sympathy for those women who are not getting the help and care that they need from this Government and this health service at this moment in time.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet at 1.00 pm. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time. This debate will resume after Question Time, and the first Member to speak will be Kellie Armstrong.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 1.01 pm.

On resuming —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Health

Fatal Foetal Abnormality: Working Group Report

1. **Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Health when she will publish the report of the working group on fatal foetal abnormality. (AQO 489/16-21)

11. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQO 269/16-21, to outline the report of the fatal foetal abnormality working group. (AQO 499/16-21)

13. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Health whether she has reached agreement with the Minister of Justice on legislating for the conclusions reached by the working group on fatal foetal abnormality. (AQO 501/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): With your permission, I would like to answer questions 1,11 and 13 together. I can confirm that the Justice Minister and I received the working group's report on 11 October and are actively considering its proposals. You will understand that the Justice Minister and I will want to take some time to consider and reflect on the recommendations. When both the Justice Minister and I are content, the report will be submitted to the Executive for their consideration and then their approval. It is not intended to publish the report or its recommendations until the Executive have concluded their deliberations. The report of the working group on fatal foetal abnormality was developed in line with the terms of reference for the group: to consider issues relating to cases of fatal foetal abnormality, including matters addressed in the previous consultation by the Department of Justice; and to provide a report to the Justice Minister and me with recommendations, including on potential legislative change for termination of pregnancy as necessary.

The focus of the working group's outreach work was to capture the broadest possible spectrum of views of women, the partners and families impacted by a diagnosis of fatal foetal abnormality and the health professionals providing their care, including representatives of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Midwives and the Royal College of Psychiatrists. In considering the trauma that can be suffered by women and their families where a diagnosis of fatal foetal abnormality has been made, the group was guided by the wishes of women, their partners and their families regarding any engagement. Women willing to engage and share their experience, whatever that had been, were afforded the opportunity to communicate their experiences to the group, whether personally, in writing or through the Public Health Agency (PHA), which has undertaken work with women and families who have been directly impacted.

The Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Nursing Officer also met women and took account of the views of women

who had engaged with the PHA through their work. Some women continued their pregnancy to term; some did not. I am grateful to the women, their partners and their families who took the time to relay their experiences either directly to the Chief Medical Officer —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mrs O'Neill: — or through the Public Health Agency, as that cannot have been easy for them.

Mrs Long: I thank the Health Minister for the attention that she, I know, has given to this difficult and sensitive issue. She said that she wanted time to consider the report and to take it to the Executive. Why cannot the report be published now so that the public are at least aware of the basis on which the Justice Minister and the Health Minister will approach their Executive colleagues and what the recommendations are?

Mrs O'Neill: I am happy to discuss the report's recommendations with the Member and other Members in due course. I received the report only last week — I think that it was last Tuesday evening — so the Justice Minister and I want to give it consideration. That is normal practice. We will then, on the basis of the recommendations, bring it to the Executive for discussion and, hopefully, chart a way forward for how we will support women who need our support. I look forward to being able to progress the report as quickly as possible. I was keen to make sure that we completed the work of the working group and were able to move forward to provide the assurance that people are asking us for.

Mr Aiken: Thank you, Minister, for your reply. Many of the points were raised by the previous Member to speak, but I would like you to re-emphasise whether you will give a public commitment that the findings will be put to us as soon as possible through the Assembly and not leaked to the media or any other forum, which seems to be the purpose of this Government at present.

Mrs O'Neill: It is unfortunate that the Opposition are again trying to use a really sensitive, complicated and emotive issue for anyone who finds themselves in that scenario. I have the best will and intention towards the women who need our support, and, with that best will, I will bring a paper to the Executive, as I have just said. I will consider the recommendations of the professionals and of all those who found themselves in this scenario and gave information to the working group. It has been good work, and I look forward to bringing the proposal to the Executive and making sure that we have in place fit-for-purpose structures and supports that will allow women who find themselves and their families with a diagnosis of fatal foetal abnormality to receive first-class support.

Mr Agnew: Does the Minister agree that this is very much a health issue and should be treated as such? Notwithstanding what she said about the recommendations of the report, will she seek to progress that this becomes a medical issue and not a criminal justice issue?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I think that it is so important that we look at how we as a health service provide, and, obviously, we are where people turn to for help and support. Where those women turn to for help and support, they need to have adequate and appropriate supports in place. I am

glad to be part of this work. I am glad that the Justice Minister and I have been able to progress it as soon as we took office. Now that we have the report, we will work our way through the recommendations, and we will bring forward what we need to in terms of legislative change on the basis of the report. It has been a very collaborative piece of work, and I thank the Member for his continued interest. I look forward to updating the House on the way forward as soon as we can.

Mr Ford: I entirely accept that the Minister — indeed, the two Ministers — cannot take action on the issue without Executive approval, but it is entirely within their gift to publish the report that has been presented to them. Given the sensitivity of the issue and the widespread public concern, will the Minister commit to discussing with the Justice Minister the immediate release of the report before any action can be agreed by the Executive?

Mrs O'Neill: As legislators, we have a duty to legislate, and we have to do that on the basis of the evidence that we have before us. The Justice Minister and I have had the report for only a week, and we said that we would look at it collectively. We have nothing to hide. The report has been done by professionals, and it is work that has also been informed by the previous piece of work — the consultation that you were involved with as Justice Minister. We have taken into account all of those factors, and we have taken into account as wide a range of views as possible. It is very important that, when we move forward and take decisions that are in the best interests of women, we do so on the basis of the evidence that we have before us. I am happy to say to the Member that I will not be found wanting in trying to bring the issue to the fore as quickly as we can. It has been in the ether for far too long, and we need to resolve it.

Mental Health

2. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the 'Building on progress: Achieving parity for mental health in Northern Ireland' report, published in June 2016. (AQO 490/16-21)

14. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Health to outline her plans for mental health services. (AQO 502/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: With your permission again, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, I will answer questions 2 and 14 together.

'Building on progress' is an important contribution to my work to champion mental health, which is one of my top priorities. I was pleased to meet a delegation from the Royal College of Psychiatrists recently to discuss it in detail. The report acknowledges that there have been improvements in provision in recent years, and the commission found many good services. It highlights issues in relation to funding, treatment access, community and specialist services, structures and data. It makes eight recommendations for improvement, including the key point that mental health must be given equal priority with physical health. The findings are largely consistent with my vision for mental health. I intend that my plans, based on six principles, will contribute to improvements in line with an outcomes-focused Programme for Government.

First, I am committed to moving forward towards parity of esteem. Secondly, I want to develop and sustain a recovery culture. Thirdly, involvement by people with

lived experience in the design, delivery and evaluation of services is essential. Mental health is leading the way in developing co-production: collaboration between people who provide care and people with lived experience. That has resulted in the development of networks and the employment of people with lived experience as recovery consultants. Just last week, I launched another recovery hub in the Southern Trust, which was a really good example of that co-production and co-design.

The fourth principle that I wish to adhere to is service development where resources allow. The Bamford evaluation, which is going to report to me imminently, will outline the needs and gaps in services. Emerging findings include a need for more emphasis on carers' provision and crisis support. My officials are developing options on the physical monitoring of people with mental illness; a regional perinatal service; child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and improved early intervention; eating disorder services; psychological therapies; mental trauma; personality disorders; provision in the justice system; safe places for people suffering from dual diagnoses; and implementation of the Mental Capacity Act. The fifth principle is structural reform and performance management. The board is leading on that area of work.

Finally, I plan to closely work with Ministers in the South to explore the potential for developing some of these services on an all-island basis. I think that that will make it more feasible to allow us to develop some of the services in a more timely manner.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for a comprehensive reply. Can she update the House on child and adolescent mental health services, please?

Mrs O'Neill: Child and adolescent mental health services are delivered under a stepped care model, and the Health and Social Care Board leads a reform process under the auspices of the stepped care model implementation review. Much progress has been made, but more needs to be done, particularly in relation to investment in community and specialist services, workforce planning and recruitment. CAMHS investment now exceeds £20 million annually, and I am considering reform and investment options across a range of mental health services, including child and adolescent mental health services.

That will include work with other Departments on comprehensive early years support.

Regional acute inpatient services at Beechcroft are frequently under pressure. An independent review in 2014 concluded that the current 33-bed model is appropriate but that, crucially, that is dependent on the further strengthening of crisis resolution and home treatment services.

In addition, and in line with the independent review's recommendation, a managed care network of acute child and adolescent mental health services is being established. That will bring acute services into one managed system, ensuring greater consistency across the region and streamlined access to Beechcroft.

Mr Durkan: I welcome the commitments that the Minister has given on the work that she will do on mental health. What percentage of her budget is allocated to mental health services?

Mrs O'Neill: We have an improving picture. In the past decade, the annual allocation to mental health services

has increased from £200 million to over £250 million. On the basis of last year's commissioning plan, the figure was confirmed as being approximately £250 million, which represents just over 5.5% of the departmental expenditure limit of £4.7 billion.

The Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR) campaign said recently that only 8.5% of the overall health budget was allocated to mental health for 2015-16, despite evidence suggesting that the mental health amount equates to about 25% of total cases. That is broadly accurate, and, despite increases in the annual allocation to mental health services from £200 million a decade ago to £250 million now, it is clear that more investment is needed. I have already highlighted how I intend to take that investment forward.

Mrs Dobson: As we know, there have long been calls for parity of esteem between physical and mental health services. That is something that I have fully supported, and the report simply adds to the appeals. What are the legal barriers to parity currently?

Mrs O'Neill: It is not about legal barriers but about proper access to services. Parity of esteem can sometimes be taken to mean applying the same amount of money to physical health and mental health, but that is clearly not what the report states and that is not my intention. My intention is to improve the picture and invest in all the service developments that I have included. One of the things that is going to inform that process is the review of the Bamford evaluation, which will give us the evidence to move forward.

I have highlighted mental health as being one of the areas that I want to prioritise. We can do more. We have excellent services out there: a brilliant community and voluntary sector and so many partners that want to work together to deliver better outcomes for all those people who find themselves mentally ill.

We also have a lot of good work being done on the positive mental health and well-being message. Last week, for World Mental Health Day, we were able to launch the anti-stigma campaign. Stigma and people being afraid to talk about mental health and to ask for support are still key factors. The sayings were, "It's OK not to be OK" and "It's OK to ask for help". That is important for mental health. I have clearly prioritised that as being an area in which I want to work towards parity of esteem, but it is important that people understand what parity of esteem means for mental health.

Early Pregnancy Units

3. **Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Health what plans her Department has to introduce seven-day access to early pregnancy units for women presenting with difficulties in early pregnancy. (AQO 491/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Ensuring that the right services are in place for treating and supporting women and their families during what can be a very distressing time is of great importance to me. I am pleased to be able to say that, following work by the Public Health Agency (PHA) with trusts and patient groups to consider issues of variation across early pregnancy services, a commissioning intention and a referral pathway were developed and issued in June this year. The commissioning intention asks the trusts to

ensure that they have appropriate arrangements in place to facilitate rapid access to care for women with problems at any stage of pregnancy.

In line with NICE guidance, trusts have been asked to ensure that, for problems in early pregnancy, a system is put in place to enable women referred to an early pregnancy assessment service (EPAS) to attend within 24 hours if the clinical situation warrants that. Those arrangements are now in place in two trusts, and the PHA will be reviewing progress with all trusts in December this year.

Ms Lockhart: I thank the Minister for that very positive response. You will be aware that one in five pregnancies miscarry. Women who present at A&E — particularly at weekends, when early pregnancy clinics are not open — are often subjected to long waits and toilet facilities that are not appropriate. Can the Minister give assurances to the House that she is going to prioritise the suggestions made by the Patient and Client Council and improve the overall service offered at this difficult time?

2.15 pm

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for her comments, and I absolutely agree that we need to support women who find themselves in that scenario. We must absolutely take on board the guidance and suggestions that have been made by the Patient and Client Council, and we are actively doing that. All trusts provide services and support, probably in varying degrees, according to what trust area you are in, for women who have miscarried. It is important that we have consistency and that people know what support is there and how they can access it.

A lot of good work has been done. Our midwives and obstetrics and gynaecology staff have all been given written information to guide them as to how to support those women. It is important that we continue to build on that and listen to the patient's voice. That is certainly going to be my mantra for going forward: we have to listen to the voice of patients, carers and families and make sure that we design supports and services for people who need them.

Mrs Barton: Experiencing problems during pregnancy can be a stressful time for any expectant mother. Does the Minister accept, however, that for a seven-day service to work, women absolutely need to be able to self-refer in order to avoid getting caught up in the current turmoil in general practices?

Mrs O'Neill: Women obviously attend when they need to through various routes, perhaps through GP referral or by going straight to A&E. It is important that all clinicians have the guidance in place that allows them to support women who find themselves with a miscarriage. We need consistency across all the trusts, and the guidance helps us to achieve that. We should have 24/7 access and support for women who find themselves dealing with a miscarriage. We are listening to patients and considering the work that was done with the Patient and Client Council. The fact that the guidelines are in place shows that we are listening and that there is an improving picture.

Ms Dillon: Can the Minister detail what services are available for women who experience recurrent miscarriage, given that this obviously carries with it an awful lot of distress?

Mrs O'Neill: All trusts have pathways in place for women who have had previous early losses or a history of a previous ectopic pregnancy, with women referred to a maternity or gynaecology team or a dedicated clinic, as required, on assessment of individual needs. As part of the implementation of the strategy for maternity care, 2012-18, actions are being taken to standardise services for women who experience recurrent miscarriage by clarifying and standardising referral criteria and pathways and developing guidance for GPs on appropriate referral.

That work is under way, and the board and the Public Health Agency, as I have said, have engaged with the Patient and Client Council in relation to issues raised by service users. It is so important that women know what services there are, particularly if they find themselves in a recurrent miscarriage situation. They need to know that they are going to be supported and how they can get that help.

Ms S Bradley: Does the Minister have any plans to introduce routine screening for group B strep?

Mrs O'Neill: It is something that I am certainly considering. There is quite a lobby and campaign for it. Obviously, we have limited resources, and we have to make sure that we target them at those most in need, but, yes, I am considering it. I am actively looking at the issue.

Causeway Hospital

4. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health whether she is committed to the continuance of all the services currently provided at the Causeway Hospital. (AQO 492/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Decisions about the provision of services at Causeway Hospital are a matter for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in the first instance. As I said in the recent Adjournment debate on health service provision in North Antrim, the Northern Trust has no plans to move away from the model currently in place, in which acute hospital services for its area are delivered from the Causeway Hospital and Antrim Area Hospital. The reconfiguration of services is an important and complex matter that goes beyond individual trusts and hospitals. I have given careful consideration to the implications of the expert panel's report and will publish it and my response on 25 October 2016.

Mr Allister: I suggest that the Minister could do better. Her predecessor was able to commit in the House to the continuation —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Has the Member a question?

Mr Allister: — of acute services. The fact that she has been unable to do that today will be very disconcerting for my constituents.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Has the Member a question, please?

Mr Allister: Why is she even anticipating reducing the level of service at a hospital that provides for much of North Antrim and East Londonderry? She could, as I suggest, do better.

Mrs O'Neill: I suggest that the Member could do better to listen. What I clearly said was that the Northern Trust has no current plans to move away from the model currently in place.

I have said that, and I said it in a recent debate. I will rehearse it again: the Northern Trust has said that it has no plans to move away from the model currently in place. To say that we can never change anything, that we can never reconfigure services or that we can never do better is a bit of an ostrich mentality — stick your head in the sand and say, "Let's keep doing things over and over hoping for better outcomes". That is not what we can continue to do in health and social care.

I have clearly set out that, on 25 October, I will set out how we are going to transform health and social care across the board. What is most important is that we deliver better outcomes for health and social care and make sure that people live longer. People are living longer, with more complex conditions, and the reason they do is that our health service is good and is delivering, day and daily, services that support people. Members of the House would do well to recognise that more and more. Moving forward, I have set it out that we will clearly have to reconfigure how we deliver health and social care. That does not mean that we have to have every service in every hospital; it means that we deliver first-class outcomes that we can stand over and people are content with. That is the transformation piece that I will be announcing and discussing in the House next week.

Mr M Bradley: Does the Minister agree that the Causeway Hospital is an integral part of the north-west's health infrastructure and that many tourist-based events, such as the North West 200, need the support that the hospital lends for the success and safety of such events?

Mrs O'Neill: There is no doubt about the current services at the Causeway Hospital. It is the trust's view that its acute hospitals at Causeway and Antrim are developed to support each other and work collaboratively to provide a strong, sustainable model for acute services. Those two hospitals also network with other acute services, especially in Belfast and in the west. The two hospitals need to be right-sized and properly resourced to meet the demand now and in the future to support the events that you refer to. The trust has never shied away from saying that it sees it as a valuable and integral part of its health and social care provision.

Mr McGuigan: I thank the Minister for her comments about the two hospitals. How prepared is her Department for the pressures of winter in the months ahead?

Mrs O'Neill: As we enter the winter period, there are the annual pressures that all our hospitals will face. I have allocated £13 million from the June monitoring round for unscheduled care and winter pressures. That funding will be invested in a number of areas to improve patient flow in unscheduled care, including winter pressures, capacity expansion on acute sites and staffing in emergency departments.

The Northern Trust share of the funding is £1.697 million, and some of it will be used to increase capacity for short-stay, fast turnaround for appropriate patients who come to the emergency departments in the Antrim and Causeway hospitals. That includes the development of a direct assessment unit in the Causeway Hospital to enhance assessment capacity and to improve emergency department flow. Other measures at Causeway include improved discharge processes and increased pharmacy support.

Measures outside the hospital setting include expanding the trust's nursing home inreach service, improving access to starting new domiciliary care packages at the weekend, managing the community rehabilitation bed-based services and working with care homes to ensure that there is capacity for short stays as well as long-term placements over the winter period.

Adoption Legislation

5. **Mr Murphy** asked the Minister of Health whether she plans to bring forward adoption legislation. (AQO 493/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: An Adoption and Children Bill has been drafted. It is principally intended to modernise the legal framework for adoption in the North and place children's welfare at the centre of the adoption decision-making processes. The current law on adoption is the Adoption Order 1987. It is based on English legislation drafted in the early 1970s and therefore reflects practice that is effectively 40 years old. The Bill will deliver a framework for adoption that is more consistent with the principles and provisions of the Children Order 1995 and international human rights requirements.

The substance of the Bill relates to adoption, although I propose to also make changes to the Children Order. The Bill will be substantive. The current draft contains approximately 140 clauses and five schedules. In the main, the Bill is based on policy proposals consulted on in 2006. However, it also contains new provisions not previously consulted on but which I consider will deliver improved outcomes for children and young people, both in relation to adoption and children's social care. As part of the consultation on the Bill, I will also seek views on a number of further proposed changes to adoption, safeguarding and children's legislation.

I firmly believe that it is extremely important that an Adoption and Children Bill is introduced as soon as possible. The Bill is long overdue. I therefore intend to seek Executive agreement to consult on the draft Bill, with the intention of introducing it in the Assembly as soon as possible in the current mandate.

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra. I thank the Minister for her answers to date. I am sure that most people will be pleased that there is movement on the issue. Will she outline what policy proposals in and around this she is preparing to consult on?

Mrs O'Neill: Professor Alexis Jay undertook a review of the Safeguarding Board in April of last year. The review report was submitted to the Department, and I accepted all the report's findings in August this year. One of that report's key recommendations was that, in the longer term, the creation of a statutory child protection partnership should be considered as a replacement for the Safeguarding Board, with wider safeguarding sitting within an overarching Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP). I intend to consult on whether to include additional provisions in the Adoption and Children Bill to establish a statutory child protection partnership and place the CYPSP on a statutory basis.

I also intend to consult on the duty of the Health and Social Care Board to provide information about adoption

support services; to introduce a right for the descendants of adopted people to access records and intermediary services; to place arrangements for duly approved placements — that is, individuals or couples approved to foster or adopt — on a statutory basis; to amend the Children Order 1995 to strengthen arrangements in respect of private foster carers; and to seek views on the introduction of contact/no contact orders to ensure that the authorities are clear that their duty is to safeguard and promote the welfare of looked-after children when making contact arrangements.

Mr McKee: Is the Minister aware that many adopters in Northern Ireland view themselves as third-class citizens when they see the greater support for those who adopt in other regions of the UK? Will she give a commitment that any new adoption legislation will rectify that, so that adoptive families here will receive the support they deserve and require?

Mrs O'Neill: It is extremely important that we support adoptive parents. That was one of the issues that was discussed when I met Adoption NI recently. One of the things that the Bill is looking at is defining adoption support services to mean that we provide counselling, advice and information for adoptive parents. It is also about other services that are prescribed by regulations in relation to adoption. The Bill will give us an opportunity to strengthen the supports for adoptive parents, and it places a statutory duty on adoption authorities to make sure that arrangements are put in place for the provision of support services that are specified in regulations. The Bill is timely, and it will support parents who adopt children and need all the support that we can give them.

Ms Bradshaw: Can the Minister assure the House that the consultation process around the legislation will be in keeping with Equality Commission guidelines and that the questions in it will not be leading and biased towards heterosexual married couples from the same religion?

Mrs O'Neill: I will always be guided by equality principles. I can assure the Member that, when I go out to consult, that will be very evident in the consultation paper that goes forward. There has been a lot of talk about this, and there have been a lot of court cases. It is about time we moved on and put it on a statutory footing.

Mr McPhillips: Does the Minister's Department have any plans to increase the number of foster carers here?

Mrs O'Neill: We are continually looking for more foster carers to come forward. We have about 2,200 children in care who need our support, and we need more people to come forward. We are actively involved in working with other Departments and key stakeholders to make sure that we raise awareness about how rewarding and fulfilling foster caring is and to ensure that we provide more support, particularly in relation to kinship; we are doing a lot of awareness work around that also. We have to continue to do more to make sure that more people come forward who want to adopt. Anybody I have encountered who fosters or adopts finds it very rewarding, albeit very challenging. That is why they need the support that we talked about earlier. It is so important that more people come forward and provide a loving home for children who find themselves in care.

Cancer Diagnosis: Southern Trust

6. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister of Health how many suspected cancer patients in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust in June 2016 were not seen within the target waiting time and were later diagnosed with cancer. (AQO 494/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The question is very timely. As Members will be aware, we are in the process of debating the issue of cancer services this afternoon. The performance figures for breast cancer in the Southern Trust for June are entirely unacceptable, but it is important to understand the full picture of what lies behind those statistics.

Of the 209 patients who waited longer than 14 days for a breast cancer referral in the month of June in the Southern Trust, 12 subsequently had a confirmed diagnosis of breast cancer; 94.3% did not have a cancer diagnosis. All of the 12 patients with a confirmed diagnosis have commenced treatment. Ten patients received their first definitive cancer treatment within 62 days, which means that the initial delay in diagnosis had no negative impact on their receiving treatment within a reasonable amount of time.

One received their first treatment at day 63, just outside the 62-day target. The final patient was a more complex case, and treatment did not commence until day 81.

2.30 pm

I reassure people who may have sick loved ones or may be unwell themselves that the level of care they will receive from doctors and nurses here is second to none. My Department is working with colleagues in the Health and Social Care Board and the trusts to do everything possible to improve performance. The arrangements that have been put in place for other trusts to help with Southern Trust's breast cancer referrals have already had a positive impact. Provisional information shows that performance management has greatly improved to 78% in the Southern Trust in September, and I believe it is up to 100% today.

The trusts continue to work with the board to seek to resolve issues, and a workshop is scheduled for 26 October to identify options for delivering a sustainable, high-quality breast cancer service.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Unfortunately, there is no time for a supplementary question. That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move on to topical questions.

Accessible Healthcare Information

T1. **Mr Allen** asked the Minister of Health whether her Department has any policies in relation to accessible healthcare information for those people with sight loss. (AQT 356/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I believe we do have strong policies in place, and I will clarify that for the Member when I leave after Question Time. If we did not, I would certainly rectify that situation.

Mr Allen: I thank the Minister for her answer. Minister, I have been engaging with the RNIB, which is promoting accessible healthcare information, and it believes there are difficulties for individuals. Would you be content to meet me and the RNIB to discuss that?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I am content. If the Member wants to drop me an email, we can arrange something.

IVF Provision

T2. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Health, following her answers to earlier questions, when she referred to women who had suffered miscarriages, to outline her views and the plans that she has to enhance IVF provision beyond current limits for those women who require multiple cycles of IVF in an effort to conceive a baby. (AQT 357/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: It is disappointing that the health service at this stage is not able to provide the optimum three cycles. That is obviously something I want to work towards. I have said that publicly and was saying it when I was on the Health Committee many years ago. We have only one cycle in place now, which is not the optimum number; NICE guidelines clearly state that the optimum number is three. I will certainly want to work towards that. Obviously, one of our biggest challenges in the health service is funding and being able to resource all the things you want to, but it is my intention to work towards being able to provide the optimum three cycles.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Minister for her answer. Could I press her a bit further? I welcome her commitment to the optimum number of cycles. Are there any plans in her Department or in the Programme for Government to move, even on a phased basis, to three cycles of full treatment compared with the one cycle of less than full treatment that women in Northern Ireland have at the moment?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will know that the approach of the Programme for Government is outcomes focused. It talks about building better lives for individuals, so that could mean an awful lot of things to an awful lot of people. For me, I want to work to a point where anybody struggling to conceive gets the best support from the health service, and I will certainly work towards that.

As I said, my biggest challenge in IVF and being able to provide that support is financial. There are so many things I want to do as Health Minister, and so many things I wish I could change tomorrow. If you find yourself in that scenario, you are asking for support. Not everybody can afford to pay for additional cycles, so the optimum three cycles are what I want to work towards.

South Eastern Trust: Winter Pressures

T3. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Health what plans the South Eastern Trust has to deal with any additional winter pressures, especially on beds. (AQT 358/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: As I said in answer to a previous question, I allocated £13 million for winter pressures, which will deal with a range of things not only in the acute setting but with other things we can do in the community to help people to prevent needing to use acute services. I do not have the breakdown of figures for the South Eastern Trust, but it received its allocation of the £13 million to help it adjust to deal with what is an annual problem in all our health and social care settings.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for her answer so far. Would she consider reopening the Bangor GP ward to deal with any additional bed pressures?

Mrs O'Neill: That is an operational issue for the trust. It is not something I have looked at before, but I am happy to provide information to the Member in writing on the trust's intention to look at it.

GP Practices: Pressures

Mr McNulty: The Minister will be aware of the real pressures on GP practices, especially in rural south Armagh and rural Fermanagh. This pressure has now reached urban areas, with many practices at risk of collapsing —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Does the Member have a question?

Mr McNulty: As of last week, a large practice in County Armagh is operating with ad hoc locum cover —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Does the Member have a question?

T4. **Mr McNulty** asked the Minister of Health to give an urgent assurance that she will support and invest in front-line services and GP practices. (AQT 359/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Indeed, I can, and I have done so on many occasions in the House. The issues that we face in GP services include the ageing profile of GPs. A number of GPs are retiring, so we have to look at workforce issues and how we can address that picture. One of the things that I am considering is the GP workforce action plan, which has come forward to me. I am actively considering that and looking at how we can support GPs.

We have not been found wanting in supporting GPs. Over the last year — 2016-17 — we have seen significant investment of £1.6 million per annum to commission an additional 20 GP places. We are in the process of a five-year investment to bring pharmacy into GP practices, and we will put close to 300 pharmacists into GP practices. So, for me, it is about investing in primary care. Many reports over the years have told us that we have to invest in primary care if we are to improve the picture. It is not just about GPs: it is about multidisciplinary teams; it is about the allied health professionals; it is about the community health visitor; and it is about the district nurse. It is about all those people working in partnership to make sure that we have first-class primary care.

Mr McNulty: Your predecessor announced £10 million capital funding, of which more than £9 million has not been drawn down and returned to the Treasury. What will you do for GPs now by way of a rescue package that can go into front-line general practice before large areas of my constituency are left without a GP?

Mrs O'Neill: I think that I have already answered that. I have said that we have not been found wanting in investing in GP surgeries. GPs are under pressure for the reasons that I have just highlighted, so we have to work with them. We now have the working group, which has reported and identified a number of issues, particularly in relation to increasing the number of GP training places.

My whole focus will be on investment in primary care. It is not just about the GPs; it is about the whole picture in primary care.

Suicide Rates: Foyle

T5. **Mr Middleton** asked the Minister of Health what involvement she has had in a crisis intervention service for the north-west, given that she will be aware that the Foyle constituency has some of the highest suicide rates in the UK. (AQT 360/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I have not visited the crisis intervention centre yet, but we all need to do more on suicide prevention. It is about a holistic approach. It is not just about the Department of Health's approach; it is about education and whether people have a job or access to a home. It is about all those things.

I am consulting on the new Protect Life 2 strategy, which is bringing all the partners together. That will be key for setting out our new direction of travel, what has been working well and what we can do more of. I encourage anybody who has not responded to that consultation yet to do so. Let us improve what we do for suicide prevention in a holistic, collective way.

Mr Middleton: I thank the Minister for her answer. The Minister may not be aware that the council has costed a proposal for a service at a value of £170,000, £40,000 of which it has committed —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Does the Member have a question?

Mr Middleton: Is the Minister willing to meet the council to look at how it can source funding for the service?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. I am always happy to discuss proposals, but we need people to come at it from a collective, creative point of view. We do not have an unlimited pot of money to do all the things that we want to do, so it is important that we tailor our resources towards the things that are most effective and which we can prove deliver better outcomes. I am always very happy to work in conjunction with councils and other partners to make sure that we collectively knock our heads together and do things better.

Unscheduled Care Direct Medical Admissions Unit

T6. **Mr Stalford** asked the Minister of Health how successful she assesses that the unscheduled care direct admissions unit for the elderly in Belfast City Hospital has been. (AQT 361/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have particular information in relation to that, so I will have to provide it to the Member in writing, but I think that we need to focus on unscheduled care. That will help people from being distracted. If they are on a waiting list and are due to go in tomorrow morning and something happens and other people need to be seen first, that interrupts the surgery. So, it is important that we look towards how we can deliver scheduled care more efficiently and make sure that we take the pressure off acute services and A&Es.

Mr Stalford: I am grateful for the Minister's response. The Minister will be aware that the future of the City Hospital lies in becoming a centre for specialisms. Does the Minister have any plans for additional specialist care fields that can be provided out of the City Hospital?

Mrs O'Neill: I think that all our hospitals can do more and could become specialists in various fields. That

is one of the things that we need to do better in the time ahead. We cannot continue to provide everything in every hospital, but we could make every hospital a specialist in something and, where possible, make every hospital able to provide first-class outcomes, whether it be for stroke services or urology. No matter what it is, if you can get better outcomes, I think that people will be prepared to travel that wee bit further to get them. I do not have the detail of the individual plans for the Belfast Trust for the future, but, again, I am very happy to give that to the Member in writing.

Causeway Hospital

T7. **Mr M Bradley** asked the Minister of Health for an assurance that existing services at the Causeway Hospital, such as maternity, will remain and that services such as orthopaedics will return in the near future. (AQT 362/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I answered a question earlier on the trust's current plans and said that it did not have any major plans to change. In going forward, during the whole transformation and in making sure that we reconfigure services that deliver better outcomes for individuals, we need to be clinician-led. The decisions about where we should provide services should be done in conjunction with patients and carers but should be clinician-led, because, if a doctor tells me that I will get a better outcome if I go to, for example, Craigavon for stroke services or to the Belfast City Hospital for another service, that is what we should be guided by. In going forward, we will make sure that decisions are taken based on better outcomes for individuals so that we have a better and healthier population.

Mr M Bradley: I thank the Minister for her answer. I do not want to put the Minister on the spot, but would she consider visiting the Causeway Hospital in the near future?

Mrs O'Neill: I am quite sure that I will make my way there at some stage. I have had many invitations. I have a very large inbox of invitations. I want to get out and I want to be a Minister who engages. I believe in listening to people on the front line and to staff, patients and carers. I am quite sure that I will be able to take the Member up on that offer at some stage in the future.

Pay Review 2017-18

T8. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Health whether she will give evidence to the pay review body in relation to the 2017-18 pay round. (AQT 363/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I will. We have started that work, and I intend to feed into that in the time ahead. We provided the pay review body with a mandate for the 2017-18 pay review round in respect of all staff paid under Agenda for Change and all doctors and dentists in August. I will shortly issue evidence to support and inform the body's recommendations.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for her answer thus far. Can she provide an update on the 1% pay award?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I can. The payroll team in the Business Services Organisation has provided assurances that the majority of staff will receive their uplift and arrears in their November pay. The pay will be awarded and backdated to 1 April this year. A number of people who require manual

uplifts will receive their payments in December or January, but the vast majority will be paid in their November pay.

Student Nurse Bursaries

T9. **Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Health to clarify her intentions for local bursary support, in the light of the British Government's announcement of their intention to replace student nurse bursaries with loans. (AQT 364/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I can say, for one, that I am very proud of our local nursing and midwifery staff, and I think that it is entirely right that we continue to support student nurses through their preregistration training. Therefore, I am very happy to confirm that I have no intention of going down the route that is being followed in England. Bursary support for student nurses and midwives will continue.

Ms Seeley: I thank the Minister for her response and welcome her intention. Given the current shortage in nursing, will the Minister consider increasing the numbers of student nursing places at our local universities?

Mrs O'Neill: The Department increased the number of student places for the 2016-17 academic year by over 100, and I am committed to maintaining that level as a minimum in 2017-18. I am also considering options for even further increases as I develop my Department's budget for the coming year.

Strategic Health Partnership Forum

T10. **Ms Dillon** asked the Minister of Health for an update on the first meeting of the strategic health partnership forum that was held last week. (AQT 365/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I chaired the inaugural meeting of the strategic health partnership forum last Wednesday, and it was attended by my Department's senior management team, trusts' chief executives and nine staff-side representatives. The meeting was a first step and was very positive in contributing to the strategic direction of health policy. I look forward to working in the forum as we develop and shape policies for the future that deliver a first-class health service. The first meeting was a positive one, at which we discussed and agreed terms of reference. I look forward to working with the forum in the years ahead.

2.45 pm

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Linda Dillon for a quick supplementary.

Ms Dillon: Go raibh maith agat. Will the Minister confirm whether the forum will discuss the transformation in the aftermath of the publication of the Bengoa report?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: And a quick answer from the Minister.

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. I have committed to chairing the next meeting next month on the back of my announcement on Professor Bengoa's report.

Infrastructure

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 3 and 9 have been withdrawn.

George Best Belfast City Airport: Railway Halt

1. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline any plans for a proposed railway halt at the George Best Belfast City Airport. (AQO 503/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): We are reliant on our airports and seaports to access key markets and destinations, whether that is for pleasure, business or education, or simply to visit families and friends. The connections to our airports and ports will be increasingly important in creating the conditions for prosperity and will be key to our ability to compete in a global, skills-based and innovative economy, not simply for markets but for investment and talent. The City Airport has an important role to play in providing that access and already has a significant market share of short-haul domestic services, aided by its accessibility to the city centre.

There are currently no plans to provide a new rail halt at George Best Belfast City Airport. My immediate railway priorities must be to maintain and improve passenger capacity and remove bottlenecks on the existing rail network. However, that does not preclude new halts where passenger demand justifies it and additional finance is obtainable.

I have started preparations for the development of a new Belfast metropolitan transport plan. The plan will provide an opportunity to consider the roles that private cars, trains, buses and taxis can all play in connecting Belfast City Airport. However, linking the airport more directly by rail may not necessarily be the best way to serve this important gateway in the shorter term, particularly as it is currently served by a very frequent, recently upgraded bus service to and from the city centre.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he agree with me that the best way to attract foreign investment is to have the best transport infrastructure in place? Would a train halt outside the George Best Belfast City Airport not help to do that and increase passenger numbers?

Mr Hazzard: It does not necessarily follow that, if you have a train halt, you will provide a better service for business and investment. A very successful bus service runs to and from the airport, and many investors who come in and out of the city use it. Indeed, I have used it. It is very reliable and a very welcome service for those who want to invest in the city and the region.

Mr Chambers: I ask the Minister whether there is a shuttle bus service from the Sydenham halt to the airport. If not, will he give consideration to introducing such a service as a short-term, interim measure?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question. As I understand it, the airport provides an on-demand shuttle bus service between the airport terminal and the railway halt at Sydenham.

Mr Stalford: In his response to Mr Easton, the Minister outlined some of the immediate priorities for the Department for Infrastructure. Can he assure the House that one of those immediate priorities will be the delivery of the Belfast transport hub over the next five years?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question. The Belfast hub is a flagship project for the Executive. I look forward to working with Belfast City Council colleagues in delivering what I think will be a transformative project, not

just for the city of Belfast but for the entirety of the North. It is key to developing our public transport network, and I very much look forward to doing all that I can in the years ahead.

There is no doubt that Brexit and the EU referendum result is a huge challenge. The Belfast transport hub is one project that would likely have benefited from up to 40% funding from the EU, and that is money that will now have to be found from elsewhere. It is a challenge that I am up for meeting, because, as I outlined to the Member, the project has a transformative effect.

Mr Milne: What is the current position with the Department's transport plans?

Mr Hazzard: As I stated previously, I am commencing work to refresh the full suite of my Department's transport plans.

Work on the regional strategic transport network transport plan will begin in the very near future. That will be followed by a series of local transport plans, including the Belfast metropolitan transport plan, which I mentioned earlier. The plans will be developed to coordinate with the delivery of local development plans. Local transport plans will be developed in my Department but working closely with council officials.

Ms Armstrong: I go back to the issue of the airport. What discussions have there been with Translink and the airport about improving access, particularly to early flights, to enable interconnectivity for business travellers?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for her question. It is probably better to ask Translink what discussions it has had with the City Airport. I point the Member in that direction.

Belfast Rapid Transit System

2. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the progress of the Belfast rapid transit system. (AQO 504/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am fully committed to the delivery of Belfast rapid transit (BRT), including not only the current phase, which connects east Belfast, west Belfast and the Titanic Quarter via the city centre, but future extensions to the north and south of the city. I regard Belfast rapid transit as a transformational public transport project for the city. It represents an exciting opportunity for Belfast going forward, and it is a major commitment for my Department in support of an Executive flagship project.

The implementation of Belfast rapid transit is progressing well. To date, my Department has completed the new Dundonald park-and-ride facility and sections of the routes on the Falls and Upper Newtownards roads, including the introduction of new peak hour bus lanes. The new peak hour bus lanes support a more reliable and attractive bus service for passengers using these busy arterial routes. Since the introduction of the new peak hour bus lanes, there have been substantial increases in passenger numbers and improvements to journey times.

The detailed specification for the BRT vehicles has been finalised. This process included engagement with the disability and elderly sectors through the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC). The diesel-electric hybrid BRT vehicles will provide a high-quality, accessible environment for passengers in terms of comfort, space, security and on-board information.

I am pleased to say that the BRT system remains within budget and on target to become operational in September 2018.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh míle maith agat. The Minister has already touched on the question of the transit vehicles. Could he elaborate on when the vehicles will be ready? There seems to have been some delay in the process.

Mr Hazzard: The contract was awarded in November 2015. Since then, my Department has finalised the detailed specification for the vehicles in conjunction with Translink and the manufacturers, Van Hool. The process included engagement on accessibility with the disability and elderly sectors through IMTAC. The BRT vehicles will be 18-metre, diesel-electric hybrid, articulated buses with a capacity for around 100 people. They will provide a high-quality, accessible environment for passengers in terms of comfort, space, security and on-board information. The first Belfast rapid transit vehicle is being assembled by Van Hool. Once completed, it will be subject to extensive road testing before being delivered to Belfast in 2017. Subsequent vehicles will be delivered prior to the system going live in September 2018.

Mrs Palmer: I thank the Minister for his update on the rapid transit system. Given that Belfast was found to be the United Kingdom's third most congested city yesterday, is the Minister content that enough is being done to address the problem, in particular through the York Street interchange, which would be transformative for dealing with congestion?

Mr Hazzard: Congestion is an issue that faces not just our city of Belfast but Derry and Dublin. I was recently in China, and it is the same, on a very different scale, in places such as Beijing and Shanghai. The BRT has been designed to have a transformative effect, and I think that it will. I will also bring forward bicycle strategies in the next number of months. We have seen the success of the Comber and Connswater greenways. These are hugely transformative active travel and public transport projects that, given time and the public appetite, which is there, will have a transformative impact. The strategic importance of a project such as the York Street interchange is clear, but, as I outlined to Members across the way in relation to the Belfast hub, Brexit and its implications for the funding of projects such as the York Street interchange create a substantial hurdle.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. I welcome his reassurance to the House about the Belfast transportation hub. That is a welcome commitment. I also welcome the investment to date in the Belfast rapid transit system and the fact that work has started. The Minister will be aware —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Has the Member got a question?

Mr Humphrey: — that the work actually relates to east and west Belfast. Does he have a timescale for when it might be extended to north and south Belfast?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his comments at the outset. He will be aware of the timescales involved for this particular phase. I assume that similar timescales will be involved when we extend this to north and south Belfast. I think that there is a level of excitement around this particular phase that will only be matched with the north

and south Belfast route. It is a route that I travel often. Certainly, I do not think that it takes experts in the field to realise that, again, this will be a transformative route between the north of our city, through the city centre, to the south and out to an area such as Carryduff. I think that it would be much welcomed. It is something that I certainly hope to progress at some point in this mandate.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Paula Bradshaw.

Ms Bradshaw: I think that the Minister has just answered my question.

Terrorist Memorials

4. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many memorials to terrorists are on property owned or controlled by his Department or its arm's-length bodies. (AQO 506/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A wide range of memorials to deceased persons has been placed on or close to property owned or controlled by my Department over many years. Most of them relate to fatal incidents occurring on or near roads. While a small number of these incidents are directly related to the conflict in the North over the past 40 years or so, most are not. These memorials comprise many different formats, from permanent structures or temporary floral tributes to the so-called ghost bikes. Given the transient nature of many of them, it is not possible to state how many there are across the whole of the North with any certainty. My Department does not endorse any of them but the long-standing practice has been to not remove any such memorials unless road safety is directly compromised. Any memorials on the property of my Department's arm's-length bodies are matters for the boards of those organisations.

Mr Allister: So it is the official policy of the Executive and Department to do nothing about terrorist memorials on public property. Is that a complacency borne of empathy with the glorification of terrorism, which these distasteful memorials represent?

Mr Hazzard: The Member will be well aware that there are memorials to the UDR, the British Army —

Mr Allister: Terrorists: the question was about terrorists.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister must be heard. The Member must refrain from speaking from a sedentary position.

Mr Hazzard: The Member will be aware of the plethora of memorials across the political spectrum; for the British Army, the UDR, the police and different groups across society. As I outlined, there are also memorials to those who have died at roadsides. The Department's toleration policy was developed as a result of its experience in dealing with illegal roadside memorials and the desire to avoid exacerbating the problem or putting the safety of staff or contractors at risk. Examples of where toleration is similarly exercised include issues such as flag-flying from street lights or cafes and bars placing tables and chairs on the public footpaths where space permits.

Mr Clarke: I feel as though I do not really want to thank the Minister for his answer. Can he differentiate between terrorists and the forces who were actually murdered by terrorists and tell us the difference between those monuments?

Mr Hazzard: I do not think that the question has any relevance whatsoever to my responsibility as Minister for Infrastructure. As I have outlined already, there is a plethora of different types of memorials on roadsides, including floral tributes and, as I have mentioned, ghost bikes for people who have unfortunately been killed as a result of a road traffic accident. It is not my responsibility to get into that.

Belfast Bicycle Network Plan

5. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the Belfast bicycle network plan. (AQO 507/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I will shortly hold a public consultation on my draft Belfast bicycle network plan, the first of a series of plans to help to bring coherent, continuous and comfortable bicycle infrastructure within the reach of most people within our towns and cities. This is part of the vision in the bicycle strategy to give people the freedom and confidence to travel by bicycle for everyday journeys and to significantly increase the number of shorter journeys that we make by bicycle.

One of the three pillars of the bicycle strategy is to build a comprehensive bicycle network. The Belfast bicycle network plan will provide a framework for the development of safe, attractive cycling provision throughout Belfast over the next 10 years. It will do this by bringing good quality cycling routes within 400 metres of around two thirds of residents of the Belfast City Council area.

The Member will be aware of a number of cycle schemes that are currently being built in the city centre as flagship schemes to demonstrate the kind of cycling infrastructure that will be delivered. I am keen to deliver more of those segregated cycle routes in the future. The network plan approach will contribute to several outcomes of the draft Programme for Government, such as connecting people and opportunities through our infrastructure and supporting and encouraging long, healthy and active lives.

3.00 pm

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his answer. I welcome his support for and shared belief in the social, health and economic benefits of cycling to our community. Of the MLAs returned to the Assembly, 70% supported the Election Cycle campaign, one of whose aims was to have a budget of at least £10 per head of population for cycling infrastructure. Will the Minister be able to increase the spend per head from the amount last year, which was only £1.30, to that target of £10?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for raising the issue. I think that I was one of the MLAs who signed up to the various pledges. We need to see an increased spend and budget when we look at active travel and our cycling infrastructure. It is a generational project. My greenways strategy will be generational. I have mentioned that it is over 10 years; that is the approach that we have to take. I want to work in partnership with our local councils. Some of them have been doing sterling work. I have already mentioned the likes of the Connswater greenway, which is a great success in the east of the city. I am certainly determined to do my best to work in partnership with Belfast City Council on that.

Ms J McCann: The Minister mentioned the benefits of cycling: how many people currently cycle in Belfast?

Mr Hazzard: The Belfast Bike Life report shows that 7 million journeys are cycled in Belfast every year. My Department's most recent research on cycling to work reveals that 5% of Belfast commuters already use the bicycle to travel to and from work. The momentum to continue growing is demonstrated by the success of the Belfast bike share scheme, with over 300,000 journeys having been taken in the last 18 months. I am confident that that growth in cycling will continue as we continue to invest in better cycling infrastructure, both in urban networks and in the development of our greenways.

Mr Kennedy: What practical steps does the Minister intend to take in rural areas outside Belfast to further develop the cycling revolution that I initiated?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for getting the wheels of revolution turning. It is a reputation that I want to build on, and I will do what I can over the next mandate to continue it. The bicycle strategy, as the Member is no doubt aware, envisages a comprehensive network for the bicycle not just in Belfast but across the North. The strategic plan for greenways is one element of that, and the urban network plans are another. My intention, following the publication of the Belfast plan, is to learn from the experience and roll it out to other urban centres.

Mr Humphrey: I commend what the Minister said about the Connswater greenway. The Committee was there a couple of weeks ago. In terms of extending that sort of initiative, which is a great collaborative approach with government, the Big Lottery Fund and the city council, can we have similar facilities across the city? I know that they are expensive, but such an investment, even one not on that scale, would be hugely beneficial to our people across Belfast.

Mr Hazzard: Yes. I was in Victoria Park and around that area and in Orangefield. We have examples of where Rivers Agency and the city council are working together. The projects that they are delivering are first-class. It is a model that there is much value in, and I am certainly more than happy to work with it.

Roads and Footpaths

6. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the action his Department is taking to ensure that roads and footpaths are reinstated to the approved specification once work has been carried out by service providers and contractors. (AQO 508/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Utility companies are required to notify Transport NI of all works on roads and footpaths through the street works registration and notification system. Transport NI inspects a 10% sample of all utility openings within six months following completion and a further 10% sample within the last three months of the reinstatement warranty period. That is to ensure compliance with the specification for reinstatement of openings in roads. The cost of the inspections is recovered from the utility companies.

Of course, Transport NI also identifies defective reinstatements through routine road condition inspections, inspections in response to third-party reports and a six-monthly core survey, where core samples are taken from visually compliant reinstatements. Where a reinstatement

fails to comply with the specification, the utility company is notified and required to carry out repairs. Follow-up inspections are carried out to ensure that remedial works have been completed. The cost of those follow-up inspections is also recovered from the utility company.

Transport NI uses sample inspection results as a key performance indicator for utility companies and informs those companies of performance on a monthly basis. Progress is also discussed at quarterly meetings of the NI Road Authority and Utilities Committee. In the event that an individual utility company's performance becomes unacceptable, Transport NI has powers to increase the number of chargeable inspections until such time as performance improvements have been achieved.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for his answer. Minister, I am sure you are well aware of the state of many of our roads and footpaths following reinstatement by service providers and contractors. In my constituency of Upper Bann and across Northern Ireland, we see many examples of poor reinstatements, the most annoying being new roads and pavements being dug up, that could have been avoided with proper forward planning.

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

Mr Anderson: Is the present reinstatement specification outdated and in much need of change?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question and, indeed, his interest in this. It is something I am currently looking at. I share the Member's frustration and, indeed, that of the wider public. We see public realm schemes come into place in many of our regional towns and villages, and then, six months later, there are maybe kerbs or flagstones being lifted. There is a sense that people, especially traders, are asking, "Why could this not have been done six months ago?". It is something I am looking at to examine whether more needs to be done to the policy, and, if that is the case, I will be more than happy to do that.

Mr Kearney: Minister, how much has your Department charged utility companies for unsatisfactory reinstatement of paths and roadways?

Mr Hazzard: My Department charged utility companies just over £100,000 for follow-up inspections carried out in 2015-16 to ensure defective reinstatements had been adequately repaired.

Mr McNulty: I thank the Minister for his answers to date. What are the guideline specifications that the utility companies must adhere to, and what is the timescale by which they must comply for the reinstatement of footways and roadways?

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

Mr Hazzard: I do not have the guidelines in front of me, but, if the Member wants to write to me, I will be more than happy to share them with him.

Mr Ford: What powers does the Minister's Department have to ensure greater coordination between other agencies that have the right to dig up roads, specifically if there is injury or damage caused? Is the contractor held liable, or is the Department for Infrastructure liable?

Mr Hazzard: Transport NI exchanges details of the programmed work with the utility companies to ensure any potential issues are identified at as early a stage as possible. Notifications of planned works are also placed on the street works registration and notification system, which identifies potential conflicts. Where a conflict is identified between planned resurfacing works or other major road works and planned utility works, Transport NI will liaise with the utility company to ensure that the utility company works are completed in advance of the resurfacing scheme, where at all possible. That is the case with our rural roads initiative, where, in a number of locations across the North, work is being held back until the utility companies are finished, and the rural roads initiative will take place later in the year.

Street Lighting: Costs

7. Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Infrastructure how the cost of street lighting is calculated. (AQO 509/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's costs for street lighting arise from three main areas: the new provision and renewal of street-lighting installations; street-lighting operation and maintenance activities; and street-lighting electricity costs. For all those areas of work, my Department uses competitive tendering to ensure that street-lighting materials, labour and electricity are procured in a way that delivers best value for money. The costs for new provision and maintenance activities are relatively straightforward to calculate. They are simply the product of the applicable contract rate for the various items of work done multiplied by the quantities delivered by the contractors.

Calculating the costs for street-lighting electricity is a little more complex. Unlike most commercial, industrial or domestic electricity supplies, street-lighting electricity is not metered. That is typical of most public lighting supply arrangements across the world. Instead of metering, my Department maintains a comprehensive inventory of all street-lighting assets, from which the electricity consumption can be calculated. The electricity costs are arrived at by multiplying the number of each type of street light by the respective wattage, by their annual operating hours and by the relevant supplier's tendered price per kilowatt-hour.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. I am sure that he will agree that many people are concerned — we are all concerned in our own homes — about energy wastage. Given that we see street lights lit on many occasions when they should not be, and, someone has to bear the cost, what will the Minister do to reduce the cost of the energy being used?

Mr Hazzard: There has been an investment of £3 million during the last financial year to retrofit approximately 15,000 street lights in the Banbridge and Craigavon areas with new LED lanterns, which has resulted in significant energy and maintenance cost savings of over a third of a million pounds per year.

Ms Archibald: I thank the Minister for his responses. How much does the electricity for street lighting cost each year?

Mr Hazzard: The annual cost of electricity for street lighting varies from year to year, depending on the prevailing cost of electricity, the number of street lights and their associated wattage. In recent years, the annual cost

has typically been in the order of £10 million. Fortunately, like many other electricity consumers, my Department has seen a reduction in the unit cost of electricity in the last year. Taken over the past five-year period, the approximate cost of providing and maintaining my Department's street lighting assets averaged as follows: £6 million per annum for new provision and renewal of old street lighting systems; £7.3 million per annum for routine maintenance and inspection, testing and safety repairs; and £10 million per annum for electricity.

A5: Update

8. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the A5 dual carriageway project. (AQO 510/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: One of my key priorities as Minister for Infrastructure is to redress the North's infrastructure deficit, particularly west of the Bann. The A5 scheme will provide a high-quality road link between Derry, Strabane, Omagh and Ballygawley and will unlock the potential for future economic development in those areas.

Following the public consultation into the draft orders and environmental statement for the scheme, my Department appointed the Planning Appeals Commission as the independent inspector to administer a public inquiry. The inquiry opened on 4 October 2016, and the hearing is scheduled to close in mid-December 2016, with the inspector's report expected around May 2017.

My Department will consider the report's recommendations in detail before I make a decision on whether to proceed with the scheme and make the necessary statutory orders. In late August 2016, the Alternative A5 Alliance applied for leave for a judicial review. My Department is opposing the application for leave, which has been listed for hearing in November 2016.

Subject to the successful completion of all the statutory procedures and a satisfactory outcome from the inspector's report, it is anticipated that construction can commence in late 2017 on phase 1A in line with the Fresh Start Agreement. I am engaging with departmental officials to explore options to maximise delivery of the A5 during the current mandate.

Mr McAleer: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. I can say with certainty that the overwhelming majority of people are looking forward to the scheme progressing. Can the Minister tell me whether a contractor has been appointed for the A5 dual carriageway project?

Mr Hazzard: Yes, three contractor joint ventures have been appointed to the integrated delivery team, with each joint venture awarded one section of the scheme. Subject to satisfactory completion of the statutory procedures and the making of the order, the joint venture contractor for phase 1A, Balfour Beatty/BAM/FP McCann, will be instructed to complete the detailed design and construct the scheme.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call George Savage

A Member: Who is he?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call George Robinson.

Mr Robinson: Can the Minister give an update on the A26 project, and does he envisage any delays?

Mr Hazzard: No delays are envisaged. Work is ongoing, and I will be visiting the scheme soon. I expect the work to be completed next year.

Mr Durkan: I will bring the Minister back to the A5. Following the delays that the project has encountered thus far, how confident is he that, this time, the i's are dotted and the t's are crossed and that the Department has a robust case that will not be brought down in the courts by opponents to the scheme?

Mr Hazzard: The Member is right when he mentions the length of time that the communities in those areas have been waiting. I am confident that all has been done in my Department's case to dot the i's and cross the t's. We must respect the statutory processes and the will of the court. Certainly, as the hearing progresses, I will do all that I can to ensure that this scheme begins. Those in the west have been crying out for the scheme to commence, and we wish them all well in that.

3.15 pm

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

Roads: Winter Treatment Budget

T1. **Mrs Barton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, with winter just around the corner, to state what budget he has allocated for the winter treatment of roads in each of the four divisions. (AQT 366/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member. The Member may be aware that we are currently bringing into place a data analyst to guide the Department when it comes to weather; certainly to give a more in-depth and scientific report than what we might be used to each evening on the 6.00 o'clock news. We also work closely with the Rivers Agency, which has a very detailed team that can work with the weather.

The Member can rest assured that all is in place now with the winter service; certainly, with the collection of salt and ensuring that we have the services in place for the winter period and the inclement weather that is likely to come.

Mrs Barton: What budget have you allocated to those areas?

Mr Hazzard: We are still finalising the terms of the final budget. We are going ahead with bringing into place the data analyst to guide us, but this will certainly not hold up any of the winter services as we proceed.

Millennium Way Project: Delays

T2. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, after paying tribute to her former colleague Sam Gardiner and Mr Hazzard's predecessor as Minister, Mr Kennedy, for their determination, to update the House as to why the Millennium Way project has been further delayed, given that he will appreciate that, for the people of Lurgan, the Millennium Way project has been coming for what seems like a millennium. (AQT 367/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The scheme had several unintended problems when it came to certain junctions. The scheme

had been progressing well. Due to an intense number of utilities that were discovered and have to be dealt with in a timely manner, the scheme is now delayed. I will be working with Department officials and those in Transport NI to ensure as little disruption to traders in the busy Christmas period as possible.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his answer. I appreciate the circumstances, and I think that he is saying that the main sticking area seems to be with the utility providers. Will this delay mean any additional costs being associated with the eventual completion of the project?

Mr Hazzard: I am not aware of any additional costs. I am due to get a briefing later in further detail around what is likely now to be a delay of a few months to the scheme. At the outset, certainly before I have had that, I am not aware of any additional costs.

Rural Roads

T3. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has any intention to reach out to those rural network roads that have not been fixed, particularly in relation to road markings and painting those markings that have all but disappeared, given that the £10 million that was set aside for rural roads, whilst very welcome, did not, once carved up, seem to go far enough. (AQT 368/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Member is correct. When you consider that we have somewhere in the region of a £1 billion backlog in road maintenance, £10 million towards rural roads is a drop in the ocean. Divisional managers have now identified roads, such as Mullaghgariff Road in the Member's constituency, which have not seen resurfacing in more than a decade if not longer.

The £10 million will have gone some way to addressing that. There are communities that have always felt isolated and that they have never got a piece of the pie. Certainly, I am under no illusions — I do not think that anybody is. In no way or stretch of the imagination are we going to address a £1 billion backlog in road maintenance in my time as Infrastructure Minister over the next five years. There needs to be a more strategic, generational approach to how we do this and how we budget and finance for roads maintenance. It is one thing to design new roads projects, but we also have to be mindful of the road network that we currently have, and I will be doing all in my power to set in place a new strategic framework for how we finance roads maintenance.

Ms S Bradley: Is the Minister aware that a section of the A2 dual carriageway, from Newry to Warrenpoint, is in particular need of resurfacing? If so, has he any plans to carry out that resurfacing?

Mr Hazzard: I am not aware of any current plans to resurface it. I am well aware of the road, however, which is one that I travel often. I would say that all Members have a list as long as their arm of roads, especially in rural areas, that need resurfaced. This is not a sob story, but our budgets are under pressure, as has been the case for a number of years, and we have to do what we can with the money available to us. When it comes to road maintenance, we need to think about the long term. I said during a recent Adjournment debate on the subject that we need to take a far more strategic and long-term approach.

Waste Water Treatment: Brexit

T4. **Mrs Long** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in the light of Brexit, what recommendations his Department is bringing forward to guide future waste water treatment directives, given that he will be aware that EU directives have driven much of the investment and improvement in waste water discharges into the environment. (AQT 369/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Member is correct: much of it has been because of that. Much of the heat and much of the debate has been around funding, but, of course, my Department also has responsibility for regulation. Waste water is certainly part of that, and something that we will take forward. I have not seen any information that relates to the Member's specific question, but, if she wants to correspond with me, I will be more than happy to do so.

Mrs Long: I thank the Minister for his response. In Westminster, a "Great Repeal Bill" will replace legislation that currently governs such issues with locally agreed legislation. Will there be a similar process in the Assembly to go through the legislation that currently governs issues such as waste water treatment?

Mr Hazzard: I am not aware of the exact governance process that we will go through. I have a briefing with officials next week, and a Brexit team in my Department is looking at a number of these issues. Although the initial conversations revolved around funding and immediate situations, I know that regulation is one item on the agenda.

Weather Patterns: Expert Advice

T5. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has considered availing himself of any additional expertise to more accurately predict weather patterns in the coming winter period. (AQT 370/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: No. As I outlined to the Member's colleague earlier, there has been a tradition over the past number of years of working closely in tandem with Rivers Agency. As the Comptroller and Auditor General's recent report identified, the flood risk maps very accurately detail the risks, and it is the same with the weather. If the Member has any ideas or suggestions, I am more than happy to listen to them.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Minister for his response. On winter services as well, I ask whether he has any plans to increase the number of grit piles in rural areas of my Newry and Armagh constituency to support the communities there.

Mr Hazzard: As a representative of a rural constituency, I probably championed the cause of grit piles to the former Minister in previous years. I am all too aware of the need. We know of the treacherous journeys that commuters from rural areas sometimes have to make. When it comes to grit and salt during the winter months, we know that there is much correspondence with the Department. The former Minister will undoubtedly know that. It is something that I look at. The Member specified Newry and Armagh, and we need to look at the issue constituency by constituency and on the basis of need, rather than strictly geographically. As I said before, we have to take cognisance of the fact that we are operating under limited budgets and have to do as much as we can with them.

China Visit: Investment

T6. **Ms Seeley** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he feels that there will be any potential investment or shared knowledge following his recent trip to China. (AQT 371/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for her question. At the outset, I thank Tim Losty and staff of the NI Bureau for facilitating many of the meetings that I had in China over the past week. I put on record my thanks to the Confucius Institute, particularly Dr Yan Liu, who assisted us greatly on our visit and certainly helped to open a lot of doors that will, I think, be of great benefit in the future.

On the first leg of the question, around investment, I was delighted to have the opportunity to meet the president of the China Investment Corporation, President Tu, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in Beijing last week. It is very clear that not only are they interested in building relationships and building friendships with the people of Ireland, they are certainly interested in investing in some of our infrastructure projects over the next number of years. I very much look forward to meeting them once again, back here in Ireland, to discuss these projects in further detail.

I think that shared learning is perhaps an area in which we may be able to work quickest, certainly by having discussions with the Beijing municipal authority around congestion and car parking. A number of initiatives in public transport and active travel are occurring now in Beijing that we can certainly learn from. As I mentioned earlier, the scale is, of course, very different. They are dealing with a city of over 20 million people, and we are not dealing with that. Many of the problems, issues and solutions are very similar, so I think that we can build on that in the future.

Ms Seeley: I welcome the Minister's response. Does he agree that, if Brexit does mean Brexit, China will become a very important ally in building the economy here in the North?

Mr Hazzard: Even before the EU referendum result, there was no doubt that China is a global superpower. You only have to cast your eye across Europe to see a number of the large-scale, and even smaller, infrastructure projects that China is investing in. There is no doubt that the axis of global power is tilting east. Many political commentators say so. I took the opportunity to visit Hubei province, where there are cities that, perhaps, some people have never heard of, yet they have populations of 10 million, 12 million or 15 million. There are hugely ambitious infrastructure programmes, and there is a lot that we can learn. I think that the best thing for us is that there is a willingness on the part of the Chinese to join us in that campaign because they have much to learn from us also.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Mark Durkan.

Mr Durkan: Can the Minister tell the House how many bicycles there are in Beijing? *[Laughter.]* Apologies. *[Laughter.]*

LED Street Lighting

T7. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his view of LED street lighting. (AQT 372/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are not enough bicycles in Beijing, I think it is fair to say. All joking aside, you touch upon that, and we were shown images of the bicycles in Beijing in the

1980s, and they absolutely outnumbered all the cars. As the growth in the economy happened in Beijing, the bicycle disappeared and the car took over. That is the exact same problem that we face here when it comes to congestion, and it is something that they are also tackling. Again, there is much to learn from that.

On LED street lighting, the retrofit scheme, to a large extent, has been successful. There were a number of issues that caught people by surprise in that the amount of white light was not as much as that from the old system. Once people get used to that, it will allay a lot of fears. Again, it is something that I want to look at. I mentioned earlier the savings that are involved and the expense of having the old system. It is something that I am looking at because I do believe that it is a project worth pursuing.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mark Durkan for a supplementary, and we will not put him to counting the bicycles in Beijing.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. I recognise the problems that have existed in some places where schemes have been carried out. However, does the Minister recognise the environmental as well as the economic benefits that such lighting brings and perhaps the possibility of replacing more street lights? We do know the pressure that the Minister's maintenance budget is under, but there might be more access to capital for such an environmentally friendly scheme.

Mr Hazzard: Certainly, and we know, for example, that there may be opportunities through the invest-to-save initiative. I am continuing to look at that in the Department, and we have discussed this. If it is feasible and affordable to roll out in the future, I am more than willing to look at it.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: That completes Question Time to the Minister for Infrastructure. Members may take their ease while we change the top Table.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

3.30 pm

Mr Nesbitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am sure you will agree that the House should be first to know when the Executive have something important to say. Nothing could be more important than the Programme for Government, and yet, even if the draft were published today, the eight-week consultation would take us to 13 December, beyond the point at which this House goes into recess. If the Executive honour their commitment to publish the final draft by the end of the calendar year, this House will be the last to know. Surely that is not right.

Mr Speaker: I take notice of your point of order. I will reflect on it and come back to you.

Mrs Long: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I apologise for not being in the Chamber earlier when the Minister for Communities responded to the debate on housing, which I had participated in. Unfortunately, I was detained in another meeting. I meant no discourtesy, and I would like to pass that on.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for her apology.

Opposition Business

Cancer Services: Deterioration

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes the recent publication of cancer waiting times, which revealed that the crisis affecting cancer services in Northern Ireland is continuing to deteriorate; further notes with anger that, in June 2016, only 6.7% of breast cancer patients in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area were seen within 14 days, despite the target being 100%; accepts the importance of timely diagnosis and treatment of cancer, as any delay can reduce the likelihood of a successful outcome; notes that these figures are symptomatic of the wider unprecedented crisis engulfing the Northern Ireland health service, with 392,000 people now on waiting lists; and calls on the Minister of Health to intervene to ensure that patients receive swift, safe and sustainable healthcare and to ensure that patient safety is not further compromised.

Ms Armstrong: I have thought very hard about how to respond to the motion today, because it deals with an extremely important and emotive subject. I start by confirming that the Alliance Party supports the motion but with reservations, because, as we have heard, the figures provide a snapshot. I also declare an interest, because I completely and totally hate cancer. I detest the disease in all its forms. Cancer causes pain and suffering and, in many cases, ends lives. I support the fight against cancer and have taken part in Race for Life events here in Stormont and raised funds for research.

I am extremely thankful that, in 2015, Cancer Research UK confirmed that more than 50% of people diagnosed will survive their cancer for more than 10 years; an all-time high. More people are surviving, and thank goodness for that. It is down, in quite a large part, to the staff who work in our hospitals to protect and care for people who are diagnosed with cancer, and their families, at a time when they are at their most vulnerable.

The motion talks about the crisis affecting cancer services, but we should not forget the people, the human beings, affected by cancer, including the almost 400,000 people on waiting lists and those who sometimes fail to receive early diagnosis. I thought I would share a quick story about what it is like to live without early diagnosis. In this case, a woman started to feel unwell around her 40th birthday and was back and forward to her GP on many occasions, a scenario that others have highlighted. The GP checked her and could not find out what was wrong. She was losing a lot of weight — not pounds but stones — without dieting.

Over the following couple of years, her eyesight blurred and her appetite left her. That person was in pain and was scared. She was frustrated and worried about her family and her children. She felt that she was not being listened to, that she was being dismissed and that she was not important; and she was angry. She was in and out of hospital, and her family were worried sick for her. The diagnosis finally came. The consultant called her husband to the side and confirmed that she had cancer. He told her husband that it was so advanced that she had days rather than weeks to live and that he should prepare for her funeral. That was on the Tuesday; she died on the

Saturday, the day before her 43rd birthday. Her name was Geraldine McGrattan and she was my mum.

I know first-hand the impact that cancer has on the person and on their family. Cancer can kill, but waiting for a diagnosis or being on a waiting list is torturous and unacceptable. The Minister confirmed that it is unacceptable: she knows that. If we are to receive swift, safe and sustainable healthcare to ensure patient safety and patient treatment, I urge the Minister to ensure that the expected cancer services framework includes a mechanism to systematically reduce waiting times and stringently monitor lists to ensure they do not increase to the levels we have today, where one fifth of our population are on waiting lists. We are all affected by cancer.

Mr Sheehan: I welcome the opportunity to speak. It is important that any debate of this nature should be balanced and fair. It is right that political representatives should highlight deficiencies in the healthcare system, but it is also very important that we accentuate the positive aspects of healthcare and that we are judicious in our language. We should be judicious because there are patients out there who are fearful, and we should not do or say anything that would make people who are already vulnerable or apprehensive feel even more insecure. Likewise, we need to be careful that our words, even indirectly, do not demoralise healthcare professionals and workers.

However, it is clear that the Opposition do not concur with those sentiments. The motion that they have brought to the Floor of the Assembly today is, quite frankly, a dog's dinner. It contains inaccuracies and misinformation. It is loaded with hyperbole and is an exercise in scaremongering. Breast cancer is the hook that the Opposition have used to hang this motion on and, to do so, it focuses on one small geographical area at one short period of time. In short, it is just a snapshot.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Sheehan: No, I will not.

That in itself is unfair, as statistics should be used to discern patterns over longer periods of time. Let me offer the Opposition a statistic which Edwin Poots mentioned earlier: clinical outcomes for breast cancer patients are better here than in any other jurisdiction in these islands.

I return to the motion. It says that:

“only 6.7 per cent of breast cancer patients in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area were seen within 14 days”.

These were not breast cancer patients. They were people who had gone to their doctor and been referred to a breast clinic. They may have had a cyst or some other issue. The vast majority of patients who are referred to breast clinics are not diagnosed with breast cancer.

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. As Kellie has already mentioned, we have reservations about the detail of the motion but not the general thrust. Whilst I accept the point he is making, does he agree that, for those women who are referred, whether it be for a cyst, benign growths or cancer, there is a huge amount of stress for the period of time that they wait? Therefore, it is relevant to raise the issue of waiting time, whether those women are breast cancer patients or are simply not aware of their current status.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Sheehan: I thank the Member for her intervention, and I agree wholeheartedly with what she says. Waiting for a diagnosis is a difficult time. Why then did the Opposition, when it was forming its motion, not try to be accurate, instead of introducing this exaggeration and hyperbole? If that is the Opposition that we are going to face over the next few years, God help us all.

I was very disappointed with Jo-Anne Dobson earlier this morning. She said, “there is not enough emotion” here, and, “There is not enough care” among our representatives. Let me say this. I first visited the Bridgewater suite in 2002, when my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer, and I made many visits there, and to the cancer centre, between 2002 and 2006, when my wife died. So do not stand here and tell me that I do not care, and do not presume that nobody else in this House cares. We have listened to enough Members today to hear all of them say how they have been affected by cancer. All of us care.

If people really care, they should work together, be judicious in their language and be accurate with their emotions. The best way to improve the health system we have is for everybody to put their shoulder to the wheel and not make petty political points, because cancer does not discriminate along party political lines. Sin a bhfuil agam.

Mr Middleton: I will begin by recognising the magnificent and life-saving work being carried out by our clinicians and medical experts, who are, of course, working on the front line day and daily delivering a first-class health service. Like many others — Mr Sheehan outlined his personal circumstances — I know that cancer has affected many of our family members and friends. Of course, it does not discriminate; it affects all of us, whether old or young, male or female.

The way the motion has been tabled is unfortunate. Together with the inaccuracies, it has been done in quite a knee-jerk fashion not, of course, to improve the situation or provide solutions but to scaremonger and to score political points. That is really sad. The motion focuses specifically on one trust and one month. Unfortunately, unforeseen circumstances — I know my colleague will touch on this in a few minutes — caused that issue. Nobody is trying to justify the figures or the waiting times, but, at the same time, we have to recognise the pressures in the system as a whole. Conveniently, it was not mentioned in the motion that 100% of cancer patients have been seen on target in the Western Trust area. Of course, there are better situations in other trusts. That has been achieved by the commitment and dedication of staff and a focus on providing the best possible care.

Ms S Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Middleton: I will indeed.

Ms S Bradley: Does the Member accept that it is a postcode lottery, given that, as he referred to, the Western Trust is able to supply healthcare, while the Southern Trust cannot?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Middleton: I thank the Member for the intervention, but I do not agree with that. At times, there can be particular pressures in a trust, and that is where you see issues arise, sometimes not in a fashion that you would have seen

previously. That creates situations the likes of which we have seen in the Southern Trust, but those can be rectified. The Minister and the previous Minister have worked to alleviate the pressures and ensure that people are not waiting. One of the ways we have done that, particularly in the north-west, is through the opening of the radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin, which our party was very supportive of. Thankfully, the Minister is working on that as well to reduce waiting lists. When motions like this come before the House, the signatories need to be careful about the language being used and make sure they truly think through exactly what they want to achieve by tabling it.

This morning, I attended an event and chaired a conference in the Stormont Hotel, hosted by the Policy Forum for Northern Ireland, on the reform of the health system. It was refreshing to hear from the over 150 delegates who attended it. The medical professionals talked the health system up rather than talking it down. Yes, there are challenges, and they recognise them, but they were there to work collectively to come to a solution. If the people out there — the health professionals — are working together to come to a solution, we in here should do the exact same rather than trying to score political points.

Do I believe there is a deterioration in cancer services? I do not. I believe we have one of the best systems in the world, but we can do better.

The motion calls on the Minister:

“to ensure patient safety is not further compromised.”

Of course, that language again deliberately scaremongers and causes concern for people.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Middleton: I will indeed.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that, with 392,000 people on waiting lists — one in five people in Northern Ireland — there are risks involved?

Mr Middleton: I accept that. Nobody is trying to justify the number of people on the waiting lists, but I question the figure of 392,000 that was stated. That is not specifically cancer-related; it is related to all conditions. The way in which the motion has been proposed is deliberately misleading. Opposition Members cannot, on one hand, say that heads should roll yet, on the other hand, say that we have great staff who should be complimented. If you want to do something for staff morale, start being thankful for the service that we have and recognise the challenges but work together to get reform. That is something that our party and the Executive and, no doubt, the Minister will do.

3.45 pm

Ms Lockhart: I support much of what my colleague has already said. Cancer is a thief and a home wrecker. It steals people away all too quickly, as we have heard so eloquently today. It is no respecter of age; it is a parasite and a plague on our society. Unfortunately, it has become a word that we all hear all too often, and it is often associated with children and the death of loved ones. However, we also hear about the victories against cancer, and that should be the message of today. We are encouraged by those victories. I do not defend the indefensible, but I congratulate, commend and encourage all the staff, consultants, nurses and scientists as well as

all the charities that are involved day and daily in saving lives from this terrible parasite. Just recently, Paint the Town Pink, a fantastic event in my constituency raised thousands of pounds in an effort to save lives.

Today, I want to talk to people and reassure them. The motion, unfortunately, is specific to one cancer, which does a disservice to people throughout our Province who suffer from many different forms of cancer. For instance, it was brought to my attention recently that there is no robotic surgery for urology treatment, and I am working with the Minister to resolve that. I am very content that she recognises that there is a problem with prostate cancer treatment and is working to address it. With over one hundred forms of cancer and one in three people suffering, there is a very real need for a cancer strategy that will address the overall associated problems, be it waiting times or dealing with this epidemic.

I was very disheartened and somewhat surprised by the form that the motion took. Even the title, with its talk of deterioration, will strike fear, dread, concern and anxiety into women across the country who will see these figures, which, we have been told, are incorrect. It has whipped up hysteria around this. The motion also mentions the Southern Trust, which is most unfortunate. Craigavon Area Hospital, which is in my constituency, operates in the Southern Trust. It is a fantastic hospital that runs the Mandeville unit. I encourage anyone to look at the services that the Mandeville unit provides, and they will see clearly the excellent work that is ongoing. Members should realise that the figures are very specific to a time in the Southern Trust diary when one of its members — a leading consultant — passed away. Unfortunately, you cannot plan for that. I encourage people to be reassured that the trust is back to its 100% performance on its 14-day, red-flag targets for breast cancer referrals.

We are all too aware of the fact that Northern Ireland has areas of specific speciality, and it is difficult when there is movement of staff or, as I alluded to, illness or death. In fact, we are not dissimilar to the rest of the UK and Europe in that sense. My aim today, as I said, is to provide reassurance to the women who will have concerns from today: you will be seen by the Southern Trust, and, if you are in need of surgery, you will get it.

Amazing work has been going on and continues in Northern Ireland. Since the Campbell report in 1995, cancer treatment services and diagnosis have been nothing short of transformational, and that is very evident in the survival rates.

In fact, back in March, it was reported that over 54% of all cancer patients survived five years after diagnosis between 2004 and 2008, an improvement in comparison with 1993 to 1999, and it is improving in 2010 to 2014. You have to look at the improvements in bowel cancer since the bowel screening programme began in 2012. There is no doubt that there are more cases of cancer appearing in men and women, but we have the City Hospital and places like the Mandeville unit. My colleague referred to the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin. We also have the cancer research lab that is doing amazing work.

The message today for the Minister is that there needs to be a wrap-around service for cancer. It is not that people are scathing of the service that they receive. Their concerns are the financial hardship, the travel costs and

the counselling needed for children who lose their mums and dads early in life. That is the message that the Minister needs to hear.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

Ms Lockhart: To those who are suffering from cancer, fight on. We are here to support you and to work with the Minister on this important issue.

Mr Beggs: I support the motion, which highlights the Northern Ireland health crisis. As I said earlier, 392,000 people are on waiting lists. This issue has not been referenced by the Back-Benchers from the Sinn Féin/DUP Government. They seem to have skated over this. The failure to address the pressures on our health service has led to this intolerable situation, with one in five of the population being on a waiting list.

This is a failure to address a basic need: healthcare. To the Health Minister, the Finance Minister and the entire Northern Ireland Executive, which is in its sixth year of being led by DUP/Sinn Féin, I say that this is unacceptable and it is time that it was addressed. What have you done about it?

Like others, I commend our health staff for the treatment that they give when patients eventually get to the top of their waiting list. However, that is the problem: too many are parked on waiting lists.

The waiting times summary report of August 2016 for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, which covers my area, shows quite concerning figures, with 17,888 patients waiting more than nine weeks — ie 64% of patients — and 1,620 waiting for more than a year to be seen or treated. Areas of concern are ENT, gastroenterology, general surgery, gynaecology, neurology, pain management, rheumatology and thoracic medicine, with many patients waiting more than 45 weeks.

Early diagnosis and treatment will reduce the suffering of patients and produce better long-term outcomes. With lengthy waiting lists, we also get increased pressure on GP services. We get additional unplanned A&E admissions to hospitals, and there are pressures on staff because patients are not being treated in an orderly, efficient manner.

Ms Lockhart: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he just confirm that the figure of 392,000 referred to in the motion is not specific to cancer and that it actually is the entire waiting times? It is important to clarify that, given that we are discussing cancer.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Beggs: If the Member waits a moment, I will come exactly to that point. If you notice, I have been talking all about the waiting list, and there is a reason for it.

In GB, they operate using referral time to treatment. It is not how long you have been parked on one of the multiple waiting lists that Northern Ireland patients have to move along; it is your treatment plan from when you see your GP until you get treated. We operate a different system, which hides many people within the waiting system. Because we are not using that referral time to treatment, the system does not look at how to better plan and improve the patient's journey. When will Northern Ireland come out of the dark ages and adopt that modern method to improve our system and bring about efficiencies?

There are 392,000 local patients on the waiting list, but the question is this: how many of them have a more serious ailment lurking in the background that may emerge when they are on the waiting list? No blame is intended on heavily pressed GPs or specialist consultants. Indeed, some illnesses are very difficult to diagnose, but the longer that someone is on a waiting list and not being regularly seen and reviewed by the specialist, the higher the risks. Indeed, some individuals end up moving to several different specialists along their journey of diagnosis.

I can think of one constituent who was parked on such multiple waiting lists and whose long journey of diagnosis has taken some six months. Only recently, it was identified that he now has a suspected cancer. Therefore, having waited six months and visited a whole range of specialists on different waiting lists, finally a suspicion of cancer has been highlighted and an operation is planned. I hope and pray that delays will not prove to be significant to his long-term health. That is a problem with the 392,000 people on the waiting list. Many of them have different ailments, some of which may be cancer, so we ought to deal with the problems in our entire health service, as referenced in the motion but not addressed by many. Once cancer spreads, it becomes very difficult to treat. Therefore, early treatment targets are there to try to prevent that from happening.

In the Northern Trust area, I see that —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member conclude his remarks?

Mr Beggs: — 75%, 64% and 63% of people with an urgent breast cancer referral were seen within 14 days in April, May and June. That is not acceptable. We need to improve our service. The service is far below that in England and Scotland.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Beggs: We need to address our health service.

Mr Milne: I begin by recording my thanks to the research team here at the Assembly for the information pack provided in advance of today's debate. I also use this opportunity to acknowledge the work and dedication of healthcare staff, who, despite the challenges and pressures, continue to work day after day to deliver the best possible outcomes for people. They are supported in that work by organisations such as Macmillan, Marie Curie and Cancer Focus, to name a few. In my area, Charis Cancer Care does exceptional work supporting patients and their families through their cancer journey.

Just two weeks ago, we had the opportunity to discuss the Department's report, which highlighted the waiting times for first consultation and, in particular, the performance in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. Many of the facts, concerns and figures have already been heard and responded to by the Minister, so I am conscious that much of the motion has already been covered.

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

Many factors can contribute to extended waiting times. Some will be understandable or unavoidable, while some will be unacceptable and need to be improved on. Whatever the reasons, there can be no doubt that the waiting adds to the anxiety and stress that comes with the news that you have been red-flagged.

There are very few families untouched by cancer. Everyone understands the impact on the lives of individuals and families when cancer is thought to be a possibility. There is, quite rightly, that sense of urgency to find out whether it is or is not, and, if it is, to know exactly how serious it is and what needs to be done.

We can all agree that performance figures reported for the Southern Trust are not good enough and fall short of the targets that we all want to see achieved. We must also be careful to avoid scaremongering and adding to the anxiety by suggesting that the service is, to quote the text of the motion, experiencing an "unprecedented crisis" or is somehow unsafe. Headline-grabbing phrases such as those do nothing for the morale of the staff at the coalface who regularly go above and beyond the call of duty.

They do not praise the success of awareness-raising campaigns that encourage people to seek advice and referral at the earliest possible opportunity or the significant improvement in outcomes over the last number of years.

4.00 pm

The Minister, in her previous contribution, acknowledged that there are challenges in our health system. They are not new and have been the subject of much debate in the House for many years. They exist not just in cancer services but in waiting times across many aspects of the service. There are issues relating to budgets, workforce planning and many other areas. Long life expectancy, early detection and treatments are a credit to medical science and to all those involved in public healthcare, but there is no doubt that the additional demand — a demand that is predicted to increase — places pressure on the service.

I welcome the commitment given by our Health Minister, Michelle O'Neill, to not just look at the potential of a cancer strategy but bring forward proposals to transform how health and care is delivered here in the North. Like other Members who spoke before me, I urge everyone in the Chamber to set aside party politics and work together to create a better health service with better outcomes for everyone.

Mr Mullan: I, too, welcome this opportunity to discuss these very important matters that affect people right across my constituency of East Derry and, indeed, people in local communities in every other constituency in the North of this island.

I would like to focus my comments on cancer care provision in Northern Ireland. At the moment, it is failing so many patients. The rate of cancer diagnosis has continued to rise, and, in 2014, some 9,000 people were diagnosed with cancer in the North. Sadly, almost 4,000 people die each year due to this horrible disease.

Like many Members, I know people who are currently suffering from cancer, have been cured of cancer or have, sadly, died from cancer. However, it has to be said that Northern Ireland has come a long way with cancer treatment and research and that there has been improvement. In 1993, breast cancer screening was established throughout the North. In 1994, the cancer registry was established. In 1999, the first cancer incidence data was compiled. In 2004, the Cancer Network was established, and, in 2006, the cancer centre was opened. The new radiotherapy unit in Altnagelvin will, hopefully, open next month. The work of individuals

such as Joe O'Sullivan and Paddy Johnston has been instrumental in driving forward this change, which has been hugely beneficial for local cancer sufferers.

Those are all evidence of a progression that I welcome and one that is evermore important considering the prevalence of cancer in Northern Ireland and the increasing number of patients diagnosed every single year. However, Northern Ireland's position as a world leader in cancer research and treatment is now in jeopardy following what seems to be a crisis at the heart of the health service that is negatively impacting upon cancer services.

Some 95% of patients with an urgent GP referral are supposed to be seen within 62 days. However, since records began six years ago, the target has never been met, and the latest figures show that, between April and June this year, only 70% were seen in this time.

Breast cancer treatment targets are also falling by the wayside. The percentage of women seen within 14 days of urgent referral for breast cancer has also fallen sharply since last year. Just 64%, which equates to 914 out of 1,433, of referred patients were seen on time, compared with 80% in June 2015. In the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area, 93% of patients waited more than the target of 14 days for a first consultation following an urgent referral for suspected breast cancer.

Those figures demonstrate the very stark reality we face and show that a dark shadow is hanging over cancer provision here. The failure to meet these treatment targets is a damning indictment of the very real pressures that the wider health system faces. Rather than the Health Minister hiding behind the Bengoa report, I call on her to publish it. We can all hide behind rhetoric but these crisis conditions are literally putting people's lives at risk, and that, in itself, is unacceptable.

Time after time, we have had reports such as 'Transforming your Care: A Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland' or the Donaldson review, but I have yet to witness any positive change emanating from them. The Minister should not hide behind another review. It would be more appropriate for her to commission a cancer strategy to ensure that cancer services are properly invested in and developed.

There is also a huge gap in the provision of cancer treatment here; it concerns cancer drugs that are available in Great Britain but not in Northern Ireland. Forty drugs have the potential to extend the lives of many cancer sufferers here but, rather than establishing a specialised medicines fund like they have in Scotland, a previous Health Minister decided to review —

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

Mr Mullan: — the punitive individual funding request (IFR) process and prescription charges.

The Minister needs to take notice of the motion, take action, commission the cancer strategy —

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

Mr Mullan: — and offer cancer patients equality of treatment in the North.

Mr Aiken: I support the motion. Along with the others you have heard from, I add my concerns for the many people on waiting lists. Indeed, any delay in a cancer diagnosis has a significant impact on an individual, their family, their workmates and society as a whole. However, when our cancer services work, they can work well. In my case, I did that most unusual thing for a husband and listened to my wife, who told me that I had to go to my GP. The process for the investigation, diagnosis and surgery for my bowel cancer two years ago met all the NICE guidelines. While I understand that many have concerns about the level of care that they have received in hospitals, my care, which was delivered fully through the NHS, was first-rate. Indeed, I cannot praise the medical staff at my GP's surgery and Antrim Area Hospital, my consultant, Mr Burns, and my wife highly enough.

Based on feedback received from throughout my constituency, I am very conscious that many people feel that cancer care provision is not only limited in some areas but that there appears to be a postcode or even regional lottery in treatment and in the provision of drugs regimes. As British citizens, many people find it difficult to understand how medicines that are available in, say, Birmingham cannot be provided here. I am also concerned that levels of service between different trusts in Northern Ireland are demonstrably of concern. Indeed, some cancer sufferers living within 10 miles or so of two or three health trust areas will be even more frustrated.

As a party, we have called for a cancer strategy for Northern Ireland that is primarily based on prevention and on early diagnosis. The need for education and changes in people's lifestyles, with a healthier approach to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, is well recognised. However, it is to an approach to early detection that I wish to turn.

I welcome Mr Poots's earlier statements on Queen's University. Its Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology is a globally leading research centre. As well as looking at specific treatments for various cancers, it is also looking at how diagnostics can be improved. The Ulster University's globally leading Biomedical Sciences Research Institute, which is particularly looking at gene nutrient treatments, is similarly able to do diagnostics. Furthermore — as an MLA for South Antrim I cannot resist it — in Radox we have a great company that is implementing testing procedures to identify people at risk and the early stages of the disease. It is significantly boosting our global exports while it is at it, especially to the US, where it has achieved over £1 billion in sales this year. Unbelievably, Radox cannot sell any of its services to the health services in Northern Ireland. Those testing approaches may result in real benefits but I and many in Northern Ireland cannot understand why, with globally leading research centres and one of the globally leading diagnostic companies based here, the Health Minister is reluctant to take the initiative and set up a properly resourced cross-Northern Ireland cancer education and early cancer screening process.

We cannot continue with the current failing approach; we need to evolve our cancer care rapidly. We encourage our Health Minister to adopt, at the earliest opportunity, our policies for cancer education and early cancer screening, which are set out in our cancer care document dated March 2016. As added benefits, they would also help boost the position of our great universities and companies

and would be truly transformational for all our citizens by providing more effective treatment for patients already suffering from cancer and, more importantly, by enabling us to prevent cancers from presenting or reoccurring.

Mr McNulty: Standing here, my blood boils when Members in the Chamber accuse the Opposition of political point-scoring, scaremongering or being negative in tabling this motion. That is the stock answer. You have all been well coached. That does not wash when it comes to cancer services. It has already been said that there is no home or family across this region that has not been touched by cancer. I have to empathise with those Members who have lost loved ones and who have been touched by cancer. Whilst the survival rates across the range of cancers are constantly improving globally, if you have lost a loved one those survival rates are cold comfort at a time of great loss.

Ms Dillon: Will the Member give way?

Mr McNulty: Yes.

Ms Dillon: I find it deeply offensive that you would say that anything was rehearsed or coached. I point specifically to Pat Sheehan's remarks during the debate. You are talking about people who have lost family members as though he is not one of them. Show a little bit of respect for everybody involved in this situation, please.

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

Mr McNulty: Forgive me: I empathise with all Members who have lost a loved one, and my empathy rings true.

The motion refers to the crisis affecting cancer services in the North and, in particular, the fact that only 6·7% of breast cancer patients in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area were seen within 14 days during June of this year. Mr Deputy Speaker, if you or your loved one has been referred to a cancer specialist, be it for breast cancer or any other cancer, even 14 days seems too long. The agony, the worry and the anxiety must be terrible as a patient. If your father, mother, wife, husband, son or daughter is going through that anguish, it must be heartbreaking. We as a legislature must step up and tackle the issue.

The Southern Trust covers the area I have the privilege of representing. I know that the Minister will tell us that, as we speak, those figures have improved; in fact, 100% of patients referred are seen within 14 days. The Minister will assure us that the dip in performance in June and July of this year was due to unforeseen circumstances. Whilst I appreciate that may be the case, for those waiting for those appointments in June and July, that delay only added to the worry and anxiety.

The services offered to breast cancer sufferers at the Mandeville unit or the Macmillan cancer care unit in Craigavon Area Hospital are second to none. The compassion and care on offer are shining lights. Time and time again, families tell me of the love, the care and the attention given by the staff there. Cancer care, however, is such a specialist field. Often, the care is administered by a small specialist team; any discontinuation of health personnel can have a big impact. We are all too aware of the staffing challenges facing the different areas of our health service, from GPs in rural practices to consultants in emergency departments to nursing staff in our hospitals. I experienced the pressure on an emergency

team in Newry with a loved one in the last month. I saw the pressure under which they functioned, and it was extraordinary to see the care and attention on offer from people who were working at breaking point.

4.15 pm

I fundamentally believe we need to take a much stronger and strategic approach to workforce planning. I understand that, in this case, there is a 1·5 whole-time equivalent breast surgeon's post vacant, as well as two vacancies for breast screening radiologists in the Southern Trust area. Can I ask the Minister for an update on the recruitment to those posts? We cannot allow workforce planning issues to continue to impact cancer services, particularly in the way we have witnessed to date. Cancer care is a top priority for the people we all represent. We must see improvements in the care we offer.

Mr Lunn: I thank the proposer for bringing forward the motion. We welcome that it was done on a cross-party basis. We are, of course, fully supportive of the motion and the manner in which it is being presented. It demonstrates that the Executive can and must be challenged in a constructive manner to deliver on behalf of the people. I suggest that, perhaps within the next year on another Opposition day, we bring a similar motion to check on actions and progress.

Of course, the issue is not just a mechanical one about targets not being met, but sometimes, that is the way it seems to be approached when discussed. The issue is that human beings — close relatives, friends and carers — are being left with huge uncertainty about their well-being. That means that not only does successful treatment becomes less likely because time is passing on a waiting list but there is additional strain that only makes their health worse. There is a tendency in the Chamber and elsewhere to talk grimly of figures but not of human lives, long-term plans delayed, big life events put off or the stress and strain of uncertainty. There is also a tendency to not talk even of people who found they were clear of cancer but whose mental health had deteriorated very badly while they were waiting to find out. I would certainly exempt Pat Sheehan and Kellie Armstrong from any criticism of just talking about figures: I thought they both spoke extremely bravely today.

I am cautious about repeating the word "crisis" too often, because it serves to create the impression there is nothing right about our health service. Many thousands of people every year are superbly treated by the service and the people who work in it. Many of the outcomes are nothing short of miraculous, but that is not to say that that word is out of place here. Clearly, when a fifth of the entire population is on a waiting list, something is not working the way it should.

I asked the Health Minister — I think it was in January 2015 — about the extent of the waiting list. The figure at that time was just over 180,000. It is now double that and more at 392,000. To put that another way, there is a tendency to see solving waiting lists by allocating more resources to the people on them when, in fact, the fundamental problem is that too many people are put on waiting lists in the first place. The resources are needed so that primary care services limit the number of people who are referred at all by intervening early to identify and solve the problem. When we say:

“patients receive swift, safe and sustainable healthcare”,

it needs to mean it happens at the very outset. We cannot just keep dumping thousands of people on to waiting lists and then rely on secondary care, often in the independent sector, to intervene long after the issue should have been dealt with.

Again, we cannot miss the point here that the expert panel chaired by Professor Bengoa presented its report to the Minister some months ago. Since that time, the concern is that she has been busy trying to fudge the outcome by focusing solely on the needs of some of those working in the service rather than those who use it. That is no way to start the process of real, meaningful reform on behalf of the public that, frankly, should have been started after Transforming Your Care and the Donaldson report. We will wait and see what Professor Bengoa has to say, if that is ever revealed to us.

When nearly 400,000 people are on a waiting list, that means you have a systems failure. The system is broken. Just throwing resources at it will not make it less broken. In fact, by failing to recognise this is a systems failure, we are insulting the many people who do such a miraculous job on behalf of patients every day.

The fact remains, however, that reform means change. That has to be managed carefully and sensitively so that, at the end of the decade, the system is fixed by broadening primary care, ensuring that expertise is shared at single locations for entire local areas and making sure that we never again have a fifth of the population on a waiting list. I doubt that that could happen anywhere else in the world.

We have said from the outset that we are not here to oppose for the sake of doing so. The Minister will receive our support where she reforms in line with expert advice but absolutely not where she fails to do so. We will judge the Bengoa report on its merits, not on the Minister's view of it. We warmly commend the motion to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Just before I call the next Member, I remind Members to speak directly towards the microphones. Broadcasting has advised us that it is having difficulty picking up some of the transmissions.

Mrs Barton: Over 660 cases of cancer are diagnosed in Fermanagh and South Tyrone each year. One third of cancers is caused by smoking, and it is those cancers that have the poorest survival rates. Therefore, Minister, it is essential that there is early diagnosis to start treatment as soon as possible before health further deteriorates.

The most recent statistics from the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry show that there has been an average of 205 deaths each year in Fermanagh and South Tyrone from cancer over the last five years, with the most common cancers being bowel, prostate and breast. While the Western Trust is one of the highest-performing trusts, with an average of 91% of patients first treated following an urgent GP referral for suspected cancer, it is still below the ministerial target of 95%. However, I commend the Western Trust for achieving 100% in relation to the number of patients first being treated within the 31-day target and for the 100% target being reached for the number of patients first seen by a breast care specialist following an urgent referral for suspected cancer within 14 days. While the Western Trust has reached its targets, there are

still approximately 200 deaths too many from cancer in Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

Dr Gavin, a founding director of the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry, projected that cancer rates in men would remain steady in the years ahead but, among women, we would see a 7% increase by 2020 and a 13% increase by 2035 due to medical advances and people living longer. Given that information, it is essential that the Minister look immediately at a specific cancer strategy for Northern Ireland, including further screening for older people and younger people, the recruitment of extra consultants so that targets set can be further improved and the provision of extra specialist cancer nurses.

As Fermanagh and South Tyrone is registered as having the second highest number of cancer cases each year, serious thought must be given to increasing the services offered at the South West Acute Hospital, including a cancer treatment unit there. After all, Fermanagh and South Tyrone has an ageing population, and its people have the furthest to travel for day treatments. Many patients also have no direct transport to the north-west and frequently have to leave home at 6.30 am or 7.00 am to travel to Belfast, eventually returning home 12 hours later. That journey for seriously ill patients is debilitating; for them, it is unacceptable in the modern world. Given that cancer incidence in Fermanagh and South Tyrone will only increase, I appeal to the Minister to consider a third cancer treatment hospital in the south-west.

Mr Allister: The rising scourge of cancer in our generation is, frankly, quite frightening. I am sure it is the experience of us all that we constantly hear of individuals we know, family members or acquaintances who have got the dreaded news of a cancer diagnosis and then of their passing. Indeed, as the debate started, I got a message that a friend and member of my party in Ballymoney had this morning lost his battle with cancer. That is a persistent theme that we encounter many, many times.

The Macmillan organisation provided us all, before the Assembly election, with the Macmillan manifesto. It identified for us that, every day, 30 people get the diagnosis they dread of cancer — that is to say that twice a week we could fill the Chamber to overflowing with those diagnosed with cancer — and 4,000 people a year die from this hateful disease. Therefore, doing all that can be done is an unavoidable imperative for us all.

We should also be mindful of the dedication way beyond the call of duty of so many who tend to cancer patients, of our excellent clinical nursing staff and people like the Macmillan nurses, who bring palliative care when it is needed most. Indeed, when you watch and see the work of people like that, each one of us in the House should realise that our job here is a doddle in comparison.

Mr Robinson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr Robinson: Would the Member include the Foyle Hospice in his congratulations?

Mr Allister: I include all hospices that give the end-of-life care that is so needed; it is done so tenderly and with such sensitivity. We all should recognise that.

Given the all-embracing nature of the issue that we are discussing — it is no respecter, like death itself, of anyone —

I have been somewhat disappointed by the ill-judged, knee-jerk reaction of some Members in the House. I understand that the Executive have a very low threshold of toleration for criticism, but some of the observations made today have been so ill-judged in their churlishness and in their resentment of anyone daring to point out that things could be done better that, really, they do not speak well of those who have taken that stance. It is a fact — an unpalatable fact — that there are huge waiting lists in the Province.

Mr Stalford: I am very grateful to the Member for giving way. I think that he is right about the tone of the debate: given what we are talking about, it is important that it is struck correctly. Mr McNulty had the good grace to apologise to Mr Sheehan for the comment that he made about people being coached. Does the Member agree that, when comments like that are made, leading members of the Opposition should not be sitting tee-heeing and laughing?

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

Mr Allister: I have no knowledge of what the Member refers to, but I will say this: Members from the Member's party should not be too quick to get on their high horse about this issue, because, last year, when we were debating cancer in the House, they absented themselves, pretending that they were objecting and marking an IRA murder — a pretence that, of course, soon fell apart when the lure of office once more overcame them.

Therefore, before too many get on that particular high horse, they should remember that, when we last debated this subject, they did not even think it worthy of contribution. The fact that this motion refers to the huge waiting list is not something to be resented, as Ms Lockhart seemed to resent it, for it is a fact that there are approaching 400,000 people in this Province on waiting lists of all varieties.

4.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Allister: That is an indictment of this Government, and of the Executive.

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): I am very grateful once again to have the opportunity to set the record straight about a number of things that have been said throughout today's debate on the provision of cancer services. I thank all those people who shared their personal cancer journey and stories. It is not easy to get up in the House and do that.

I raised a point of order at the start of the debate, a LeasCheann Comhairle, because I believe that the motion is wrong. Not only is the spirit in which it is presented wrong but the facts noted in the motion itself are wrong. The Opposition, through the motion, seems intent on talking down our health service and the all the men and women who work really, really hard to provide that service. Let me start by saying up front that I am proud of the service that all those men and women provide day and daily to the people with cancer here and all the other people who need health and social care. I am proud of the dedication and hard work of the highly trained doctors, nurses and other medical professionals who provide such

a high level of care to all our people. I am proud of the quality of the full range of health and social care services that we provide, not just for cancer but across the board.

Ms S Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs O'Neill: The Opposition have had two hours now to debate things, so let me get into what I want to say in response to all the comments made throughout the day. I am sure that I will answer everything that you have set out in your contribution.

Are things perfect? No, they are not. I have never stood once in the House and said that things are perfect. There is a recognition right across the piece that we need to tackle waiting lists and deliver better outcomes for people. That is the job of government. I consistently say that there are areas in which we can improve, but unlike the Members who tabled the motion, who ducked the responsibility of choosing to take tough decisions and make things better, I am not going to be found wanting in trying to fix the problems that we have in our health and social care system. I am determined to work with colleagues who want to be constructive. I am determined to work with stakeholders to make sure that we do more to deliver the improvement that we need.

It seems unbelievable that the Opposition would put forward a motion that is factually incorrect, but they have, and it falls to me today to correct a number of issues that were highlighted in the debate. The motion:

"notes with anger that, in June 2016, only 6.7% of breast cancer patients in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area were seen within 14 days".

That is wrong. The 6.7% figure is for urgent referrals for suspected breast cancer cases. There is a very important distinction, so let me be very clear: that statement is wrong. It would be highly irresponsible, if not outright scaremongering, to send out a message that all people given urgent referrals have cancer. Thankfully, that is not the case. We need to be very, very clear, and I am not for one minute trying to diminish poor performance. I have said before and I will say it again that any underperformance needs to be tackled. In this instance, it is important that we also correct the false impression that is being irresponsibly created by the Members who tabled the motion. Allowing politically motivated misinformation to spread is bad for the health service and demoralising for patients and staff.

I understand the worry and concern that long waiting times can cause for patients and families. Performance has not been strong enough in many, many areas, but I am committed to dealing with the problem, because that is what you do in government.

I will set out my vision for health and social care next week, and it is going to include specific actions to deliver improvements in this area. I hope that, at that stage, the Members of the House will be as up for discussing all those issues with me and that they will be up for tackling the vital tasks in the time ahead.

It is absolutely right to hold Health and Social Care to account for the level of services it provides. That is why my Department sets targets for cancer services that are so challenging, because they can drive improved performance. But the kind of inaccurate, overblown

criticism contained in the text of this motion does nothing to deliver improvements for patients or for staff. Instead, it creates fear and worry in the minds of those people at home who fear that the services they need will not be there for them when they need them or that their loved ones will not receive the level of care that they need. Blanket condemnations of public services and public servants is nothing more than Project Fear politics, and I believe they have no place in any discussion of the health and social care services that our people deserve.

Improvements have been made. Cancer services have been reorganised in recent years so that professionals with an expertise in treating the most common cancers can be brought together. Patients who are treated by professionals who specialise in cancer and work together as a team have a better outcome than those not managed by such teams.

There are five cancer units for the management of patients with more-common cancers and the provision of local chemotherapy services. Specialist radiotherapy services in the North are currently provided by the cancer centre at Belfast City Hospital, which opened in March 2006. The cancer centre will, next month, be supplemented by the £66 million investment in the new radiotherapy service at Altnagelvin. This is an example of my Department's commitment to delivering the best possible services to patients. The new radiotherapy service is a significant boost for our cancer service infrastructure. It will provide radiotherapy services to 90% of clinically suitable patients in the north-west region.

I am particularly pleased that the new development at Altnagelvin brings a welcome cross-border dimension to cancer services, with some €19 million in funding coming from the South. This is a small island, and it is so vital that we work together as much as we can to pool resources, share experience and deliver the best possible outcomes for our people.

Meeting the challenges that have been posed by cancer will continue to be a key priority. I believe we have made great strides in tackling cancer and have seen significant progress in the past. I wish to see that progress continue, and I can assure Members that I will continue to give due consideration to the need for a comprehensive strategy.

The recent underperformance in the breast cancer service in the Southern Trust is due to staffing issues. The trust has had issues in recruiting key surgical staff, and I am also sorry to say that the untimely passing of a senior doctor was a further blow. In that context, it is unsurprising that there was a significant drop in performance. It is so disappointing that politicians would seek to gain political capital from such circumstances. The Opposition should be ashamed of themselves. I am not interested in the Opposition's empty rhetoric of anger. It is empty rhetoric; it means nothing. I am not sure who that serves. Instead my focus —

Mrs Long: Will the Member give way?

Mrs O'Neill: Let me just get through my points, and if I can, I will give you some time towards the end.

Instead, my focus is on delivering everything I can to drive improvement and ensure that the high standards we set for our services are met. Twelve out of the 209 patients in the Southern Trust who waited longer than 14 days for a breast cancer referral in June were subsequently diagnosed with

breast cancer. Thankfully, 94.3% did not have a cancer diagnosis.

All of the 12 patients with a confirmed diagnosis have commenced treatment. Ten received their first definitive cancer treatment within the target of 62 days, which means that the initial delay in diagnosis had no negative impact on their receiving treatment within a reasonable time. One received their first treatment at day 63, just outside the 62-day target. The final patient was a more complex case, and treatment did not commence until day 81.

This is not to try to downplay the seriousness of the situation, especially for those two patients who did not receive treatment within the 62-day target. While I am far from satisfied with the level of service, I want to acknowledge the sterling service that the trust's clinical team provided for their patients and to show the public that things are not as bad as they may first appear. I want to reassure people at home who may have sick loved ones or may be unwell themselves that the level of care they will receive from the doctors and nurses here is second to none.

Of course, there are issues in the system. I am committed to working with all parties in this Chamber who are interested in that collaborative approach to address all these issues. I hope my approach will be reciprocated on all sides.

Whilst I can always take on board and fully understand any concerns that are absolutely genuine, the future of the health service is too important for one part of the system to be debated as a knee-jerk reaction or in the heat of the moment. Instead, I acknowledge that performance is not where we want it to be, and I want to work hard with partners across the system to make sure that everything that can be done is done to improve it.

The decline in performance was first reported to my Department in June this year. As soon as I became aware of the issue, I asked the board to work with trusts as a matter of priority to find ways of improving the situation for patients. The board and the trusts have now put in place innovative solutions to work together to provide additional clinics to address the poor performance in breast cancer while maintaining safety for patients. In addition, the trust has extended its working hours, and that has facilitated the operation of a fourth breast clinic. It is early days, but there are signs that their efforts are having a positive effect. The latest provisional information indicates that performance in the Southern Trust has improved to 100%. I will continue to keep the situation under review, but I want to put on record my sincere thanks to all the staff and management in the Southern Trust and beyond who have worked so hard to recover the situation.

The issues in the Southern Trust highlight the challenges that exist across the system in maintaining acceptable levels of performance. That is why a workshop will take place on 26 October, bringing together breast cancer specialists from across the North to identify options for delivering a sustainable, high-quality breast cancer service for the future. I look forward to receiving the proposals put forward by the workshop and will ensure that they are given the priority that they deserve.

I pay tribute to the staff — I thank all Members who joined me in that — the management in the board and the trusts and, most of all, the doctors, nurses and technicians on the ground, who have come together to take action to improve the situation for their patients. It is easy for others to sit in

the Assembly and talk about their anger; it is another thing to be on the front line delivering the services and putting structures in place to improve patient outcomes. These actions reassure me that our system continues to function, despite the picture painted by the Opposition. Of course, it is right to keep monitoring performance and to bring any problems to attention, but we do our health service and healthcare staff a massive disservice when we ignore the actions that they take daily to deliver their services.

The picture painted by the Opposition of our cancer services bears no relation to reality. They see a crisis that is "continuing to deteriorate", whereas, in reality, our cancer service is better than it has ever been. We treat more people for cancer than ever before. The number of patients treated for cancer has risen by 32% in the past five years. The latest comparative study of international breast cancer survival rates — I thank the Members who pointed this out earlier — show that the North has the best survival rate of anywhere in Britain and Ireland. Despite the increase in waiting times, we treat more people within the timescales than ever before. The five-year survival rate for women with breast cancer has improved over time, with survival increasing from 75% in the 1993-99 diagnosis period to over 80% in the 2005-09 diagnosis period. When adjusted for age and population change, the female breast cancer mortality rate has decreased by 1.3% a year.

The Opposition talk about a "wider unprecedented crisis" in the health service and bandy about a figure of 392,000 people on waiting lists. At best, that figure is the product of a woeful misunderstanding of the statistics published by my Department; at worst, it is a mischievous attempt, once again, to scaremonger. The Opposition appear simply to have added up the waiting list figures for outpatients, inpatients and diagnostics, despite the fact that the published statistics warn against doing that. It is clearly stated on the publication. For example, 19,919 endoscopy patients are included in both the inpatient and the diagnostic waiting times. That is just one of many examples.

Of course, as I said, I recognise that our service is under strain and that the arrangements put in place to help the Southern Trust are short-term solutions. The problems that affect cancer services are the same as those that affect the wider health and social care service: the challenge of rising demands on services linked to an ageing population and the finite resources available to meet that demand. I have been making the same case for cancer and for all other health services since I took up office five months ago.

There was a 17% increase in the overall number of red flag referrals for cancer between 2014-15 and 2015-16. That includes a 25% increase in breast cancer referrals and a 21% increase in lower gastro-intestinal (GI) cancer referrals. Why did that happen? It is testament to the good work being done across our health and social care system to successfully raise awareness. The campaigns taken forward by the Public Health Agency can make a significant difference to the level of referrals in any one year. One recent campaign contributed to an increase in referrals from 13,225 to 16,312, and I think that that shows that there is a real, meaningful difference being made in relation to awareness. October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and I encourage all women who are invited for breast screening to consider attending.

4.45 pm

A growing, ageing population means that the number of people who will require cancer treatment in the future will continue to rise, with consequent pressures on health services. The ever-increasing number of new technologies and treatments for cancer, whilst good news in terms of early diagnosis and treatment, also contributes to those pressures.

The focus of the motion is on cancer services. The waiting lists are not good enough. Our people have a right to have the services there for them when they need them, and I will do everything that I can to make sure that that is the case. However, as Minister for the health service, I cannot pick one service over another, and nor can I prioritise one group of patients over another. The problems causing long waiting lists for cancer patients also affect every other part of the health and social care system. We have more people living longer lives, which is something that we should celebrate and be proud of, but it inevitably puts more and more strain on our health and social care services. We have no choice but to think again about how we deliver those services and to make sure that we make the funding that is available to us work hard to deliver the best possible outcomes for our people. That means radical transformation of all of our services, using the best clinical expertise to tailor services that are patient-centred. It also means giving renewed focus to areas like mental health that have not always been given the attention they warrant.

As I have said previously in the House and during the debate today, I will announce my vision for the future of health and social care services next week. It will set out the kind of health service I want to see for our people. Success in this will depend on everyone. It will depend on us all here as politicians working together to put the needs of our people first and not seeking to protect special interests. Put simply, it will take political leadership. It depends on our excellent doctors, nurses, clinicians, technicians and other medical professionals. It will depend on the third-sector organisations that do so much to help in their own areas of interest. It will depend on our people too to get involved in shaping the services they want to see for the future. Delivering improved cancer services as part of a transformed health and social care system is a significant challenge, but it is one that we do not shy away from. It is one that we will face up to.

In conclusion, a Cheann Comhairle, thank you for the opportunity to correct some of the mistruths and scaremongering that have been put out in relation to the motion. We should all concern ourselves with being constructive, delivering better outcomes and not trying to alienate and, I suppose, put pressure on the healthcare professionals who work day and daily to deliver better services. The Opposition's time would be much better used being constructive and offering alternatives, but I did not hear one alternative here today. All I heard was them sitting on the sidelines from the safety of opposition and not being prepared to take the hard decisions that need to be taken. The Executive are committed to taking the decisions and delivering better outcomes, and I think that that is a better outcome for all of the people who elected us to come in here and make a difference.

Mr Durkan: I rise to wind up on the motion. I thank all Members and, indeed, the Minister for their contribution to what should have been a largely constructive debate

on an issue that should unite us all. I thank and pay particular tribute to those who shared personal and painful experiences with the House.

This is Opposition day, and our role as the official Opposition and, I am sure, that of members of the unofficial opposition is not to oppose everything that government does. We recognise and acknowledge the good work that has been done and the good work that is being done, and we certainly recognise the unbelievable and heroic work of people in our health service: doctors, nurses, nursing assistants, porters, the whole shebang. We could not ask for more from them. Our role is to challenge government to do better, to deliver more, to deliver better and more efficient services and, on this matter, to provide better care for people living here. There is no doubt that we can, we should and we must do better.

There has been much derision — misplaced, in my opinion — from the Government Benches about motions brought by the Opposition thus far. This is not about politics; this is about people.

We do not just want to talk about issues that matter to people; we want to see changes that have a positive effect for and on people. It is difficult to think of a more positive effect than ensuring that people get timely access to quality healthcare when they need it and reducing the number of people who need that healthcare in the first place.

The motion makes specific reference to cancer services. Yes, we heard from the Minister in the Chamber today and recently in response to a question for urgent oral answer from me on cancer services. We have had questions for urgent oral answer, but patients — people — want to see urgent action. I call on the Minister to implement the recommendations of Cancer Research UK's report on cancer services here in Northern Ireland. The Executive should conduct a review of diagnostic capacity, including direct access for GPs, and outline steps to ensure that capacity can meet rising demand.

The health service needs to develop national data sets for chemotherapy and radiotherapy. That would support ongoing evaluation of how services are performing or, in some cases, sadly, not performing. The Department should review workforce capacity and treatment services to understand where there are shortfalls in staff and set out how they will be addressed. The Department, with the trusts, should undertake work to clarify why operating standards for cancer are not being met.

Crucially — a few Members referred to this; indeed, the Minister herself referred to it — we need a new, comprehensive cancer strategy that sets ambitious goals and allocates sufficient resource to ensure that cancer services can improve outcomes, meet rising demand and reduce the undeniable variation in care that exists across the North. I welcome that the Minister has now committed to such a strategy. Obviously, she has given it the due consideration she said she would.

I will touch on some of the contributions Members made. The motion was proposed by Jo-Anne Dobson. She referred to an announcement by a previous Health Minister of £40 million that was allocated specifically to deal with waiting lists, but it was later revealed that £18.5 million of it was spent elsewhere. She spoke of the sense of fear and dread and of the impact that a cancer diagnosis has on someone and appealed for a calm and measured

approach to today's debate. She highlighted the very real and serious impact of diagnosis being delayed and how that can result, ultimately, in fatal outcomes. She described the performance of some trusts as atrocious. Indeed, on occasion, they do give cause for concern. That is what led to the motion. But we all have to recognise, which we do, when trusts are doing well, and I pay tribute to the Western Trust specifically in this regard. She spoke of her own experience at the hands of cancer, and everyone in here will have their own harrowing tales of loved ones lost.

The SDLP family lost someone very dear to us; a member of staff in this Building, Stephen McKiernan. He fought a very long and hard battle with cancer. Sadly, he ultimately lost that battle. So many Members from so many parties have attended in the two years since his death coffee mornings we have run in conjunction with Macmillan in his memory. That is cancer bringing us together and making us unite. I know how touched and appreciative his wife, Julie, is that there is support for that event from right across the political spectrum.

Ms Dobson says we need to be equipped and ready to respond to the increase in demand brought about by public awareness campaigns. Indeed we do. There needs to be proper workforce planning. We need the right people in the right places, and we need enough people in every place. She spoke of the importance in that regard of longer-term budgets. That is important in the long term, as people living with cancer cannot afford to wait. She outlined, as did many contributors, the fact that there are humans behind the statistics and that people deserve better.

In her contribution, Catherine Seeley began by commending the Marie Curie nurses, and I certainly echo that commendation, having seen at first hand the tremendous work that they do. She urged women to book a screening as part of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a call that I also echo. She spoke of the tireless efforts made by staff and the Department. We also recognise that, but, I am sorry, the figures do not lie. "This problem is not new", the Member said; therefore, the problem has been not solved. We need to see it solved and we need to work together to get it solved. She actually described the motion as:

"an insult to ... hard-working ... healthcare staff"

That is completely off the mark and, in my opinion, out of order. Nobody says more about the problems in our healthcare system than our hard-working healthcare staff, and nobody wants to see them fixed more than they do. I do not know if the Member has seen any of the comments of her party colleagues in the South on waiting lists there. Are they attacking workers in hospitals and doctors in the South?

We had a very positive contribution, I thought, from Edwin Poots, a former Health Minister, who wished the current Minister well, as do I. He spoke of his role in giving the go-ahead for the radiotherapy unit in the north-west. I again thank him for that. He spoke of the work of the Pink Ladies Cancer Support Group in my constituency. They, and many other groups like them, do invaluable work; it is often unheralded and I take this opportunity to pay tribute to them too. He outlined the rationale behind his approval of the centre and said that it was not just for the people of the north-west; it was part of an overall strategy to ensure easier access to cancer services for people across the North. He spoke of the good performance here on breast

cancer and the need to constantly strive to improve — that is what we are doing.

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

My party colleague Sinead Bradley made a very emotive contribution. She is conscious of people waiting on lists, and the stories behind those lists, where people are living in a vacuum, awaiting a diagnosis, and then there is the tendency to cyber-self-diagnosis. She reiterated the fact that we are not, in any way, attempting to fault or slight workers. She urged the Minister, and her Government colleagues, not to go into defensive mode; but that plea has obviously fallen on deaf ears. I really cannot understand this circling of the wagons that has taken place.

Ms Dillon: Will the Member give way?

Mr Durkan: Certainly.

Ms Dillon: Go raibh maith agat. I do not think that there was any defence of the waiting lists. The Minister was very clear that the waiting lists are unacceptable. The defence was around the wording of the motion and the fact that it is incorrect. There are inaccuracies in it. If we are talking about temperate debate, it would be more prudent of the Opposition to bring forward a motion that was factually correct and which everybody in the House could possibly have supported.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that intervention. It is clear that, in some cases, even attack has been seen as the best form of defence, because of the number of attacks that were launched, not just on the content of the motion but on the spirit in which it was brought. Any study of today's debate in Hansard will clearly show that it was the tone and content from the Government Benches that were less than conciliatory.

Kellie Armstrong spoke of the human impact from first-hand experience. I welcome her contribution and commend her courage.

Pat Sheehan said that every debate should be balanced and fair. We should be "judicious in our language" and refrain from trying to score political points. He then proceeded to a critique of the motion in language that was a wee bit less than judicious and certainly not short on political point-scoring. I sympathise, albeit belatedly, with Pat on the loss of his wife. I am sure that that is something that hurts greatly and always will.

The best way to improve the system is to work together, and that is precisely why the motion should be supported by everyone here.

Gary Middleton said that the Opposition cannot have it both ways: we cannot praise workers and criticise services.

I did not hear anybody saying that heads should roll. When it comes to having it both ways, perhaps the Member should cast his mind back to when a Minister from his party was trying to close care homes, and they were protesting outside them.

5.00 pm

Carla Lockhart said that the motion was too specific to one form of cancer. I have never heard any motion opposed in here on the grounds of being too specific. Other parts of her contribution were excellent, and I concur entirely, particularly on the cancer strategy.

I will move on a wee bit. Many Members made many valid points; unfortunately, I do not have time to cover them all. The Minister said she was grateful for the opportunity to set the record straight. She is proud of those working in healthcare: I think what we have established today is that we all are. She said that the Opposition ducked responsibility by not taking the Ministry. Again, I will ask this: did her party duck responsibility in the South? She has promised to set out her vision for health and social care next week, and we look forward to that. We regret, however, that the public have not had time to read the Bengoa report in advance of her vision being made public. She outlined some of the undisputed good work being done in tackling cancer here. That is great, and we all want to see more of it. The Minister's attack on the motion, its proposer and its supporters was, in my opinion, ill-judged. I am not going to get dragged into a slanging match with her. We will work with her and with others in transforming the health service, if she will let us, because, every day, we see and hear more compelling evidence that it needs to be transformed.

In conclusion, I would just like to ask this: which part of the motion are Members opposed to and voting against today? Members raised and, yes, the Minister addressed the Southern Trust figures, and she described them as unacceptable. The motion notes those "with anger"; maybe it should have been more in sorrow than in anger. We have said not that cancer services are deteriorating but that the crisis affecting them is. Is it not? Have we not to respond to that crisis?

We ask that the Assembly:

"accepts the importance of timely diagnosis and treatment of cancer, as any delay can reduce the likelihood of a successful outcome".

I have not heard anything today to suggest that the Assembly does not accept that fact. The motion says that this is:

"symptomatic of the wider unprecedented crisis engulfing the ... health service".

Yes, it is a crisis and, yes, it is unprecedented. Has there been a time before when there have been 400,000 people on waiting lists, regardless, Minister, of how that is computed? The Minister said that the problems facing cancer services, increased demand and workforce planning, are reflective of pressures right across the health and social care system. We ask the Minister to intervene. Will she not? Why are parties voting against the motion today? Now, that really is opposition for opposition's sake.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. Thank you. That concludes the debate.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 32; Noes 62.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mrs Long,

Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Aiken and Mr Mullan.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Milne and Ms Seeley.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Members may take their ease while we make changes at the Table. Order. I ask Members, if they are leaving the Chamber, to do so quietly. Thank you.

5.15 pm

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy).]

Adjournment

Titanic Quarter Development

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): In conjunction with the Business Committee, I have given leave to Mrs Naomi Long to raise the matter of development at the Titanic Quarter. The Member will have 15 minutes.

Mrs Long: I am very pleased to be able to raise the issue of Titanic Quarter as a driver for the Northern Ireland economy in the Chamber today. I want to thank Minister Chris Hazzard for attending today to respond to the issues. I know that he is probably slightly jet-lagged, having been in China, and I appreciate him giving time at the end of today to respond to the debate.

The development of Titanic Quarter in East Belfast is of significance not just to my constituency but to the city of Belfast as a whole, and beyond to the surrounding economy in Northern Ireland. As someone who grew up in the shadow of Samson and Goliath, whose family located to East Belfast from north Antrim to avail itself of the employment opportunities there, whose father and grandfather both worked in Harland and Wolff and whose first work experience as a schoolgirl was in the apprentices' workshop of that same company, I, like many other people in East Belfast, feel a very strong connection and attachment to the site.

However, growing up in the 70s and the 80s, the glory days were over and, sadly, I experienced a place in decline. Indeed, my father was made redundant during that period as Harland and Wolff restructured and changed its business from being one of the world's most famous shipyards to what is today a smaller but more sustainable heavy engineering business. That was a difficult and challenging time for the business, for the supply-chain companies and above all for the community, which relied very heavily on the yard for employment and opportunity. However, with that challenge came fresh opportunity.

The site that is now known as Titanic Quarter became the largest waterfront site for potential redevelopment in western Europe, with the potential to again be a place of innovation, creativity and world-class endeavour, and a place that could generate education, training, employment, wealth and opportunity for the people of Belfast and far beyond. Over the first 10 years of development, we have started to see that potential unlocked, despite a property crash that occurred during that period, which impacted on investor confidence and on the demand for residential accommodation that drove some of the development of the site.

The development of Titanic Quarter relies heavily on positive working relationships with political, public, private and educational sectors, and has done so over the past decade of development. Through partnership with local and central government, Titanic Quarter Ltd is developing regeneration and investment to realise Belfast's ambition as a globally competitive city. In contrast with the period

of decline, 18,000 people now live and work in the Titanic Quarter and over a million people visit the site every year. Those people are contributing to the economic, educational and social regeneration of Northern Ireland. The success of Titanic Belfast, which is now recognised in a series of awards that have listed it as one of the world's top tourist attractions, has transformed the scale of opportunities available to grow our tourism industry in Belfast and beyond.

It is fascinating to watch large cruise ships, private yachts and tourist buses coming into Belfast and to see people from right across the world descend on the site and experience what is an incredible visitor facility. However, what is increasingly encouraging is that people from the area and many tourists remain on-site to visit the other maritime heritage assets that have been retained and reused on the site, such as the pump house, the dry dock, the slipways and the Nomadic, among many, many more. Even as we speak, work is ongoing to restore and repurpose the old Harland and Wolff drawing offices to provide much-needed hotel accommodation on-site.

Over 100 national and international organisations are established in the Titanic Quarter, including Citi, Microsoft, HBO and many others. The public-sector investment in Belfast Met is providing educational opportunities in what is an inspiring and high-quality environment, and I believe that that reflects the quality of education and training that is accessed inside. The work being done at Catalyst Inc in driving forward knowledge, supporting innovation and encouraging entrepreneurship is re-establishing Belfast as a world leader in science and technology. Titanic Quarter Ltd has invested £21.5 million in the enabling infrastructure on the site to make development to date possible. Crucially, £425 million has been invested in Titanic Quarter over the past 10 years, with a rates gain per annum of £4 million. Clearly, that is good news for East Belfast and the city of Belfast as a whole, but, crucially, it is good news for Northern Ireland, as the regional portion of those rates allows the Executive to redistribute the benefits to other areas.

Developing the site and doing so in a timely and energetic manner is hugely important to unlocking the wider potential of the city and Northern Ireland. Not to do so will inhibit our ability to provide the required office accommodation for those who are considering bringing foreign direct investment into Northern Ireland. When I have met representatives of such businesses, they have raised a number of issues that are crucial factors for them in making investment decisions. Availability of a suitably skilled workforce and the cost base of the location are, of course, important. However, high on their list is the need for high-spec office space in central locations.

Equally, if we are to grow and expand business and leisure tourism, it is imperative that we increase the number of hotels available in the city to accommodate those who visit. The need for accommodation has been highlighted to me on a number of occasions of late, when businesses that have sought accommodation for staff visiting Belfast midweek found that the only available rooms with a week's notice cost £350-plus per night, almost double the comparable room rates in London and Dublin. Clearly, that raises the cost of doing business in Northern Ireland and is a disincentive for those who want to visit and, more importantly, to extend their visit beyond a day trip to take

in the other sights and experiences Northern Ireland as a whole has to offer.

It is imperative that the impetus and partnership working that has driven the development thus far continues to drive it into the future. Sadly, over the last while, progress has slowed, so I thought the debate was a timely reminder of the potential of that site and the need for continued pressure to make sure progress is delivered.

It is projected that a further £365 million of investment will be made on the site in the next five years. That will create permanent employment of around 9,000 jobs, or, to put it in cash terms, jobs with an employment value of £285 million per annum to the local economy. That is in addition to the 1,000 construction jobs per year and the rates payable of £4.5 million per year that such a development could generate. The benefits of that are far-reaching for our economy, our public finances and our competitiveness internationally. It also offers huge gains not just in the greater Belfast area but for businesses in the supply chain across Northern Ireland, promoting tourist and heritage assets and growing services businesses that can regenerate communities far removed from Titanic Quarter in collaboration with those host businesses. The increased rates gain allows that benefit to be felt by those who use our public services, wherever they are accessed.

Recognising that the city of Belfast and Titanic Quarter can be economic drivers for the wider economy makes it all the more crucial that any impediments to progressing swiftly with the development of the site are addressed. Planning approval has already been given for a further 3 million square feet of residential, hotel, office, tourism and leisure facilities. It is that blend of uses — that mix of residential, tourism, education and retail — that has provided us with a successful and vibrant quarter. The focus on creating a shared and inclusive space in which everyone feels safe and welcome, in which everyone can pursue their ambitions and from which everyone in East Belfast and right across Northern Ireland can benefit is critical to its success. The inclusion of the Dock cafe, which is a multi-denominational project of a coffee shop that operates on an honesty box principle, has brought heart and spirit into the site, fostering a sense of community on what was previously a wasteland.

It is clear that there are significant opportunities going forward. However, if those are to be unlocked, it will require a continuation not just of the driving vision behind Titanic Quarter but of the close partnership working with local and central government, private sector bodies and public-sector bodies and the local community in East Belfast and beyond to ensure the necessary positive relationships between the various stakeholders on the site are fostered and maintained going forward.

Working across sectors is challenging, but with that challenge comes huge reward. I extend to the Minister an opportunity and an invitation to meet the stakeholders, including Titanic Quarter Limited and the harbour commissioners, on the site, hear their experiences and consider how his Department and those of his ministerial colleagues can support those endeavours. I hope that the Minister, on behalf of the Executive, will also be able to commit to doing all within his remit to ensure that the pipeline of investment continues and the full potential of what is a unique site is finally unlocked for all Northern Ireland.

5.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I advise the House that all other Members will have approximately six minutes.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Member for securing the Adjournment debate. First of all, I want to declare an interest: I am a trustee of the Titanic Foundation, which delivered the iconic Titanic building in 2012. I was a trustee even before I entered politics. I also want to say a word of thanks to Titanic Quarter for giving me some of this information. The only problem is that it has given me the same information that my colleague has. I trust that the honourable Member for East Belfast will forgive me if I regurgitate some stuff; hopefully, I will spot it and move on.

I was in the Titanic Quarter recently with some of the directors when they talked about their projections for the future and some of the plans that they have. Pat Doherty, who hails from Donegal, has been the driving force behind Titanic Quarter; he is a real man of vision. I met him in the early days. In one of my first experiences, I had a good fight with one of his staff, who suggested that we take down the iconic Samson and Goliath cranes, put them somewhere else in Belfast and build apartments. Thankfully, the cranes are now listed, and I am delighted about that.

In the early 1990s, I took my father for a drive round Queen's Island. As we looked at the neglect, the decline and the blight, he was in tears, because he had fond memories of working there over the years. He had been a red-leader at the yard in the 1950s and 1960s, and, like me, although I had been down a number of times, he was shocked to see how the area had declined. This morning, my friend and colleague Maurice Kinkead and I cycled round the area, now known as Titanic Quarter. All I can say is that, for visitors who have been coming to Belfast over a number of years, it must be remarkable to see the very positive developments that are taking place there. I am in that area most days, and, as Van Morrison would say, it is my source; it is somewhere I feel at home and at peace. I have fond memories of going down to get my father's wages before he went on the drink. Those are great memories.

As the honourable Member said, apart from the hugely successful physical developments, 18,000 people now live in that area and over one million people visit every year. I looked at the Titanic website earlier today. It says:

"Titanic by name, Titanic by nature, Belfast's Titanic Quarter is one of the world's largest urban-waterfront regeneration projects. Master-planned over 185 acres on the site where RMS Titanic was designed and built, Titanic Quarter is redefining what it means to work, live, play and stay in central Belfast."

Of course, it has been a huge success. One of the things that I and some other MLAs have been trying to do is connect Titanic Quarter with the working-class areas of east Belfast, the areas where the people who worked in the yard worshipped, went to the bookies and had their drinks. My friend and colleague, the Reverend Mervyn Gibson, is minister of Westbourne Presbyterian Church. They have a great plan to transform that church — the shipyard church — which, at one time, had about 1,800 people there on a Sunday. As a church, it was about the shipyard. I know that he has been in touch with my

colleague the Finance Minister trying to get a wee bit of help and support.

We could not talk about the Titanic Quarter without highlighting Titanic Belfast, recently named as Europe's leading visitor attraction at the prestigious World Travel Awards held in Sardinia, Italy, in August, during which we welcomed our 3,000,000th visitor and experienced our busiest month since opening. It saw us beat off stiff competition from Buckingham Palace, the Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, the Eiffel Tower in France and the Roman Colosseum in Italy. Is it not tremendous that we were able to beat them off? Titanic Belfast opened in 2012 on the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic. The business plan projected 425,000 visitors, of whom between 130,000 and 165,000 would come from outside Northern Ireland. A lot of people said that it would not work and that, with 50% of its funding from the Executive, it was a threat to taxpayers' money. In the first year alone, there were 807,000 visitors. What a success story. I think that the iconic Titanic building says it all about the area. It has been regenerated and is a place that people want to visit to work and play, but we need to make those connections with inner East Belfast.

Mr Allen: Like the previous Member, I thank our colleague in East Belfast for bringing the Adjournment debate before the House and indeed the Minister for giving up his time to respond to the debate. Like the previous Member, I will attempt not to cover areas that have already been covered.

Belfast's Titanic Quarter is a 75-hectare brownfield site of largely cleared land located at Queen's Island within the Belfast harbour estate, close to Belfast city centre. The site was once part of the Harland and Wolff shipyard, which, at the height of its success, employed over 30,000 people. On that point, I think that, if you went throughout East Belfast and indeed other parts of Northern Ireland, you would struggle to find people who did not have a direct affinity with the shipyard. I have an affinity with it because my stepfather worked there. I remember, unfortunately quite a number of years ago, which is a crying shame, having the opportunity to go to a fun day in the shipyard and see the sheer scale of it in action. I very much enjoyed that; indeed, it was an annual event that the shipyard put on for the children of its employees. I very much looked forward to that event.

The Titanic Quarter is a large-scale regeneration waterfront comprising historic maritime landmarks, film studios, education facilities, apartments, a riverside entertainment district and the world's largest Titanic-themed attraction centred on land in Belfast harbour. Known until 1995 as Queen's Island, the 185-acre or 75-hectare site was previously occupied by part of Harland and Wolff. With 1.5 million square feet completed and a further 3 million square feet with planning approval, the Titanic Quarter's sheer scale allows it to offer a diverse range of modern workspace accommodation. The already completed 130,000-square foot Gateway Offices, located at the entrance of Titanic Quarter, is a template for the rest of the development. Fully occupied by Citi, the LEED "gold" building is one of Europe's most sustainable and environmentally friendly buildings, providing space for 1,300 workers.

The largest development is the £97 million Titanic Belfast visitor attraction, which holds the record for the island's largest-ever single concrete pour — 4,300 cubic metres for

its foundations. The building opened on 31 March 2012. I acknowledge my colleague for East Belfast's contribution to that. I congratulate and thank him for bringing that forward because it is a massive asset to East Belfast. The attraction had over 800,000 visitors in its first year. It is owned and run by a charitable foundation. The architects said:

"we have created an architectural icon that captures the spirit of the shipyards, ships, water crystals, ice, and the White Star Line's logo. Its architectural form cuts a skyline silhouette that has been inspired by the very ships that were built on this hallowed ground."

As the proposer of the Adjournment topic pointed out, the further development of the site has economic value for Northern Ireland as a whole. A rates dividend will extend from that, on top of what has already been secured. I look forward to continuing to work with our colleagues. In the House, we agree or disagree on things, but this is an area on which we can unite and work together to secure further development on the site. I look forward to hearing the Minister's remarks; indeed, I look forward to working with the Minister in any way that I can to help promote Titanic Belfast.

In finishing, I reiterate what the previous Member to speak said: it is imperative that we continue to link Titanic Quarter with the working class of East Belfast and wider east Belfast. Like us, they are stakeholders in trying to develop the area.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome this opportunity. I thank my colleague Naomi Long for bringing forward this important topic for debate today. It allows us to set out the importance of Titanic Quarter as a key social and economic driver for East Belfast, Belfast as a whole and Northern Ireland. The Assembly and the Executive have rightly set out to achieve the regionalisation of economic development in Northern Ireland, but, as my colleague said, Titanic Quarter will be absolutely vital to ensuring that we achieve that. We want to ensure that our Executive Ministers continue to prioritise Titanic Quarter in Belfast as key to achieving that aim.

As many Members have said, Titanic Quarter is one of the most exciting development spaces in Northern Ireland. We have heard that 18,000 people live and work there, with over one million people visiting every year. We have had three million visitors to Titanic Belfast. Over 100 national and international organisations are established in Titanic Quarter, generating rates per annum of around £4 million. There are exciting future plans for the site, and we want to ensure that our Ministers take heed of them and give their support to them.

We have seen a decade of development at Titanic Quarter that has made it a world-class tourist destination, an education, film and media campus and now a growing residential community, with space for the grade-A premium offices that are so badly needed in Belfast to drive our development. Of course, it is also a site for business and scientific innovation. Titanic Belfast is at the centre of that. Further to it being awarded the title of Europe's leading visitor attraction, we now have the opportunity to vote for Titanic Belfast to become the world's leading tourist attraction. I encourage all Members to promote that opportunity by directing people to titanicbelfast.com/vote and #VoteTitanicBelfast. I believe that voting remains open until 24 October. If we can garner enough public support, we can ensure that Titanic Belfast takes its rightful spot as the official number one world tourist attraction.

It is important to note that Titanic Belfast has struck the balance between the respectful commemoration of a tragic loss of life and human fallibility and the celebration of the historic human endeavour and innovation that has inspired people at that site for many years. It has also inspired the type of innovation that we are now seeing and for which we want to seek further support for its development.

At Titanic Quarter, we also have extremely exciting projects such as T13. T13's anchor tenant is Belfast Urban Sports. People such as Liam Lynch do fantastic social entrepreneurship in that area. They host fantastic local media production companies such as Stellify Media, involving local people such as Kieran Doherty and Matt Worthy. They have produced a prime-time game show called 'Can't Touch This' that people may have seen on Saturday evenings. It was made in T13 in Titanic Quarter, Belfast. As my colleague Naomi Long said, it is vital that we work with local and regional government to ensure that the huge potential of the sites across Titanic Quarter is used to nurture the creativity that we have among our people in Northern Ireland.

5.45 pm

The Dock Café, the Dock Market and the Arc apartments and, of course, the Reverend Chris Bennett have all been mentioned and have brought heart and soul into Titanic Quarter. We have the SSE Arena, led by the Odyssey Trust and home to the Belfast Giants, which has given us a real shared sport that everyone in Belfast and Northern Ireland has been able to get to.

There are key links from Titanic Quarter into East Belfast to sculptures like the Yardmen, in inner east Belfast. It is vital that we continue to ensure that there is infrastructure in Titanic Quarter that links it to the local communities, not least by some of the impressive cycling infrastructure that was previously supported by you, Deputy Speaker, in your time as Regional Development Minister. Hopefully, we can see more of that to link those communities.

There are exciting plans in place for Titanic Quarter, with a possible further 1,000 construction jobs per annum, permanent employment of 9,000 jobs and payable rates of £4-5 million with a mix of residential, community, tourism, education, retail and innovation available. We want to see our Executive get behind that and make Titanic Quarter the local engine room for international economic growth, employment, creativity and innovation that it can be and, indeed, make it the shared space that can inspire a united and prosperous Northern Ireland.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Tá áthas orm páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht seo anocht. I am delighted to take part in the debate tonight. Chris Lyttle did not leave much for the rest of us. He gave us a virtual tour of the Titanic Quarter. Like my colleague, Mr Douglas, I have a connection to the former shipyard and to East Belfast because my father worked in the shipyard. He recalled working in a blizzard of asbestos at a time when they were cleaning old heating units on ships that had been decommissioned. I suppose he was fortunate because there were not a lot of people from Ramoan Gardens or Andersonstown working in the shipyard at that time, but I have always felt a great connection to the shipyard. I was delighted to see rising from much of where the shipyard was — I know that Harland and Wolff is very much still in business — really

a new Belfast, where everyone is welcome, diversity is treasured and prosperity is the goal.

I really want to echo some of the points that Chris made and maybe mention some different people. He mentioned the Dock Café, and I think the generosity of the Dock Café is a great symbol of the new Titanic Quarter, of the new East Belfast and of the new Belfast. I want to mention the Cast and Crew restaurant because we really know that the revitalisation of an area is taking place when you see an art gallery or a restaurant. In another part of East Belfast, we have seen the ArtisAnn art gallery in Bloomfield Avenue opening recently. When Cast and Crew took over what was an old bank building, Niall and Joanne McKenna invested their own money, turning it around. I have met cyclists there early on a Saturday morning, stopping to have their breakfast. Also, late at night, some nights, they bring life back into the area. The entrepreneurs who are the pioneers and put the first stake in the ground are those we need to reward and acknowledge.

Mr Douglas: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Yes of course.

Mr Douglas: I am sure the Member will agree that in Cast and Crew you get some of the best porridge in Belfast. On a more serious note — I have seen the Member running up and down Titanic Quarter — do you agree, and hopefully the Minister will pick this up, that one of the weaknesses at the moment is that we have one road in and one road out? We definitely need new infrastructure there if it is going to expand and grow.

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

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Hopefully, as the peace process between the harbour and Titanic blossoms we will see that bridge. We definitely need another bridge across to the new Hyatt hotel and to the Baker and McKenzie offices and so on. I agree with him on improved infrastructure. I also want to say that we need to see more entrepreneurs investing there. I want to talk, in a second, about the large business projects that are there, but we need to find ways to encourage entrepreneurs to go in. When the new hotel opens in the drawing rooms, that will be a great lift. However, I would like to see more indigenous entrepreneurs have a go at making a living off the back of the tourism and the other people who visit Titanic Quarter every day.

The only other group that I want to mention is Catalyst Inc, formerly the Northern Ireland Science Park. The leadership of Dr Norman Apsley, Steve Orr and Alan Watts is absolutely exemplary; they are true pioneers. Their focus is on job creation, and they are determined to create a reputation for us as a hotbed of innovation, research and cutting-edge technology. I really love their approach; they just get things done, and the force and conviction they bring to their mission is absolutely inspiring. I met them earlier this year at a meeting with the board of Catalyst Inc, after its rebranding, to hear the ambition and scale of their plans. It gives you great heart and, when you meet them, they tell you, "Here's the plan we need help with immediately and, by the way, we've another one in two years' time". They are particularly good at spreading the love and want to get involved in other projects outside East Belfast, and I commend that.

I am really hopeful in the short time ahead — I have discussed some of this with Mr Lyttle — that we will see more cranes above Titanic Quarter; that we will see an additional hotel go in — as well as the boutique hotel that is going into the Titanic drawing rooms — perhaps in front of Titanic Belfast; that we see additional grade-A office space beside the wonderful offices of Citigroup; and that we see another building go in for the cutting-edge knowledge economy jobs that Catalyst Inc are bringing to the quarter. These are just some of the projects, and I have no doubt that they will be complemented by other people, but the drive will have to be to increase the pace of the transformation that we have seen in that part of the city.

Last word — Belfast badly needs an art gallery. We know that Pat Doherty is a great fan of the arts, and of art. They had a plan on the table some years ago, but whether it is at Titanic Quarter or is for Belfast City Council to consider, I am not sure where this 21st century European-class art gallery should go in Belfast. Certainly, I would be very supportive of anyone who comes forward with more cultural and arts projects for Titanic Quarter.

Mr McGrath: I begin by apologising on behalf of my Belfast colleagues who cannot make it this evening due to ill-health and the passing of a party colleague.

Like all the other Members who are speaking this evening, I acknowledge and celebrate the achievement of the Titanic experience. It is now rated as one of the best tourist facilities in the world, and it proves the value that there can be in signature tourism projects. In that regard, it would be remiss of me not to mention — just as a little drop-in — other possible signature projects, such as the St Patrick's project, and, of course, Downpatrick would like to be able to join in some of the success there. Turning to Titanic Quarter, I suppose —

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. It is hugely important that we use Titanic Quarter as an opportunity to signpost exactly those kinds of things and make sure that when people come they do not arrive on a cruise ship and then disappear but stay in a hotel in Titanic Quarter and visit places as far away as Downpatrick.

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

Mr McGrath: Thank you, and I welcome the intervention. Of course, I would say that they should visit Titanic Quarter and then come to Downpatrick and stay in a hotel. A hotel development in Downpatrick may be the subject, hopefully, of a future debate.

It is connectivity, not isolation that I want to gently touch on. We support the proper and full development of Titanic Quarter. It is a huge land mass and it has immense potential and an immense future that will create a great part of the city. However, we would like to see it very much as part of complementing the development of the whole city, using its connections to ensure that each part of Belfast gets the opportunity to develop. Care needs to be taken to ensure that we do not concentrate all our investment and development in one part of the city. I think that there can be a bit of a sense in north and west Belfast, maybe, that there is not as much support going there as there could be. So, whilst we certainly welcome the development of Titanic Quarter and do not want to deprive it of the development that it should get, we want to see it as

being part of a wider development of the whole city and a wider strategy.

It would be really good to see within the city centre the development of things such as John Lewis. We must make sure that we do not concentrate things like that on out-of-town-centre areas. There is a bit of concern amongst traders that everything could move out to the peripheries of cities, and it can sometimes be at the expense of city centres. We would like to see the development of Titanic Quarter, but as part of an overall project.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member made the point about other areas of Belfast getting support, which I certainly encourage, but does the Member not agree with me that Titanic Quarter is a regional area for a whole range of different projects? An example is the Titanic slipway, where you have had the BBC Proms, Carl Frampton fighting and, this year, the Euro fanzone for both the Republic of Ireland and the Northern Ireland fans. That is regional, in any sense.

Mr McGrath: I thank the Member for his intervention. It is articulating what I am saying as well: we want to see all of that development in Titanic Quarter, but as part of a wider strategy that allows for the development of other parts of the city that may feel they are not being as well developed.

The Odyssey Trust, which was a millennium project, has well served the city. It is an education trust and a big business. The SDLP believes that more of its profits should be invested in the trust's stated objective, which is education. Imagine what more of its balance sheet invested in East Belfast in educational intervention could do to areas such as the Short Strand, the Newtownards Road and Dee Street, which are a hop, skip and jump away from that Titanic Quarter area. We would like to see that happening. It will allow greater connectivity between the local people living in the area, and these regional facilities that are centred within the Titanic Quarter. However, I am advised that the Odyssey Trust is one of the least accountable organisations in Northern Ireland, and that its balance sheet deserves closer scrutiny. It should spend more of its money on educational provision. It was set up to do that, and it should do more.

In general, the harbour estate is a strategic asset for Belfast and Northern Ireland. The concentration of economic development in the harbour estate, particularly in the waterside of the Lagan, is sometimes a matter of grave concern. Whilst we certainly welcome investment, a concentration of investment in Titanic Quarter and the harbour can create economic imbalance in the city and deepen economic partition for the north of the city. With the Queen's University and Titanic Quarter corridor at risk of receiving all economic investment, meaning that it becomes concentrated and not diversified, it can leave areas such as the north and west of Belfast being denied investment. We must develop all parts of the city — Titanic Quarter for sure, but also the other parts.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I call the Minister for Infrastructure, Mr Chris Hazzard, to respond and conclude the debate. Minister, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): I thank Mrs Long for bringing the topic to the Assembly. She said at the outset that I have just returned from China, and I saw at first hand the interest not only in Titanic — they are building a complete replica of the Titanic in China, which shows the

worthiness and the value they place on it as a model to attract investment — but also 'Game of Thrones'. Here we have two massive investment opportunities centred right on the very location that we are talking about this evening. I am more than happy to be here to discuss this.

The redevelopment of Belfast waterfront has been a key feature in the economic regeneration of the city. It has resulted in the transformation of the Lagan and the reclaiming of the river as a key feature of the city centre — a social, as well as an economic, asset benefiting local communities. No one in this Chamber would dispute the importance of that transformation. Where once we had derelict sites, we now have thriving businesses and communities. The significant investment which the Government and others have taken forward in recent decades has allowed us to create the type of dynamic, urban environment central to attracting high-value businesses and investors. It has also been key to building the sense of pride and ambition within our communities along the Lagan.

I believe all of us in this Chamber recognise that the redevelopment of the harbour estate, and in particular Titanic Quarter, has been a key strand of that transformation. Since the Titanic Quarter master plan was launched in 2005, we have seen investment of some £358 million, and the successful delivery of major commercial, tourism, residential and education schemes, some of which, such as the award-winning Titanic signature project, have come to define Belfast internationally.

We now have over 18,000 people living, working and studying in Titanic Quarter, and over one million visitors per year come to what was, little more than a decade ago, a derelict former shipyard and building land.

6.00 pm

We have film studios and major financial and IT employers, all of which raise the profile of the North of Ireland and all of which, just over a decade ago, few of us would have anticipated.

The progress that has been made reflects the high level of commitment and support the Executive have provided to the redevelopment of Titanic Quarter, including investing £50 million in Titanic signature-related projects in recent years. That is part of our ongoing commitment to develop the tourism potential of Titanic Quarter, and it includes Tourism NI support towards the restoration and development of the historically significant HMS Caroline as a visitor attraction.

Further Tourism NI investment is planned for early next year with the construction of the Titanic waterside pathway, which will improve the connectivity between key heritage sites in the area and enhance the overall visitor experience in Titanic Quarter. That will benefit significantly from the investment the Department for Communities and the Belfast Harbour Commissioners have taken forward in the cycling and pedestrian infrastructure along the Lagan and through the harbour estate.

It is important we recognise the Executive's commitment and support for the redevelopment of Titanic Quarter, including that of my Department working with Titanic Quarter Ltd (TQL) to address the infrastructure challenges associated with major development. Indeed, the introduction of the new Belfast —

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for giving way. While he is on the topic of developing fit-for-purpose infrastructure, perhaps I can bring to his attention — he may already be aware of this — the need to improve the Dee Street roundabout/Sydenham bypass junction that leads to the Sydenham Road and into Titanic Quarter. Hopefully, that is something he can keep on his agenda as well.

Mr Hazzard: Absolutely. As the Member across the way from me suggested, to develop a lot of the stuff we are talking about here, we need the infrastructure to be in tandem. Otherwise, we would be simply wasting our time, and there would be congestion and gridlock that we would not be able to deal with. I will, of course, be keeping such projects on the radar.

The introduction of the new Belfast rapid transit (BRT) system will greatly assist in opening up further opportunities by providing high-quality public transport connections between Titanic Quarter and Belfast city centre, as well as to our major population centres in west Belfast and east Belfast. This goes back to my South Down colleague's comments about ensuring that all of Belfast and, indeed, the wider North can generate prosperity from Titanic Quarter. There has been criticism in recent years that Belfast city centre was moving east. It is important that we do not have a situation where investment and opportunity are sucked into a particular quarter, meaning that we do not have the ability to expand. The BRT system will link east to west through the city centre, so it is vital that the Casement redevelopment and the Andersonstown leisure centre — those are just two projects that come to my mind — progress well and that we have the flow of people, goods and services that the Programme for Government says should be right across our city.

It is equally important that we recognise the role of others, in particular the Belfast Harbour Commissioners, in supporting and enabling development at Titanic Quarter as an integral part of the wider regeneration of the harbour estate. That regeneration, of course, is not limited to Titanic Quarter. It includes over £60 million of investment by the commissioners in key projects such as City Quays 1 and 2, the City Quays Hotel, the Science Park and cruise terminal, among others — projects that are central to Belfast's ability to attract the high-value investment we seek.

I recognise, as we all do, that over the years there have been tensions in the relationship between the commissioners and TQL. It is unfortunate that too often that distracted from the positive contribution both parties have made to the regeneration of Belfast, particularly given that the tensions were not a result of different levels of ambition for the regeneration of the quarter. The commissioners and TQL have worked together for more than a decade to deliver projects and realise the ambition of the agreed master plan for the redevelopment of the quarter. We would not be where we are today without the hard work and dedication of both. In supporting the development of Titanic Quarter, however, it is important we recognise that the harbour commissioners have a responsibility to have proper regard to the public interest and commercial considerations. It would be entirely inappropriate for the commissioners to operate in a way that was not consistent with that obligation or, indeed, for the Government to seek unnecessarily to influence commercial negotiations.

Tensions in any relationship, particularly commercial relationships, are to be expected. It is the ability to resolve these and to continue to work together in the common interest that is important rather than ignore their existence. In that context, I think that we can all agree that the signing of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the harbour commissioners and TQL in May this year was a very welcome development, as it provides an opportunity to reinvigorate Titanic Quarter and resolve outstanding differences. I believe that we are already seeing the fruits of that, with progress made on the exhibition centre, hotel accommodation and new film studios.

In signing the agreement, both parties recognised that Titanic Quarter is a major economic opportunity for the North of Ireland. Both also committed to act with the utmost good faith to reach agreement to facilitate viable current and future development projects. That is to be welcomed. The signing of the new MOU has prompted the review of the previous Titanic Quarter master plan, which is under way. This provides an opportunity to consider not just the respective roles and responsibilities of the commissioners and TQL but to look at the infrastructure requirements to enable the further development of the Titanic Quarter site. Looking forward, while differences will emerge at the level of individual projects or investment proposals, the agreement provides an appropriate framework to resolve those through negotiation.

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the Adjournment debate today. The comments from Members today reflect the importance that we all attach to the development of Titanic Quarter. I can assure you that I will do everything that I can to support that development, and I conclude by welcoming the commitment of the Belfast harbour commissioners and TQL to driving forward the development of Titanic Quarter. I also congratulate Members for their obvious display of passion and dedication to a project that really does have the ability to transform not just our city but our inner-city communities that really need that transformation. Finally, I am more than happy to meet the Member and the people whom she wants me to meet in the months ahead.

Mr Douglas: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hazzard: Yes.

Mr Douglas: I suggest that, during that visit, you go on the wee tram that Reverend Chris organises. It is a fabulous wee tour and takes only five or 10 minutes. I will pay for you if you want to go on it. *[Laughter.]*

Mrs Long: That is bribery and corruption.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I recommend it because I have done it. Hansard will record that you will pay for that. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Hazzard: On that bombshell, I am more than happy to retire.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I notice that he did not extend that offer to others.

Adjourned at 6.07 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 24 October 2016

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 want to raise with you a point on Standing Order 19(5) in respect of the asking of questions for written and oral answer. I have in mind questions for written answer. Standing Order 19(5) is emphatic. It says:

"A question must be answered as clearly and as fully as possible."

I suspect that I am not the only Member who finds that some answers are the very antithesis of that; they avoid the question and do not answer it. Two examples of many are AQW 586/16-21 and AQW 4663/16-21. What sanction or capacity is there to ensure that Standing Order 19(5) is honoured by the Executive Office and others and that they answer the questions that are actually asked?

Mr Speaker: Mr Allister, as you will understand, I and every Member would expect a question to be answered as fully as possible. That is within the procedures. You also know that there are other ways in which you can follow up on the matter, and I expect you to follow those procedures.

Executive Committee Business

Welfare Supplementary Payment (Benefit Cap) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I beg to move

That the draft Welfare Supplementary Payment (Benefit Cap) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 be approved.

The regulations are being brought in under article 137 of the Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 and will make provision for mitigating changes to welfare benefits introduced under article 101 of the Order.

The draft statutory rule was approved by the Communities Committee on 13 October.

The regulations have been made following the publication of the welfare reform mitigations working group proposals on how the Executive should help the most vulnerable in society as a consequence of the introduction of a number of changes to the welfare system. I take the opportunity to thank Professor Evason and her colleagues on the working group for the work completed, in a limited time frame, to bring recommendations to the Executive that were subsequently endorsed on 21 January.

Members may recall that an initial set of mitigating measures that was debated in the House in March this year has now been made. Those regulations — the Welfare Supplementary Payments Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 — provided mitigation payments for claimants affected by the introduction of the £26,000 benefit cap that came into effect on 31 May this year. The Westminster Government have already legislated to reduce the benefit cap levels to £20,000 a year for families and £13,400 a year for single people who live outside greater London. Those new benefit cap levels will be introduced in Great Britain on 7 November this year.

The regulations for debate today will enable my Department to implement mitigation payments to claimants with families who are impacted on by the new benefit cap levels, which, it is expected, will also be introduced in Northern Ireland on 7 November. The provisions are to be made by way of amendment to existing regulations, namely the Welfare Supplementary Payments Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016. The existing regulations allow the Department to make mitigation payments to people with children who are affected by the £26,000 benefit cap. Other than the amendments, which I will now explain, the regulations will not make any changes to the administration of the existing scheme.

The regulations provide for the calculation of a welfare supplementary payment from the date on which the new benefit cap of £20,000 is introduced. For those already affected by the £26,000 benefit cap and receiving a welfare supplementary payment, that means that their payments will be adjusted from 7 November. Families not already affected by the £26,000 benefit cap will be entitled to a payment from the first date that the £20,000 benefit cap applies to them.

There is already a basic requirement that all claimants must be ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland and that they continue to reside here while mitigation payments are made. The regulations will also have the effect of ensuring that payments are made only to those who are resident in Northern Ireland on 6 November 2016. This is a Northern Ireland-specific scheme, so it is important to ensure that mitigation payments can be accessed only by claimants from Northern Ireland who have been affected by the welfare reforms.

As Members are aware, the Fresh Start working group recommended that only families with children affected by the benefit cap should receive a mitigation payment. That means that couples and single people without children who are affected by the benefit cap will not receive a welfare supplementary payment. Those claimants will, however, be able to apply for financial support through discretionary housing payments. Discretionary housing payments are extra payments to help people pay their rent.

The Department is currently delivering mitigation payments for the £26,000 benefit cap, as proposed by the working group. The provisions in the regulations will ensure that that important financial support is extended to the many vulnerable people who will be affected by this further welfare reform, while remaining within the agreed budget.

The new benefit cap will restrict the total amount of benefit paid to families to £20,000, and the cap will be applied through a claimant's housing benefit. The main out-of-work and child-related benefits that are included when calculating the benefit cap are jobseeker's allowance (JSA), income support and employment and support allowance (ESA), except where the support component has been awarded. A household is exempt from the benefit cap if it is entitled to working tax credits, carer's allowance or a range of disability-related benefits. Guardian's allowance will also become an exemption from 7 November 2016.

Mitigation payments will be made to families who receive more than £20,000 a year, provided that they have been continuously in receipt of any combination of the welfare benefits that contribute to the calculation of the benefit cap from 6 November 2016 until the point at which they are impacted on by the £20,000 benefit cap. That will include families who may initially have been exempt but later lose that exemption and are impacted on by the £20,000 benefit cap and families who are initially below the benefit cap level but for whom a change in circumstances later causes their benefit income to exceed the £20,000 benefit cap.

Claimants will receive a payment equal to the amount by which their benefit is capped, so there will effectively be no loss of benefit. These payments are transitional in nature and are intended to assist claimants with the transition from the current benefit system to the new welfare system. The mitigation scheme is due to end on 31 March 2020.

Households will continue to receive welfare supplementary payments at the same level unless the amount by which their housing benefit is capped is reduced. Further measures, which were recommended by the working group to mitigate welfare reform, are currently being prepared with a view to these being presented to the Executive in the coming months. These include provisions to mitigate the social sector size criteria and a new cost-of-work allowance scheme.

Mr Eastwood (The Chairperson of the Committee for Communities): These regulations are the latest in a series that provide the legal basis for the implementation of the mitigation measures recommended by the welfare reform mitigation measures working group led by Professor Eileen Evason. While we have distinct differences about the overall approach to welfare reform, as it is called, it did provide some assurance when the package of mitigation measures was agreed.

Many of us, in all parties, were concerned about the potential for the benefit cap to cause hardship to those on benefits, particularly to families. That cap of £26,000 was introduced in May of this year. However, we will soon be in a position, come 7 November, where the benefit cap will be reduced further. Just to be clear, the new cap for families will be £20,000, and for single people and couples without children it will be £13,400. In DWP-speak, this is to make the benefits system fairer and to incentivise people into full-time employment, but personally, I am not sure about that. I suppose not being able to feed or clothe your family or heat your home is as draconian an incentive as you can get.

The Department has advised that an estimated 2,600 households will be impacted by the new cap. It is important to note that the mitigation payments which the regulations will allow for will only apply to families with children, as per the recommendation of the working group. Couples without children and single people without dependants will not receive a mitigation payment. A mitigation payment will also apply only to those people in receipt of benefit on the day before the cap comes in. In other words, new claims on or after 7 November will not be subject to mitigation payments. This means that, although any current welfare supplementary payments based on the £26,000 cap will end and future payments for families will be based on the £20,000 cap mitigation, mitigation payments will make up the difference, unless, that is, the applicant's circumstances change. It is important to note that the mitigation payments will only be paid until 31 March 2020, as long as a person's circumstances do not change in that time.

It is also important to consider how the Department communicates these changes to people who are affected by the revised cap. Members of the Committee have raised this with officials on several occasions and have suggested sending a single letter to people to highlight the change that applies to them and the mitigation measures if applicable. It is also important to consider whether the Department should provide, for example, an annual reminder to those in receipt of payments noting that they are scheduled to end by 31 March 2020.

The Committee has been told that people who will be impacted by the new cap but who will not receive a mitigation payment can apply for a discretionary housing payment to make up the shortfall in their rent. It seems that the discretionary housing payment is the Department's key safety net for people whose benefits will be reduced. After

March 2020, this fund, in lieu of any other arrangements, may well be under considerable pressure. Perhaps the Minister could comment on the current pressures on that fund, whether he anticipates it will increase and for what period, on average, awards from this fund are given. Also, does he have any concerns about people falling into rent arrears as a result of the welfare changes, and is he considering any other contingencies to prevent this and therefore reduce the potential risk of increased homelessness?

12.15 pm

The mitigation measures are important to help people with families in the short term, and the Committee agrees that the Assembly should affirm these regulations. However, consideration needs to be given to what type of welfare system we want and can afford post-March 2020. I encourage the Minister to start that work sooner rather than later.

Mr Beggs: Since 31 May, there has been a benefit cap introduced into Northern Ireland at £26,000 for families. However, since the legislative consent motion, there has been little point in our discussing the merits or otherwise of the policy behind that because with that motion, which was approved with DUP and Sinn Féin support, the authority to set the policy in this area has been passed to Westminster. So, what we are talking about today is purely mitigation.

We need to look at what is being proposed here. Certainly it follows the Evason report in trying to protect some of those who would be most significantly affected by the changes as a result of this further reduction in benefits, with the cap being reduced to £20,000.

It would be helpful if the Minister could tell us what the estimated total cost to the annual budget will be for each of the remaining years of this Assembly. Again, what are the detailed eligibility criteria; and, if not all households are entitled, is there an alternative in place to support them? In particular, can he clarify the situation regarding new claimants?

It would also be helpful if the Minister advised, as was said by Mr Eastwood, on the work he has undertaken to plan beyond 2020 or, if there is nothing planned, how he is going to communicate that fact to those who would be affected so that they can start to plan accordingly.

Ms Gildernew: I support the motion. While I have listened carefully to other Members' contributions, the important thing to remember is that we are dealing with a British Tory party which is hell bent on austerity. We had a very difficult negotiation with the British Government for a long number of months a year or two ago.

The fact remains that there is not a bottomless pit of money. We have done our best to mitigate the worst ravages of this. It was important to protect families with children. I suppose we are concerned about the impact that it will have and I look forward to hearing the Minister's responses to some of the questions here today. I welcome the fact that families with children are being protected. It is incumbent upon us as an Assembly to do all we can to try to alleviate child poverty and take children out of poverty. I think that that has to be a priority for this Assembly.

Mr Givan: I am grateful for the consensus expressed around the Assembly in respect of these regulations. Let

me thank Mr Eastwood and his Committee for the way in which they have been able to deal with the regulations. Obviously, it is critically important that we get these improved, given that the impact will start on 7 November. This was put through the Executive successfully, and the Committee had its scrutiny role, so I am grateful that we have been able to introduce these regulations in time to provide the support that I know all of us in the Chamber want to provide.

As stated, the regulations will allow us to implement mitigation payments to assist claimants who are impacted by the revised benefit cap of £20,000. These measures are unique to Northern Ireland. I think that other jurisdictions look with envy at the way in which Northern Ireland has been able to put together a series of mitigation measures in respect of welfare reform. Whilst I accept an element of what Mr Beggs said in respect of these issues being dealt with at Westminster, obviously we have our own proposals to deal with it.

I draw the Member's attention to the fact that the reduction from £26,000 to £20,000 is a result of Conservative Party policy that his party signed up to when it ran joint candidates. The fact that the Assembly has had to introduce a series of — indeed, half a billion pounds' worth — mitigation measures flows from the proposals that the Ulster Unionist Party, when it had candidates, signed up to. It said that it would take the whip of the Conservative Party in London had any of its members been elected at that time. I appreciate that none of its members did get elected, but I draw that to the Member's attention. I value the scrutiny role that they have, but it is always important to go back to the genesis of these issues: Conservative Party policy that was supported by the Ulster Unionist Party in 2010.

I am pleased that we are putting together a very significant mitigation package that will go some way to alleviating the hardship that is being inflicted upon the people as a result of the Ulster Unionists', Conservative and Lib Dem, supported by the Alliance Party at the time, proposals. *[Interruption.]* The Executive can rightly take credit for putting together a proposal of half a billion pounds to alleviate some of the worst impacts that the Ulster Unionist Party signed up to. I appreciate that some Members do not like the truth, but it is important that the Ulster Unionists look back at the way in which they supported the 2010 Conservative Party. That is what we have to deal with.

There will be further implications as a result of the policies that the present Conservative Party is taking through Westminster. Those need to be grappled with, and the Executive will need to consider those issues in due course, but I am pleased that we were able to put together the regulation that is going through the Assembly today. It will provide £1 million this year to mitigate, and there will then be £8 million in each of the subsequent three years after it is implemented to help vulnerable people in our society who need support and whom the Executive have decided to support. I am grateful for the support of Members across the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Welfare Supplementary Payment (Benefit Cap) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 be approved.

Committee Business

Assembly Members' Pension Scheme: Trustees

Mr Speaker: As with other similar motions, this will be treated as a business motion. There will be no debate.

Resolved:

That the following Members are appointed as the trustees of the Assembly Members' pension scheme: Mr Ross Hussey, Mr Trevor Lunn, Mr Richie McPhillips, Ms Caitriona Ruane and Mr Jim Wells. — [Mr Maskey.]

Private Members' Business

HMP Maghaberry: Paramilitary Prisoners

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

Mr Beattie: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes that HMP Maghaberry is unique in the British Isles and much of Europe for the challenges it faces as a result of housing prisoners with such opposing political and ideological views and criminal backgrounds; further notes the continuing implementation of a flawed decision taken in 2003 to separate paramilitary prisoners and the impact that this is having on the operation of the prison and on the morale of public servants who live with its consequences; believes that the prison should gradually revert to its integrationist policy and that this should be reflected in the Executive's action plan on tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime; and calls on the Minister of Justice to put in place the framework to ensure that, by 2021, there are no new admissions to separate paramilitary wings and that, by 2026, there is a fully integrated prison regime.

First, I praise our Prison Service for its dedication, diligence, professionalism and courage in the most difficult of environments and circumstances. I pay tribute to the families of serving prison officers who were killed on duty; they have taken their hardship with great dignity and should not be forgotten.

The motion is in support of the Executive. It supports the DUP and Sinn Féin, Fresh Start and the action plan on tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime. 'A Fresh Start' says that we will:

"work collectively to achieve a society free of paramilitarism ... the disbandment of all paramilitary organisations and their structures; challenge paramilitary attempts to control communities ... and accept no authority, direction or control on our political activities other than our democratic mandate".

The motion supports the action plan on paramilitaries. It is important, as we take forward this work, that we keep in mind the ambitious outcomes that we are seeking to achieve: ultimately, a society in which citizens and communities feel safe and confident and in which paramilitarism has no place — no place. My motion dovetails with Fresh Start and the action plan. We are not here with this issue because we want to be; it was thrust upon us. I reach back —

Mr Stafford: I appreciate the Member giving way. He will be aware that prison officers do not have a trade union as such. They have a staff association: the POA. Could the Member detail for the House whether the Prison Officers' Association has approved the content of the motion?

Mr Beattie: I thank you for your comments. I have spoken to individual members, and they have accepted and agree with what I propose.

I throw this back to the Steele report, which came out at a time when the devolved institutions had collapsed, and there was a fair degree of concern over security and safety. The Government instigated the Steele report, and, in one month, they decided to revert to a separated regime. Twelve days later, that was where we went. They did so against the recommendations of the Prison Officers' Association, the Prison Governors Association and the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. The rationale for bringing in the separated regime was health and safety — safety for prisoners — although the institutions I have just named said that there was no issue. Interestingly, Mr Steele gave what was probably the real reason for going back to a separated regime when he said:

“it was clear to me and clear to a lot of people that [the paramilitaries] were about to mount a campaign inside and outside the prison ... I expected that if they were denied separation, those would steadily get worse and indeed that it would escalate to attacks on prison officers”.

That is the reason why we went back to a separated regime, and this view was perpetuated by Sinn Féin. Here we have, yet again, terrorists holding a gun to the head of Northern Ireland society, saying, “Do as we say, or we will return to violence”.

Mr Givan: I appreciate the Member giving way. Does he agree that, in August 2010, when the then Justice Minister, David Ford, reached what was called the August agreement, he used the same argument as the Steele report to make further concessions to republicans?

12.30 pm

Mr Beattie: Thank you very much for your intervention. I am just about to step into that little nugget now, if I may.

I am looking at the Sinn Féin amendment. It is full of great words, and I have to say that it is easy to support the words. I support some of the words because the amendment recognises that:

“all prisoners and all prison staff must be treated with dignity and respect”.

The Member talked about the principles agreed in August 2010, and they are virtually the same. They stated:

“Arrangements are predicated on mutual respect; Prisoner and staff safety must not be put at risk”.

That was in 2010. How did that work out? I will tell you how that worked out: it worked out with the death of prison officer Black; it worked out with the death of prison officer Ismay; it worked out with numerous prison officers being targeted for murder.

The amendment goes on to say that Sinn Féin supports:

“the planned independent” —

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beattie: No; not this time.

It supports:

“the planned independent review to examine the operation of the separated regime”.

That would be bravo 8 of the action plan, but it addresses the framework of the separated regime; it does not talk about ending it. Here is where we are: no independent reviewer has been nominated; no one has been found yet; no process has been put in place to find one; and no resources have been put in place to get one. We have not taken a single step forward. We do not even have a term of reference.

Do you know what? I will start with the term of reference. The term of reference is my motion: let us end it. The Ulster Unionist Party believes that the continuation of the separated regime gives paramilitaries an identity, a centre of gravity, a credibility — a perceived credibility — and an ability to direct terrorism from inside the prison at society outside the prison. I know that it is difficult to come up with a plan to end that. My plan is for nine years — nine years. It took them one month to force this on us, and I am looking for nine years to get rid of it. If I am to take criticism, I will take it because I am suggesting nine years when I know that there may be people here who think that it should be done straight away or within this mandate. I ask for nine years because people need time to get used to it. Between now and the end of the mandate, it is about making sure that people understand the idea of ending the separated regime. At the end of the mandate, it is about stopping new prisoners going into that regime. That gives us a full mandate to get into integration. It challenges the status quo. It feeds into Fresh Start and the action plan on paramilitarism.

There are issues, and I step up to those issues. First, the Secretary of State is the man who decides who goes or does not go into that prison. We are the elected representatives. We represent the people, and, if we do not want it, we need to stop it. We need to go to the Secretary of State, if that is what we have to do. We must go to the Minister of Justice. We must tell them that we do not want it any more; we want a normalised society. That is what the people want, and that is what we should deliver.

Should there be an all-Ireland solution? Can we have no separated regime in Northern Ireland while they have one in the Irish Republic? Do you know what? This is something that we have to talk about, and that is why I am talking about nine years from now — nine years. I keep saying that: nine years. Should we be flexible if, in 2026, prisoners who have been in the separated regime for a long time are still in jail? I think that we can be flexible. I think that we should allow them to see out their time in that regime.

It is telling that, in 2007, four years after separation, a Minister acknowledged that it would be desirable to see separation phased out as our political situation improved — I hope that it has improved — but he was quite clear that he did not envisage any early end to it. We believe that ending separation should be a high priority for those responsible for criminal justice after devolution and would welcome an early debate on the issue amongst Northern Ireland politicians.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Beattie: Do I not get a minute? Then, I conclude.

Mr Kearney: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after “Maghaberry” and insert

“is unique on these islands and much of Europe for the challenges it faces as a result of housing prisoners with diverse backgrounds who are subject to different court processes depending on the nature of their charges; recognises that all prisoners and all prison staff must be treated with dignity and respect; believes that there is a need for ongoing and comprehensive prison reform; and calls on the Minister of Justice to work jointly with the planned independent review to examine the operation of the separated regime, evidencing the need for any changes and providing useful information for stakeholders to take forward, as proposed by the report from the Fresh Start panel on the disbandment of paramilitary groups.”

Maghaberry prison is, indeed, unique in these islands. However, what should take primacy for us, as legislators and political leaders, is to ensure that all prison staff, all prisoners, their families and visitors to the prison are treated with dignity and respect. The penal system is one of democratic society's responses to the social context that produces offenders. Prison is not simply about the punishment of offenders; it is also about rehabilitation and reorientation to assist their transition back into society. Prison is a societal punishment but not at the cost of dehumanising prisoners or prison staff or degrading their rights. That must be the guiding vision and purpose of how prisons, including Maghaberry, should be run.

The history of prisons in this state is one of well-documented conflict. One lesson learned is to ensure that prisons no longer contribute to more or future political or communal instability. There have been significant changes to prison life in the North, including in Maghaberry prison. Placing responsibility for prisons under the control of the local Executive since 2008 has played an important role in promoting penal reform here. However, while prison reform is ongoing, it is neither completed nor comprehensive. That applies especially to Maghaberry prison. Comprehensive prison reform should be at the heart of the political and policy framework for the Department of Justice and the Assembly. Today's UUP motion completely misses the context and the necessary reform agenda. A prison reform based on approaches that make maximum use of all the available resources is necessary to progress that agenda. That means listening to the Prisoner Ombudsman; working closely with the Probation Board, NIACRO and the Children's Law Centre; learning from and being guided by penal reform experts; and engaging with other authoritative agencies. Importantly, the process of prison reform should be set in the context —

Mr Aiken: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kearney: Not at the moment.

— of the Fresh Start Agreement and specifically the planned independent review as proposed by the panel on the disbandment of paramilitary groups. But then, of course, the UUP opposed the Fresh Start Agreement.

The change champions in our Prison Service need to be politically supported by the Department of Justice and the Assembly. Sinn Féin will work constructively with the Minister, other parties and all agencies committed to positive change in Maghaberry and all our other penal institutions. For Maghaberry, that requires that management and operational systems are reformed. The

security mindset that continues to dominate needs to be replaced by a rehabilitative culture.

Let me be very clear on this point: no prison officer should be subjected to threats or intimidation or be harmed in any way at work or away from work. Prison officers are public servants from whom we expect the highest professional standards and accountability for prisoners' welfare and safety. They, in turn, deserve to be treated with respect and dignity and to know that they can depend on our support. However, transparency, consistency and adherence to best practice and human rights — I emphasise human rights — must also be at the heart of how Maghaberry prison is run. In recent weeks, shocking and —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kearney: Not at the moment.

In recent weeks, shocking and unacceptable failures in the prison have been brought to public attention. I am glad to say that much of it has been extensively scrutinised by the Justice Committee. It has also been discussed here on the Floor. The case of Sean Lynch was an unacceptable travesty. The treatment shown to him was inhumane. It was absolutely wrong.

The internal prison inquiry was deficient, and questions remain to be answered. There was a complete breakdown between the prison and the health services, and an absence of proper medical supervision contributed to the death of Patrick Kelly. As a result of the ombudsman's investigations into those cases, greater attention has been drawn to significant mental health concerns in Maghaberry prison. The Department of Justice, the Public Prosecution Service, the Assembly and society as a whole must look at sentencing and committal arrangements for people who are mentally ill and should not be sent to jail. Maghaberry prison should not be used as society's default option. Prison officers cannot be expected to manage complex cases when the proper skills and facilities do not exist in the Prison Service. However, there are other issues with conditions in Maghaberry that should give us all serious cause for concern.

Prisoners on integrated wings report habitual 23-hours-a-day lock-up, with only one hour for recreation or association. They are obliged to eat three daily meals in the cell space also occupied by their toilet. The routine prison diet has little or no nutritional value. Young prisoners in Maghaberry have reported to me that a lunch typically consists of a small bread sandwich containing a Spam filling with no butter and a small bag of crisps. While education facilities have improved — I commend the commitment of outside educationalists — prisoners who wish to attend classes have told me about difficulties in doing so. Prisoners report that parity of esteem does not exist for the Irish cultural identity, particularly with respect to the Irish language and language learning resources. That was confirmed in the July 2016 report by Criminal Justice Inspection (CJI). Ba chóir go mbeadh meas ag an dá thraidisiún ar a chéile san áit seo, sa stát seo, agus sna príosúin go háirithe.

Controlled movement and strip-searching in Roe House also remains a serious problem. Such practices dehumanise prisoners and prison staff. The template agreed in August 2010 between prisoners and prison staff should be revisited, because it contains the basis for resolution of those issues, which create avoidable and

unnecessary stress and conflict in the prison context. The prison environment should be kept free from outside political interference, including that of the NIO, which is currently using Maghaberry prison to wrongfully detain Tony Taylor on an extrajudicial basis.

Members, we need to be de-escalating and resolving contentious issues and practices in Maghaberry, not compounding problems. The UUP motion offers no properly thought-out approach to how that can be done. Our focus, as an Assembly, should be on making Maghaberry a stable, stress-free and safe environment for all staff, all prisoners and all those who visit the prison. Commitment to continuing, comprehensive prison reform based on principles of human dignity, decency and respect must be paramount. That is what the Assembly should work to achieve. That is what the Assembly should be debating today. That is the change agenda required in Maghaberry and what the Department of Justice must be accountable for delivering and demonstrating under the leadership of the Justice Minister. Molaim an leasú.

12.45 pm

Mr Frew: The motion from the UUP on ending the separation of prisoners in Maghaberry is something that, of course, we have aspired to achieve for many, many years from manifesto to manifesto. The decision was taken in 2004 by Her Majesty's Government, and there were options looked at at the time. One option was reopening the Maze prison to allow for separated prisoners. Of course, we could never support going back to the days of the Maze and the regimes in it.

We owe a large debt of gratitude to the prison staff who work day in, day out, in our prisons, not only at Maghaberry, of course, but across our prison estate. They do tremendous work, and nobody, with the exception of their families, realises just how tremendous that work is. If there is a message that we need to send, it is this: we support you, we respect you and we will try and do everything that we can to better support you in your day job. Of course, it is not only a day job. Officers in the Prison Service are faced, every hour, with the risk of death, of assassination, of being blown to smithereens. That is something that I suspect is unbearable at times for the families and for the prison staff involved, both male and female, of course.

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for giving way. Did it not gall prison officers, their families and the wider Northern Ireland public when the report that concluded that Maghaberry was the most dangerous prison also claimed that prison officers were under no greater threat here than anywhere else in the United Kingdom? Was the death of Adrian Ismay not a clear indication that our prison officers operate under a very different regime from that in any other part of the United Kingdom?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for his intervention, and he is absolutely right: it is pie in the sky to think that our Prison Service operates in the same climate as that in the mainland UK or anywhere else in Europe. That is not the case.

We want to see an end to paramilitarism. We want to see an end to organised criminality. We want to see an end to any sort of terrorist organisations or activity. How do we achieve that? We have all said that we want an end to it,

but how do we work and operate to achieve it? Our best way of achieving it is through the Fresh Start Agreement and the Executive action plan that has been published. That is our road map to ending not only the separation in our prisons but paramilitarism in its entirety. If there are paramilitaries out there, of whatever hue, and they are conducting terrorist activities, I want them arrested and imprisoned and out of harm's way.

We should also send out the message today that we are not back in the days of the Maze. Prisoners cannot dig tunnels and stockpile soil in a cell. It is controlled by the prison staff. Maghaberry is controlled by the very staff we place in there to protect us.

Mr Beattie: I thank the Member for giving way. I would just like to hear what he thinks about special treatment for paramilitaries when everybody else is locked down at lunchtime and dissident republicans are out playing football. Does he think that is fair? Does he think it should continue?

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for the intervention. That is not the message that should be going out. It is not special status. That is my point: they are separated, not special.

I have been to Roe House and Bush House: they are locked down. Prisoners are able to move in threes and fours, but that is all. The prison authorities have control, and it would be a mistake for a paramilitary organisation to get publicity from the fact that we think they control the prison. They do not, and they will not, because the prison authorities have it under control. Paramilitaries do not control Roe House, and the loyalists do not control Bush House. There is a lot of psychological warfare going on — there is absolutely no doubt about that — and they can pick on individual prison officers. That is wrong, but that is the calibre of prisoner that we are talking about.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: Yes, I will.

Mr Allister: It is interesting to hear the Member so assured that there is no control. Is part of the cancer in prisons that the present system creates an aura of Mr Bigs in the prison and then, when they are out in the streets, they still think that they are Mr Bigs who can dictate to the Government as well as everyone else?

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Frew: OK.

Mr Attwood: The SDLP submitted an amendment to the Ulster Unionist motion in an attempt to comprehensively manage this issue across the island and across the multiple issues that we have to manage. When it comes to dealing with issues that have this sort of character, it is best that the Chamber is able to hear all the voices in that regard, so I want to address what we would have been proposing in an effort to navigate through this very difficult issue.

First, and I ask the Minister to reply to this in her response, there are two separate regimes on the island of Ireland, and the proposer referred to this. It is the view of the SDLP that if we are going to deal with the issue of separation, and the SDLP believes that it should be addressed, then it needs to be, as best as possible, addressed across the island of Ireland. Therefore, I asked the Minister to meet with the Minister of Justice and Equality in the Republic of Ireland to discuss where they see the issue of separation

going, so that we try, as best as possible, to manage this in a coherent and common way as we go forward.

Secondly, the motion may have been less acute if the independent review that was endorsed by the Executive in the middle of July had actually commenced by now. I ask the Minister to advise where we are in respect of the independent review because, as indicated to the Justice Committee last week, as of now, a person has not been appointed to conduct that review. Given that it is part and parcel of the three-person panel report, we need to have action, and action quickly, in respect of the review.

Thirdly, how is the current system of separation operating with regard to those who seek to enter into a separated regime in the prison, because people of far greater authority than me, who observe and are involved in the management of prisoners, say to me and to others that those who seek to benefit, as they might see it, from the separated regime are rather casually able to do so. There is a lack of rigour in the assessment of a prisoner going into prison as to whether that prisoner should be permitted to go into the separated regime. It is becoming a matter of first choice — an easy option — and that is not the purpose for which the separated regime was established.

I remind the Minister that this issue has been interrogated by the Irish court system when it comes to the separated regime that exists in Portlaoise to the point where a court decided that a person seeking a separated regime in Portlaoise was not going to be allowed to have that option. There is a need for robust management of the current regime as we move beyond that, if that is the decision, to a different regime.

That was the spirit and content of what the SDLP would have proposed. In my view, it would have been a more comprehensive way, even more comprehensive than the words used by Sinn Féin, to navigate our way through this. Navigating a way through this is what we have to do. This issue is part of the residue of paramilitarism in our society, and all the issues that arise from that residue need to be addressed.

I know the reasons why the Ulster Unionists have brought this forward but, in our view, some of the language being used by them does not best serve the outcome required in this situation. As I said, in our view, what we would have proposed goes beyond where Sinn Féin is. I make all those comments in the context that I think that there should be a moderate tone in this debate.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Attwood: The reason why there should be a moderate tone is that we are talking in the shadow of a murder in the streets of Belfast. That should focus our minds on paramilitarism and on moderating our language when we come to debate the matter.

Mr Lunn: I will deal with the motion first. We like it and support it, but that is not to say that it is perfect. It refers to the flawed decisions taken in 2003, and I think that Mr Beattie referred to subsequent decisions by the previous Justice Minister. All that I will say about that is that decisions were taken by people who knew what they were talking about in the best interests of security and health and safety in the prison. If they turned out to be flawed, it does not mean to say that they were automatically flawed to start with. It is a really difficult area, and I suspect that

the current Minister will have to deal with it as a difficult area as well.

Other Members referred to the situation with prison staff, and I join with them. Nobody in our society, except, perhaps, PSNI officers, has had to suffer the level of threat, intimidation, strain and stress on their everyday lives that prison staff have had to suffer. Maybe it is because I represent Lisburn and, perhaps, others would say the same thing, but we hear a lot from prison staff on these issues, including from some who have had to retire prematurely because of activities that have happened in the separated regimes in Maghaberry. So, I absolutely agree that we should make every effort to come up with an integrationist solution and to end the separation as soon as possible.

The motion refers to timescales of 2021 and 2026 to finish all separation. Who could argue with that? If we cannot solve this situation within 10 years, frankly, what are we doing here? How many current prisoners will still be there in 10 years' time, clinging on to some kind of separationist status? It is time to move on this, so I thank the Ulster Unionists for bringing the motion before us.

It also refers to an Executive action plan. Sometimes, I think that, frankly, that is a contradiction in terms. However, that is not to say that, perhaps, this review, if it eventually starts — it is already five months behind — may not produce some fruit and will not sit on a shelf gathering dust. It is too important for that.

The panel made various recommendations, not all to do with separation. In fact, the one that it made on separation was pretty bland and vague. It just said that it should:

"Revisit the framework related to the separated regime and arrange for an independent review".

It did not commit itself to very much. In fact, it did not commit itself at all, except to set up a review. We could have looked for more than that from the panel, but there we are.

We have no difficulty with the amendment except that, perhaps, it does not go far enough. It refers to prisoners with diverse backgrounds who are subject to different court processes depending on the nature of their charges. Well, I am sorry for the proposer, but, as far as I am concerned, a criminal is a criminal. If he is in Maghaberry because he was sentenced to be there, the nature of the court does not really matter. This notion of political status and separation should be far behind us by now. We do not need that.

The rest of the motion —

Mr E McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: Yes.

Mr E McCann: Does the Member not agree that not all prisoners in Maghaberry are exactly the same or have exactly the same status? Will he factor the case of Mr Tony Taylor into his argument about all prisoners being the same in Maghaberry? Some have had due process; some have not.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

1.00 pm

Mr Lunn: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is a matter of opinion, is it not? I see a prisoner in Maghaberry as a prisoner in

Maghaberry, and they should all be treated in the same way and have the same status. I do not find that a hard argument to defend.

The amendment seeks to get to the same solution without actually saying so and without timescales. Its wording is:

“evidencing the need for any changes and providing useful information for stakeholders to take forward, as proposed by the report”.

Hopefully, we are all heading in the same direction and are on the same journey. We want a normalisation of our prison regime, and, whether we do it on the basis of fixed timescales or ongoing deliberations, surely it is not beyond us to have this settled within 10 years or, as Mr Beattie said, nine years; I see it as 10 years. We will support the motion — absolutely. We will not vote against the Sinn Féin amendment, but we will have to see what way the House goes on it.

Mrs Cameron: I rise as Deputy Chair of the Justice Committee and as a DUP Member to speak on the motion. Since 1986, Her Majesty's Prison Maghaberry has served to accommodate remand prisoners and those paramilitary prisoners not released under the Belfast Agreement. During the summer of 2003, a number of prisoners, largely dissident republicans, staged a series of protests aimed at reinstating the former Maze style of segregation and pushing for political prisoner status. A number of incidents occurred, including assaults, the planting of hoax devices, damage to cells and intimidation of officers, escalating to rooftop protests and dirty protests. This, coupled with demonstrations at the prison gates, attacks on officers' homes and the sending of a parcel bomb to the prison, led to the Government commissioning the Steele review to look at conditions in the prison. The findings of the report were accepted by the Secretary of State, and the process of segregation was quickly implemented. The changes caused immediate concern amongst prison officers. Indeed, the Prison Officers' Association at the time described it as a retrograde step. To my mind, it seemed that the voices of the people whom we rely on to deal with the changes on the ground were completely ignored. Whilst the changes were implemented with the safety and welfare of paramilitary prisoners in mind, it appears that the well-being and security of officers were disregarded, a position that continues to this day.

The separation of prisoners takes up a disproportionate amount of staffing resources, with separate units prioritised over the rest of the prison. Recent cases such as that of Paddy Kelly, who overdosed in March 2015, and of Sean Lynch, who blinded himself in custody, highlight the need for prison reform and a need to look at the mental health issues of prisoners and staff members. “Ordinary prisoners”, to use that phrase, particularly those who are vulnerable, are being put at risk due to the additional pressures that are being put on the officers in monitoring the separated paramilitary wings.

I have spoken to a number of serving prison officers in recent months, all of whom highlighted the incredibly challenging conditions that they are working under. We are aware that, due to retirements and high sickness levels, a large number of staff have left the service. Newly recruited staff, following initial training, are learning on the job without the support of more experienced staff to fall back on. Coupled with a cut in the budget for training, we are left with staff who are overstretched and ill-equipped to deal with this

incredibly difficult and specialised job. High staff turnover and sickness levels add to the pressures. Indeed, to quote one of my constituents, people view a job in the Prison Service as a stepping stone before they apply to the PSNI.

I believe that morale is incredibly low in the service, which must be addressed to advance a more settled regime for officers and prisoners alike. Any move towards ending the separation of paramilitary prisoners must be done primarily with the emphasis on ensuring the well-being and safety of prisoners and staff. It is encouraging to note that, since the unannounced inspection of the prison in May 2015, standards appear to have improved. I hope that that situation continues.

There is no doubt that Maghaberry is a completely unique prison, dealing with a completely unique set of circumstances. I have concerns about ending the separation of prisoners as it will need to be handled very carefully. It could be said that there is a catch-22 situation at play and that changing the status quo will require a considerable amount of dialogue not only with the prisoners themselves but with the associated organisations on the outside to ensure that change is received and implemented in a safe and non-violent manner, both for prisoners and officers.

In closing, the situation in Maghaberry is entirely like no other, and, therefore, any change to the regime is sure to be fraught with difficulties. There is a significant job of work to be carried out before an ending of separation is undertaken. The construction of the new cell block at the prison may, upon its 2019 handover, present an opportunity to implement change. In the interim, I hope that the Minister will engage with the review and subsequent reform process. The move to a normalised prison community will not be an easy process, but I feel that, in doing so, we will be taking a further step forward into the future of Northern Ireland.

Mr McCartney: I will speak in support of the amendment and in opposition to the motion tabled in the names of the Ulster Unionists. Central to our amendment is that there is already an independent review in place. The place to take the points outlined today is the independent review, where all of us can inform whatever decisions will be made. We will bring to that review, when it is in place, the same logic that we brought in 2003, when there was a resolution in August 2010 and to the Anne Owers prison reform report in 2011. Everyone should do that when having this discussion. The Ulster Unionists, in my opinion, have tried to predetermine the outcome of the review. Let us have the review, and let everybody have their input. The points can be made to that review, and then let the review determine what is the best way forward.

I echo the remarks made by Declan Kearney and Eamonn McCann about Tony Taylor. In the middle of this, there are prisoners who have not received due process. We have to come at the arguments or discussions on whether prisoners are the same and should be treated the same with that in mind. There is no doubt that, at the heart of this, there are political perspectives, and people have views of how prisoners should be treated. What people should bring to the independent review is the issue of good governance. Whatever your view of the prisoners and the impact of particular individuals inside and outside a prison, bring good governance to the discussion. My opinion, based on years of experience and talking to

prison managers in recent times, is that forced integration as a policy does not work. That is what is at the core of the separated regime in Maghaberry. In my opinion, that was recognised by the John Steele report in 2003. Forced integration does not work. Indeed, it makes prisons very difficult to manage.

Look at it in the context of Maghaberry: the Anne Owers report in 2011 said very clearly that it was a difficult prison to manage, and each and every single CJI report reinforces that position. We should consider that when trying to steer a way out the last report of the CJI. People have their own interpretations of that. There was a quote from one of the inspectors and that was if it carried, but I think that all of us would agree that where Maghaberry found itself in the last report is not where it should be. Imagine implanting into that a decision that would force prisoners to integrate. If Maghaberry is difficult to manage in the current circumstances, how much more difficult would it be to manage if we took the decision to support a motion on forcing prisoners to integrate? Show me a prison system in a similar circumstance anywhere in the world where the governance of a prison is designed so that people are forced to integrate. I can tell you that it has not worked and will not work. That is why we tabled an amendment. When there is an independent review, we will bring that to it.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank Mr McCartney for giving way. I assume that he agrees with his colleague Mr Kearney that one of the functions of a prison is to help to prepare prisoners for rehabilitation into society. How does he think that it is helpful in preparing somebody to go into a society based on a shared future and shared space to force them to live in a segregated present?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McCartney: Thank you very much. They are not forced to live there; they do it by choice. Anybody who has looked at rehabilitation knows that you cannot force people into a rehabilitation process; it has to be a process where the prisoner volunteers and works with the prison staff to get the outcome of rehabilitation so that when they go back out they will be better people. If people choose to opt out of that, you cannot force them into rehabilitation either. Your point reinforces the point I am making, which is that the independent review is the place to bring all these issues.

Where the Alliance Party is concerned, in 2011 Anne Owers explicitly said that Maghaberry should be separated into three mini-prisons, with one to house that particular group of prisoners. That was supported at the time by the Minister and, indeed, in broad terms across the Assembly. I heard no objections at the Justice Committee or at the debate in the Assembly saying that that was the wrong thing to do. It was not called a "flawed decision" then. I think what we are seeing here is that, as opportunities now arise with this new world of the Opposition, they have to find things that, in my opinion, divide people when it is not necessary. The review will examine all the issues, as it should, but I will say this, and I will say it with confidence: if you talk privately to prison managers, you will find they will tell you that forced integration in Maghaberry will ensure the next report from the CJI will be worse than the reports we have had to date.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member conclude his remarks?

Mr McCartney: We will not be supporting the motion.

Mr Douglas: I will speak as a member of the Justice Committee, and I certainly welcome the debate. When I look at the Justice Committee, I realise these issues have been raised a number of times, so I think it is quite timely we have this debate and look at the way forward, and part of that way forward is to have the prison review and to go through that.

Doug Beattie paid tribute to the bravery of the prison officers, and I certainly reiterate that in terms of their commitment and dedication. Over the years, many of those people have made the ultimate sacrifice. Just in March this year, Adrian Ismay, one of my neighbours down the road, made the ultimate sacrifice himself.

In one sense, we have a problem. I have often been involved in mediation between various groups over the years. One of the things I came to realise is that if there is a problem, we should name it. Brendan McGuigan, the chief inspector of the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, came to our Committee on a couple of occasions. He said that the separate regime for dissident republicans and loyalists at Maghaberry jail was a disproportionate drain on resources that requires a radical new approach. That is what we are looking for, no matter how long it is going to take us, because:

"They are taking up a disproportionate amount of senior management attention and resources to deliver an unrestricted regime often at the expense of the rest of the prison population."

There are major issues surrounding Maghaberry prison. But let me say that we are not alone. My colleague Alastair Ross, when he was Chairman of our Committee, said at the time that:

"We often talk about Maghaberry being one of the most complex prisons in Europe and unique",

— we agree with that, but that:

"in Great Britain, Islamic terrorists are kept in prison, so there are, one would imagine, similar challenges there."

It is interesting that, at this point in time, the Government are investigating specialist units on the mainland. Those are made up of convicted extremists who promote terror and violence and who are to be isolated from the general prison population and placed in new specialist units under plans to be announced by the Government. In one sense, we are not alone, and the British Government have realised they have a major problem with young Muslims being radicalised within prisons.

There has to be a recognition that there is a problem. The Minister said, probably just this morning, that integration was generally best. I think that we all agree with that. However, she went on to say that, if it is not done right — I am paraphrasing her — it will have a serious and disruptive impact on good order, discipline and the security of the prison as a whole.

1.15 pm

We need to ensure that the security and safety of prison officers is at the heart of the changes that come about. It does not matter when they occur, whether it is in four

years, as part of the Fresh Start Agreement, or in Doug Beattie's suggested nine or 10 years.

We certainly do not want to exacerbate the situation, but I see it as being similar to the one for peace lines. I live a mile from a peace line, and I would love to see every peace line in Northern Ireland taken down. The reality is that the people who live in those communities, particularly those living behind the peace walls, will not argue for them to come down until they feel safe and that they are not worrying when they go to bed at night about a petrol bomb or a brick coming through their window. The situation with prison officers is similar. I have spoken to some, and of course they want to see change, but that change has to be done in a managed and professional way, taking in what the Minister has said today.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member conclude his remarks?

Mr Douglas: If we do not do it in a disciplined fashion, it will come back to haunt us all.

Mr Butler: Like many Members have done, I go on record to thank my former colleagues in the Prison Service for their bravery and for the work that they do in arduous circumstances.

I welcome the opportunity to support Doug Beattie's motion, which is critical to the continued viability of Maghaberry prison. I feel that I am in a unique position to speak to the motion. I speak with the benefit of four years' experience working as a prison officer in Maghaberry prison, from 1996 to 2000, which is the hardest job that I have done to date. I have first-hand experience of the difficulties faced by staff, particularly around safety and the management of facilities and resources. Moreover, that I live just outside Maghaberry and represent Lagan Valley in the House gives me a unique insight into issues that are faced there. Frankly, my main concern is safety: for the officers, the non-uniform staff and the prisoners. There is no reason that we cannot have all three.

As has clearly been evidenced today, however, the current policy of prisoner segregation is not working. In no way does it increase the safety of staff or prisoners. In fact, it undermines it. The decision taken in 2003 to enforce prisoner segregation was flawed at the time and makes even less sense in 2016. It promotes a two-tier prison service, which only heightens tensions in the prison and perpetuates the false narrative that we have political prisoners.

That the staff and even the families of staff — that is my family whom I am talking about — have had, and continue to have, their personal safety jeopardised from the outworkings of prisoner segregation is disgusting. Did the deaths of David Black or Adrian Ismay further a peaceful political cause? The truth is that they absolutely did not. They were murdered. I cannot accept the mantra that we are still living in a peace process with ongoing political prisoners. At what point do we, as a society, finally move from a process into normality? As we seek to integrate our society and our societal differences more and more, why do we allow ourselves to be haunted by the spectre of the past?

We find ourselves at a critical juncture regarding making history. By not allowing the mistakes of the past to influence good decision-making and by accepting and recognising the amendment from Sinn Féin, we would be legitimising an artificial regime. That would tell us that we have not learnt from our mistakes and would perpetuate

the Executive's inability to develop Maze/Long Kesh for the people of Lagan Valley and Northern Ireland.

Let us not forget — it has been well covered today — the purpose of custodial establishments like Maghaberry. There is a duty on the Justice Minister and the Executive to ensure the safety and well-being of staff, visitors and inmates. I can tell you that resources are stretched to breaking point. I am in regular contact with former colleagues who are concerned not only for their own well-being but for that of colleagues and prisoners as well. The strain of the current regime at Maghaberry cannot, and should not, be maintained indefinitely, as has been suggested, not solely for financial reasons but for the poor impact on the mental health of staff and prisoners alike.

I wholeheartedly commend the motion proposed by my party colleague, and I believe that nine or 10 years is more than generous, Mr Beattie, in which to normalise the Prison Service at Maghaberry, and we have more than enough time to do that.

Mr E McCann: Thank you, Mr Speaker; I was not expecting to be called, but it is a pleasure.

When we talk about the changes that have been made in Maghaberry prison and the problems that have arisen there, we ought to look back a wee bit further than the last couple of years. We have heard mentioned the cases of Sean Lynch and Patrick Kelly, after which, of course, we had all manner of assurances that lessons had been learnt and that things were going to change.

I put it to the Members who made those arguments or observations about Maghaberry that they should ask themselves whether all the problems, difficulties and inadequacies that were referred to in relation to those cases were clear to be seen in the case of Annie Kelly, aged 19, who hanged herself from the wire mesh covering of the window in her cell, back in 2002. At that time, there were extensive inquiries and clear-cut, explicit and ringing declarations that all the problems that had been identified would be seen to. Indeed, I have had from the Minister of Justice, in an answer to a recent question, a suggestion that the defects in the Prison Service at that time had been remedied.

Annie Kelly's family, from Strabane, with whom I have been speaking in recent days, are still waiting for some explanation as to how a 19-year-old child, whose problems had been widely signalled, including by the prison staff, could have ended her life in that way. Indeed, a senior member of the prison staff at Maghaberry at that time wrote to Annie Kelly's solicitor. I saw the letter. It said that the prison staff knew that Annie Kelly should not have been in Maghaberry and that it was no place for her. It said explicitly that she was in danger of harming herself and even of suicide. That was said, and, as she did commit suicide, we are entitled to ask questions about the overall regime in Maghaberry and whether the present situation, regime or authorities would be capable — assuming that they are mindful — to manage the transition suggested in the motion in a proper and legitimate way.

I can tell you now, and Mr McCartney was, I think, coming close to saying the same thing, that if you impose integration on the prisoners at Maghaberry, you will not solve any problem. You will reap a whirlwind. You are going to have serious violence within the prison. I do not say that with any sense of pleasure or anticipation of it happening; I am simply telling you that, in my view and

judgement, based on my experience of campaigning on these matters and my knowledge of prisoners, some of them in Maghaberry at the moment, I have no doubt that you will be making a very serious mistake to push this.

A couple of moments ago, the point was made by Mr Douglas, I think, that it is simply not the case that all prisoners are regarded as having equal status in this jurisdiction, the Southern jurisdiction or across the water. We heard a few moments ago that all prisoners are the same. They are not the same. If a prisoner is in Maghaberry on the basis of the signature of a Secretary of State and not on the basis of having been brought to court on any charge — that is the situation in the case of Tony Taylor — then we have established clearly that there are differences in status. If Tony Taylor is not a political prisoner, what type of prisoner is he? He is certainly not a convicted prisoner.

Incidentally, if we begin to look at separation in our schools then maybe we can move on to the more difficult question of separation in Maghaberry. If children were allowed to learn multiplication tables in the same room then, perhaps, we would have some ground of principle on which to stand to say that prisoners should be kept in the same accommodation. It is not going to work.

Finally, my main point is this —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr E McCann: We should look back. When I hear that Annie Kelly's case has been resolved to the satisfaction of her family, I will take the motion seriously.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Edwin Poots, who will have two minutes.

Mr Poots: We will not be supporting the motion or the amendment. The motion is flawed in that it identifies that the Steele report was wrong in the first instance but then proposes to take nine years to unravel it. If the separation of prisoners is worth ending, it is worth doing it much faster than over nine years.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: I cannot; I have only two minutes. The motion is wholly and completely flawed. What else should we expect from a party whose previous policy on prisons was to allow the prisoners out and let them go free? When you see weak policy coming from the party that agreed to free prisoners in the first instance, that does not come as any surprise.

What is absolutely important here is the safety of the prison. I have to say that Maghaberry prison has become a much less safe place for prisoners and prison staff to be over the last five years than it was before. There has been an absolute failure in prisons over the past five years. I wish the current Minister well, but she will have to listen to the people on the ground and not ignore them. Our staff are hugely important. They have a wealth of experience, and to have that dismissed and to fly people in from England to stay in the Culloden Hotel to run our prisons and fly them back again after spending two or three days here was a failed means of carrying out the running of our prisons. We need to listen to the people on the ground and we need to identify the issues that they are raising with us.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Poots: We must ensure that their voices are heard and that our prisons are better managed.

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): I would like to thank Mr Beattie and Mr Beggs, for bringing this very important issue to the Assembly, and the proposers of the amendment. I welcome the opportunity to debate this issue in the Chamber today. It is something that we often tend not to talk about, but it is important that we do.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service has a very important role to play in keeping Northern Ireland safe against the backdrop of a continuing threat from dissident republicanism and all types of paramilitarism. No one should underestimate the considerable challenges that arise from having separated areas for paramilitary prisoners in Maghaberry prison.

In accepting the recommendations of the Steele review team report in 2003, the Government at the time committed to providing separate accommodation for paramilitary prisoners who, on the grounds of their personal safety, wished to be held apart from prisoners belonging to other paramilitary groups and those who belonged to no such groups. The rationale for that decision was that separation provided the best option for improving conditions at Maghaberry prison, particularly in relation to the safety of all staff and prisoners.

Some may question the efficacy of that decision and cite the challenges that operating a separated regime in Maghaberry has posed since its introduction in 2004 as evidence that it was a flawed decision. However, it is important to remember that the review was commissioned in response to violent clashes between rival groups in the integrated population in Maghaberry prison at that time and in the face of a dirty protest by some prisoners.

As Members are aware, decisions on who can be admitted to separated conditions are made by prison staff acting under the direction of the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State also has responsibility for setting the criteria under which applications for separation are considered. However, the operation and management of the separated regime are the responsibility of the Prison Service. It is provided at Maghaberry prison with Bush House for loyalist prisoners and Roe House for republican prisoners. There are 42 prisoners in separation: 16 in Bush and 26 in Roe.

1.30 pm

I want to be clear from the outset that, contrary to opinion, the arrangements for separation in Maghaberry are very different from those that existed previously in prisons in Northern Ireland. A key principle of Steele was that the Government would never again concede complete control of landings in a prison, as had happened at the Maze. Separation at Maghaberry prison today is not the same as Maze-style segregation, which allowed prisoners to be unlocked continuously and saw the withdrawal of staff from the landings. The Prison Service ensures that the separated landings, as is the case with the rest of the prison, are controlled by staff and not by prisoners. There will not be a return to Maze-like conditions.

As far as possible, the Prison Service strives to deliver a regime consistent with that of the integrated population, whilst cognisant that many of the prisoners are in custody

because they have committed very serious offences. However, as the motion notes, there are consequences to operating a separated regime, and it is most despicable that some members of our society have sought to use it as justification for attacks on prison staff, including the awful murders of David Black and Adrian Ismay. Attacks such as these and the ongoing intimidation of staff are of grave concern to me and are entirely unacceptable.

I know that working in such an environment can have a far-reaching impact on the lives of the staff affected and their families. The determination of prison staff and management to continue to deliver a positive and constructive regime against such a challenging backdrop must be commended. I will listen to the people on the ground so that I can best understand how to support them and how I can ask my Department to support them.

Maghaberry can be a stressful environment to work in, and I want to make sure that adequate support is made available to all my prison officers in this respect. I am committed to ensuring that specific training continues to be provided to maintain staff resilience and to prevent conditioning; that appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that officers working in separated conditions are rotated on a regular basis and have the opportunity to work in different areas of the prison; and that, where needed, prison officers are provided with the appropriate supports and services to prevent this environment from having an impact on their mental health and well-being.

Notwithstanding the impact on staff, operating a separated regime within the confines of a normal prison presents other significant challenges. Whilst prisoners held in separation account for less than 5% of the total population of 919, the management of separated accommodation places significant pressures on the Northern Ireland Prison Service in a number of ways, including the staffing resource required to manage this challenging group of prisoners; the ability to establish and maintain a stable, normalised regime without impacting on safety and security; and the provision of services and interventions that meet the needs of that segment of the population. Those are the real challenges that operational staff in Maghaberry face daily, and I wish to put on record my appreciation of their continued dedication and professionalism. Prison officers serve the entire community in Northern Ireland, and I am so grateful for their commitment and dedication to that service.

It is also the case that prisoners in separation require a disproportionate amount of senior management attention. As reflected in the motion, Maghaberry is unique. It is a large, complex prison, and the requirement to provide a separated regime is, undoubtedly, a significant contributory factor to that complexity. Management decisions are made in the context of intense public and political scrutiny, and it is often necessary to balance considerations in respect of issues such as controlled movement and searching arrangements against ensuring that a safe and secure environment is maintained. It also means addressing the impact that such decisions may have on the safety of staff inside and outside the prison and the impact that managing a resource-intensive separated area has on the rest of the prison. It is not an easy balance to achieve.

The motion refers to the Executive's action plan on tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime. I fully agree that the three-person panel report and the Executive

plan provide important context for the discussion of the motion. Members will be aware that the Executive published their action plan on tackling paramilitary activity on 19 July. The plan set out our initial response to the three-person panel report on disbanding paramilitary groups and sought to draw together the recommendations made by the panel and the commitments made in Fresh Start. That response demonstrates the Executive's intention to develop a strategic approach to this programme of work, and, for that reason, the action plan is based on the four themes set out in the three-person panel report: promoting lawfulness, support for transition, tackling criminal activity and addressing systemic issues.

The action plan outlines a combination of approaches to tackling paramilitary activity and the associated criminality. It recognises the importance of a strong law enforcement response to the threats created by the issue, whilst noting the need to support communities in transition and to focus on preventative work, particularly with young people who may be susceptible to becoming involved in paramilitary activity.

Importantly, the independent three-person panel report recognised that the time is not yet right to end separation. It noted, however, that the ultimate aim must be to secure the end of a separated regime for paramilitary prisoners as we move to a more normal and peaceful society. I agree. Having noted that this is a longer-term commitment, the panel recommended that the DOJ revisit the framework related to the separated regime and arrange for an independent review to be undertaken to examine the operation of the regime. I have accepted the panel's recommendation and have instructed officials in my Department to develop terms of reference for an independent review and to identify the stakeholders that will need to be engaged in the process. Work has also begun to identify individuals with the necessary skills to lead the review. When complete, the review will provide me with a report and recommendations on the future of separated conditions in the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

In summing up, I want to make a number of points. I absolutely recognise the difficulties associated with operating a separated regime in Maghaberry prison and the daily challenges that it presents to staff and to operational work. Accommodating prisoners in normal, integrated prison accommodation is the most appropriate approach to the management of prisoners in Northern Ireland, as it provides the best opportunities for rehabilitation and successful reintegration into the community on release. It is clear to me, however, that, as long as prisoners who refuse to integrate into the normal prison population remain, it is my duty to ensure that the safest possible conditions exist for staff and prisoners. I believe that forcing those prisoners to do so would have a serious disruptive effect on the good order, discipline and security of the prison as a whole.

As I stated, the three-person panel report noted that our ultimate aim must be to secure the end to a separated regime for paramilitary prisoners, but it is only in the context of a more normal and peaceful society that a proper discussion about the timescale for an end to separation can take place. In the meantime, I am fully committed to delivering on the panel's recommendation on separation, which is to revisit the framework and arrange for an independent review to be carried out.

I do not disagree with the intent of the motion: we should aspire to end separation, and we have already committed to ending all paramilitarism through Fresh Start. Maybe it will happen in nine years, but it needs to happen in a more peaceful and safer Northern Ireland. We must not underestimate the current severe threat that has claimed the lives of two prison officers and threatens officers daily. Members are correct: we need to address separation. However, the focus needs to be on the right solution in the safest environment for prison officers and wider society. I cannot support a motion that focuses on a time frame rather than on the right solution. We have committed to a solution through Fresh Start: a high-level series of actions to be taken in response to the recommendations made by the three-person panel.

Mr Attwood made comments about the action plan and progress. As I stated, there will be an independent review. I do not have a time frame for you today, but it is not sitting on a shelf. We are developing it. The terms of reference are in development, and work is progressing. The action plan is a high-level acceptance of our commitment to tackle paramilitarism. It is not an easy issue, and there is no overnight fix or even a five-month fix. It is irresponsible to expect anything sooner. The correct mechanism for delivering progress on the challenging issues that result from the separation of prisoners at Maghaberry is through the action plan in response to the three-person panel report.

Ms J McCann: At the outset, I want to say that the Ulster Unionist Party motion beggars belief. The proposer was quite exercised about his support for the Fresh Start Agreement, but the fact that his party does not even support the Fresh Start Agreement makes it a bit ridiculous that he was quoting pieces of it and picking and choosing pieces that he wanted to support.

We heard from a lot of Members. Our amendment would give the best possible outcome in prisons. We want prisons to be manageable — that is what we are about — but human dignity, decency and respect, both for prisoners and for prison staff, has to be made paramount, and that is what our amendment does.

I will just go over the 2010 August agreement very quickly. Independent facilitators took a lot of time and energy to go into the prison to speak not only to prisoners but to prison staff and management. They came up with recommendations that controlled movement and strip searches be stopped and that prison officers be allowed to do their job without fear, threat or intimidation. That agreement seemed to be the best at the time for all the people involved. We then saw the toing and froing and what happened when that agreement was not put in place.

As my colleagues said, forced integration of prisoners does not work. Sammy Douglas crystallised it when he said that, if we do not force people on the outside to live together, how can we force people on the inside to live together? We have to get to a place where people want that. The reality is that Maghaberry prison is not there yet, and people need to be realistic and take cognisance of that.

I will go through some of what Members said. The proposer of the amendment, my colleague Declan Kearney, said that all prison staff, prisoners and their families should be treated with dignity and respect, and that neither prisoners nor prison staff should be degraded in any way. He quite rightly pointed out, as I did, that,

although the proposer of the motion quoted the 'Fresh Start Agreement' — he was quite exercised about it — his party opposed the agreement at the time. He went into the issue of there being a security mindset that needs to be replaced by a rehabilitation culture. We saw what happened years ago when a security mindset was forced into prisons. We need to see that prisons are about rehabilitation and treating people with dignity and respect, and that goes right across the board: I am not talking just about prisoners; it has to be for prison staff as well.

He went on to point out the recent case of Sean Lynch from Derry. It was most traumatic even listening to that young man's father on the news, talking about how his son had blinded himself, and then to Sean Lynch himself. As a number of Members said, we need to look at how prisoners with mental health issues are treated in prison. It is not the place for them, and even some of the staff would tell you that. Quite a lot of Members mentioned others who had taken their life in prison. We need to look, in any review of prisons, at why people with severe mental health issues are there is the first place.

My colleague Raymond McCartney made the key point that the prison environment should be kept free of all outside political interference. That is crucial because that is not what prison is about. Prison is not about us coming here and battling it out over wee motions, which is what the Opposition seem to be doing. Prison is there for the care and rehabilitation of prisoners —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

Ms J McCann: Sorry. Very quickly, our focus should be on making Maghaberry a stable, stress-free and safe environment for all staff, prisoners and those who visit, as my colleague Declan Kearney said. I support the amendment.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Roy Beggs to wind up the debate on the motion. The Member has up to 10 minutes.

Mr Beggs: Like my colleague Doug Beattie and many others, I will start my comments by praising prison officers and staff for their dedication and professionalism in the very difficult environment in which we have placed them to look after prisoners on our behalf. The system that we set up results in shortages and difficulties for them in doing their jobs as best they can. There were other comments from Paul Frew, Trevor Lunn, Sammy Douglas, Robbie Butler, Pam Cameron and indeed the Minister recognising this during the debate.

1.45 pm

My colleague Doug highlighted that the motion that we have crafted is an attempt to dovetail into Fresh Start and the action plan to end paramilitary activity, because if we are going to end paramilitary activity outside prison, we also need to work to end the arrangements for segregation of paramilitaries inside prison, where they do have undue influence. He indicated that segregation was introduced in haste in 2003 against the wishes of prison governors, the Prison Officers' Association and the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. It was adopted within a month, and we still have it today. Many in the Chamber are saying that a maximum of nine years is not sufficient time to have it removed. Some say that it is too long. If you look at the motion, you see that we have said, "by 2021" and that, "by 2026", it should be completely over. If there is willingness,

it could be done much sooner. I hope that that would be the case. It is false to criticise the motion on those longer time frames.

I turn to some other things that were said. It is important that the Assembly indicates its view on the matter, because ultimately the Secretary of State has a role in bringing about that change. Like Doug Beattie, Alex Attwood highlighted the need to deal with the separated regime. He specifically indicated the difficulty with there being a segregated or separated regime in the Republic as well as in Northern Ireland. I agree that that issue needs to be dealt with. Again, the time frame that is envisaged should allow that to happen easily if there is goodwill.

The Assembly faces a stark choice; a choice between the motion in my name and that of Doug Beattie, which sees a normal society and prison system, and the torturous language of the Sinn Féin amendment, which can be easily read as blaming our court system for a separated regime in our prisons. When you look carefully at the wording, you see that that is how it can be easily interpreted.

2016 is 20 years after the announcement of the paramilitary ceasefires and 18 years after the Belfast Agreement. Surely that is long enough for change to happen. Why do we have any paramilitary prisoners? That is the question that must be asked. The motion calls for no fresh admissions by 2021 — let us endeavour to have it sooner — and to end separation by 2026. Again, let us have that sooner. There is a vision of integrating prisoners within the Executive's action plan for tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime. Again, many spoke about the need to do that. It needs to happen in prisons as well as in outside society.

The Ulster Unionists have been to the fore in moving Northern Ireland towards a normal society. We believe that the decision to establish separated wings was a flawed one in 2003. As my colleague Robbie Butler very ably explained, if the decision was flawed then, the experience that we have seen since — particularly the violence that we have seen, with prison officers being attacked in their homes and, indeed, prison officers Black and Ismay having lost their lives — shows that it is still flawed today; even more so.

Some DUP Members, Paul Frew for instance, spoke of their party's opposition to separating prisoners. It was with surprise that I heard later that Edwin Poots indicated that their party would vote against the motion. I cannot explain that one. There can be little doubt that concentrating paramilitary prisoners in separated wings has a significant adverse effect on other aspects of the prison, including prison officers' morale, and, indeed, it also has consequences outside our jails.

The 2015 Criminal Justice Inspection report is also damning of the current arrangement, which gives special treatment to paramilitary prisoners. Paragraph S48, which is about separated units, states:

"They provide only a containment function but ... consume a disproportionate amount of staff and management resources to the detriment of the majority of the population."

It also states:

"Staffing levels in the units were prioritised ... regardless of what happened in the rest of the prison."

That point was also highlighted by Sammy Douglas. The report also refers to knock-on effects, such as the inadequate care of vulnerable prisoners, which Eamonn McCann highlighted. When you take prison officers away from other sections of the prison, regardless of the impact on those other sections, to maintain the separated regime to a very high level, including playing football at lunchtime when everybody else is locked down, guess what? Mistakes happen, and things go wrong. There are consequences to blindly going forward and maintaining a separated unit. There are consequences to prioritising staffing levels over those in the rest of the prison and creating more favourable conditions in the separated unit. Alex Attwood highlighted the issue that how people enter the prison is highly questionable. Are people thinking that they will be better off if they move into the segregated unit? Is the system encouraging people to link up with paramilitary organisations and benefit from the segregated unit? It is vital that we do not encourage and maintain such structures. Doing so will possibly even contribute to recruitment.

Other aspects of the report indicated that, on the day of the inspection, the mail facility was closed owing to staff shortages. No doubt, staff were providing supervision for football in the segregated unit or something like that. The important aspect of handling mail for all prisoners was not facilitated. Paragraph 2.12 indicates:

"Managers and staff told us that a large proportion of staff sickness was caused by working conditions in Roe House, with shortages met by staff from other houses."

That is just what I have been saying.

The Minister, in her response, indicated that there was training for staff resilience and rotation of staff on the segregated wings, but I am still picking up that there is a chill factor and a difficulty for prison officers operating in the segregated units. Is that because of the concentration of prisoners? Do they think that they can dominate and impose their wish on the staff? While some Members spoke of the fact that the prisoners did not control the wings, it is undoubtedly the case that they have undue influence.

We benefited greatly from hearing from Robbie Butler about his experience. I thank him for that. His concern for officers, non-uniformed staff and prisoners was obvious. He made the point that segregation was not working.

I am particularly concerned about the language of the amendment. It states that Maghaberry is unique because of:

"the challenges it faces as a result of housing prisoners with diverse backgrounds who are subject to different court processes depending on the nature of their charges".

It is almost saying that we have the segregated units because of the court processes and it is all the courts' fault. Much of Europe does not have juries. That is a British judicial tradition that I wish to uphold. It is reflected largely in the Republic of Ireland as well. In February this year — this epitomises why there is a difficulty — a Fianna Fáil councillor highlighted why there was a need for the Special Criminal Court in the Republic: 12 jurors could not be got from 729 people for a case in Limerick. It is important —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Beggs: — that we protect the jury system and the justice system and do not allow courts to take the blame. We must move forward as a community and create an integrated prison, just as we need an integrated society.

Mr Speaker: Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, so I suggest that, by leave of the Assembly, we suspend the sitting until that time. The Question on the amendment will be put immediately after Question Time. The sitting is, by leave, suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 1.54 pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00 pm.

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Justice

Paedophiles: Internet Threat

1. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the measures being taken to combat the threat posed by paedophiles who use the Internet to contact victims or share illegal images. (AQO 518/16-21)

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): Educating the public on how to keep safe online and prevent cybercrime is a high priority for government. The Get Safe Online website is an ongoing resource that provides advice, including a specific section on safeguarding children. This year's Get Safe Online Day was on 18 October, and an associated awareness campaign urged the public and small businesses to make every day safer by treating online security as essential "life admin". I had the opportunity to visit the PSNI's e-crime centre, where it was clearly demonstrated that there are considerable challenges in safeguarding children and young people against the associated dangers of online exploitation and grooming.

The Marshall report on child sexual exploitation contained recommendations for my Department, including the need to examine a range of legislative issues. A review paper is currently under development. A range of protective measures are already in place including sexual offences prevention orders, statutory notification requirements and child protection disclosures. The Probation Board for Northern Ireland delivers a range of programmes to convicted sexual offenders, one of which specifically targets those who have made, possessed or distributed indecent images of children through electronic media. Policing and community safety partnerships across Northern Ireland also play a key role in educating our children and young people to stay safe online. Many, including those in the Member's constituency, will deliver a diverse range of initiatives in local schools and communities this year to keep the awareness of children, young people and, indeed, their parents heightened to the dangers that can and do lurk online.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for the detail that she has outlined. One of the UK's most senior police officers has said that he believes that at least 100,000 men in the UK regularly look at obscene images of children online. Can the Minister really provide any assurances that she, her Department and, indeed, the Executive are increasing the prioritisation of the safety of our young people and are investing in real online protection and in the identification of such predators, especially considering that years after the call for a cross-departmental Internet safety strategy, it remains outstanding?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. Yes, I believe that there is a renewed focus on child sexual exploitation, particularly online forms of it. We are becoming more aware of the nature of these offences, and current legislation, such as the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland)

Order 2008 and the disclosure scheme on child sexual exploitation, enable us to militate against them. I take on board the Member's comments that it is something that we need to have continued focus on, because these are our children and, often, when the bedroom doors are closed, we are not aware of what they are doing. We have a responsibility, both as a Government and as parents, to ensure that we keep our children safe online. I think it was said that 70% of the population now accessed material online, and, undoubtedly, the majority of them are children and young people. There is a definite need to provide a more targeted focus. When I visited the PSNI's e-crime safety unit only last week, that focus was happening, but much more needs to be done. It is almost one of those issues that I am not sure we will ever get on top of, because it is so colossal, but, as a Government, we are looking at how we can mitigate it in as many circumstances as possible.

Ms Armstrong: Just following on from what the Minister has discussed, this week is Parenting NI week, and it is discussing online digital safety, especially for teenagers. Can the Minister confirm what correspondence she has had with the cybercrime unit about the changes in legislation that are needed to combat the increasingly difficult challenges from this sort of crime? How will that be communicated to parents to ensure that they can support teenagers to stay safe online?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. I have had no specific suggestions about what legislation we need to put in place to better tackle this issue.

However, I do agree that this is a multiagency approach, not only with the PSNI, but also in our schools, in the Department for Communities, and in the Department of Health. We need to look at all Departments to see where these crimes can impregnate themselves, particularly amongst our children and young people.

I appreciate the Member's highlighting this important week for parenting. Parents and families have a responsibility to understand what their children and young people are doing whilst they are online. It is not always easy. We conduct a lot of our activity on smartphones, and children, I am sure, do not like you looking over their shoulder, but there needs to be a sense of trying to educate children and young people to the dangers that they face online. That is not something that the Government can do alone, and indeed, they need to support parents in doing that.

Nothing has been done as yet, but I am keen to look at this. Other Members have raised it with me, and it is one of those issues that unless we start tackling it now it might be difficult to get on top of later.

Prisoners: Mental Health Issues

2. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners currently serving sentences are diagnosed with mental health issues. (AQO 519/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) takes the duty of care for all individuals it holds in custody extremely seriously. Identifying and supporting prisoners with mental health issues during custody remains a priority for NIPS, and, since becoming Minister, I have instructed officials to ensure that focus on addressing prisoner and prison officer mental health remains at the forefront of their work.

The prison population stood at 1,499 on 16 October 2016, and 391 prisoners were recorded as having been diagnosed with a mental health issue on that date: 26% of the prisoner population. There is an obvious problem here, and it is something that we need to give full consideration to. In the overall prisoner population there were 1,107 sentenced prisoners, of whom 173 were recorded as having a mental illness.

The Prison Service and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, which is responsible for the delivery of healthcare in prisons, are committed to providing effective services to vulnerable people in custody.

The Minister of Health and I visited Hydebank Wood on 27 September to discuss health issues in prisons, particularly mental health. I will continue to work with Minister O'Neill to ensure that children, young people and adults in the criminal justice system are healthier, safer and less likely to be involved in offending behaviour.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister. If I heard her correctly, it sounds as if there is a suspicion that perhaps one in four people in the criminal justice system should not be there because of their mental health and well-being. I ask the Minister whether she is considering a multi-agency approach. For example, the PSNI argues that sometimes they go to the scene, lift somebody, and put them in a cell and therefore into the criminal justice system where the proper path, for the benefit of that individual, and therefore of society, lies elsewhere.

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his comments and, indeed, his question. Entirely, there needs to be a multi-agency approach to tackling mental health, not just for those in custody but right at the beginning of the criminal justice process, and that begins with the police.

We also need to feed that through, perhaps in courts before a conviction has even taken place. However, if that results in a custodial sentence, how do we deal with prisoners whilst they are in our care and then afterwards? After all, prison sentences are not indefinite, and prisoners will eventually come out into society.

In the best interests of a safer community we need to ensure that we have rehabilitated not just prisoners' behaviour but their health as well. There has to be a multi-agency approach to tackling mental health issues in prisons. I recently met a forensic mental health team in the Northern Trust, and a lot of the work that it is doing is a good model for how we could move forward in this area. I look forward to seeing how we can explore that further.

Ms S Bradley: Given the acute issues with mental health in our prisons, and across society in general, can the Minister advise on details of any new bid for increased moneys to address mental health issues as part of the proposal to deal with the past?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. No, I have not received any bids in that area, but the Member raises an important point. I have said in the House before that one of the biggest legacies of the past is mental health. The Troubles were a deep trauma for everyone involved, both directly and indirectly, and we need to focus on the fact that there will be out workings of that.

It is happening now, particularly when a lot of people are now in retirement and are starting to think about those issues. I have not had a bid in that area, but I am interested

to see how this area of work develops, alongside the Health Minister. This is her area, but when it comes into the justice system it crosses over into my remit. I think that, together, whether it is Health, Justice, Communities or Education, we need an interdepartmental approach to mental health. Outside the Executive and the House, we also need to look at agencies and our communities to see how we can best tackle the matter.

I am quite heartened by the conversations that we are having on mental health because it is important, and it is too often forgotten about. Indeed, since the beginning of this term, there has been a focus on it. That can be only a good thing because there are significant mental health problems throughout society, not least in my prisons, and, if we were to address them, we could address significant wider societal problems.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Does she agree with me that mental health issues do not just stop when a prisoner gets out of prison? When a prisoner is released, they are transferred into the community and into families. Will the Minister also look at the mental health work that the Probation Board for Northern Ireland is doing with clients?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. The Probation Board does fantastic work in preparing prisoners on their release. Indeed, mental health does not begin or end by coming into prison. The structure of prison can help to regulate some mental health problems — namely, through medication. However, it takes a wider approach than that, perhaps through other types of therapy. My difficulty is that, when prisoners are released into the community after serving their time in custody, they almost go back to square one because those support mechanisms are not necessarily in place, so their chances of reoffending increase. My approach to mental health, alongside the Health Minister, is that I am quite keen to begin with a preventative approach, perhaps even looking at whether we should send people with severe mental health issues to prison at all, looking at the support available when they are in custody and a post-custody approach to ensure that they do not reoffend, with the vicious circle beginning all over again. It helps no one: it does not help wider society, and it causes a lot of problems. From a pragmatic point of view, it wastes an awful lot of resources and money. I think that there is a responsibility on this Government to address the matter quite seriously.

Mr Sheehan: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Will she tell us what provision exists to support prisoners with autism or ADHD?

Ms Sugden: When prisoners come into custody, their circumstances are assessed. If I am really honest, I am not quite sure what provision exists for autism and ADHD, which perhaps suggests that provision is not quite satisfactory. I am keen that we look at the issue. Again, mental health is not the only reason for leading people to offending in society, and learning disability, autism and ADHD should be considered as well. Indeed, I met the forensic mental health team from the Northern Trust, which I mentioned earlier. It looks at all these issues because it comes from a multi-agency approach. It is not just about the clinical care of mental health through prescribed drugs; it is about the therapy of mental health, the environment

and the circumstances, so occupational therapy will be in there as well.

I entirely agree with the Member. I believe that no one is born bad; people tend to be a product of their circumstances and upbringing. If we can tackle those issues upstream, perhaps we will not have people offending in the first place. If we can tackle them whilst they are in our custody, they will, hopefully, not reoffend when they are released.

Ms Bradshaw: To follow on from your last point, will you give us some specifics on proposals that you are bringing forward to diagnose and treat those people in the youth justice system so that they do not become adult prisoners of the future?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. Conversations around children and young people in our criminal justice system are at a very early stage. I have, however, met the Health Minister to look at the issue because I believe that putting children and young people in the criminal justice system could be to their detriment and begin a spiral of destruction that does not help the individual or make for a safer community for wider society. It also causes a lot of other wider repercussions.

I am not sure how that will look. I am keen to develop it and see whether there is a necessity there. We also have to bear in mind the point of sentencing and people coming into custody: it is about finding the balance between rehabilitation and, in a sense, people being held to account for their offences, which makes this quite a difficult issue. It would be remiss of us not to look at it, because we see the outworkings of the current system, and, frankly, I am not sure that it is good enough.

2.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): As David Hilditch is not in his place, I call Steve Aiken.

Legal Aid Budget

Mr Aiken: May I ask the Minister of Justice for an update — sorry.

4. **Mr Aiken** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on how she is reducing the cost of the legal aid budget. (AQO 521/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member. I am committed to reducing expenditure on legal aid through a range of measures to tackle demand and the cost of individual cases. I am bringing forward proposals to introduce a standardised fee structure for legal representatives in family cases, I am conducting a review of the cost of expert witnesses, and I am making some adjustments to the types of cases that can be funded through legal aid. The proposals will build on changes that have already been implemented, including reduced fees in the criminal courts and measures to ensure that the appropriate level of representation is granted in civil and criminal courts. Administration costs are being addressed through a transformation programme in the Legal Services Agency, which includes a digitalisation programme. I am considering the recommendations in Access to Justice II and will bring forward an updated strategy for legal aid. I will also consider any relevant recommendations from the Gillen review to ensure that we take a strategic approach

to reform. Legal aid is demand-led and exists to provide support for the most vulnerable in society to get access to justice. Last year, the budget provided for over 90,000 acts of assistance.

Mr Aiken: I apologise for getting it slightly wrong earlier.

Given recent high-profile cases, including that of Hazel Stewart, in which, allegedly, over £600,000 has been spent on legal aid, does the Minister agree that more must be done to restore public confidence in the legal aid system?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. I am sure that the Member will appreciate that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on individual cases, but I take the point that there has been a lot of conversation about the cost of legal aid. Indeed, the bill is significant. I suppose that some could say that that might demonstrate that we are providing access to justice in all of these types of cases. We need to look at it in a wider context; indeed, the Access to Justice review part II enables us to do that, as will other reviews, such as the Gillen review that I mentioned, that we should also take into account. I am very aware of the public perception of legal aid, and I am working towards seeing how I can do something to ensure public confidence in it.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. The Minister indicated her intention to introduce a domestic violence offence. Can she tell us what impact that might have on the legal aid bill, and does she have a timeline for introducing the offence?

Ms Sugden: I am working on the offence. I have given myself a very definite timetable for the domestic violence offence, and I am really confident that I will stick to it. On the question of how that will affect the legal aid budget, it is really a matter of considering access to justice in the provision of legal aid and ensuring that the most vulnerable get that access to justice. I imagine that it will be facilitated in a similar way to other cases.

Ms Boyle: Minister, can you confirm that plans to reduce the cost of legal aid will not in any way impede proper access to justice for all sections of society?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. As I outlined, we need almost to reframe the message of legal aid and the purpose of it. From my perspective, legal aid should be the resort of access to justice for the most vulnerable. That is the focus that my Department and I are putting on legal aid to ensure that those who require access to justice should indeed get it. However, I will balance the argument: some would say that this is access to justice; others would say that this is a significant bill to come out of my budget, which is correct. We have to try to ensure that we can meet that bill in our budget. We are quite confident that we can do that this year. Overall, we have to ensure that this is about access to justice. The figure in itself is significant, but we should look at the fact that it is demand-led and we are satisfying access to justice in that respect.

Mr Attwood: Can the Minister give a firm personal commitment here and now to legal aid funding for the family court? The Minister has made issues of abuse and trauma priorities for her. If the funding for the family court is undermined, vulnerable families, parents and children will be put in jeopardy. Will you give that firm personal commitment to funding for the family court?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. The Member, as a member of the Justice Committee, will be familiar with the challenges that I have faced on legal aid. As I have reiterated, it is a challenge and a significant amount of budget, but, as I have said to other Members, it is about access to justice and providing access to justice to the most vulnerable in our society. That is something that I am keen to move forward with.

Ms Bailey: Does the Minister have any figures for cases in which legal aid has been rejected since the implementation of the budget cuts?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. I would not say that anything has been rejected because of budget cuts. There is a budget, and it is demand-led. If the cases that are brought forward satisfy the criteria for legal aid, they will get it. I would not suggest that anything has been rejected due to budget cuts.

Legacy Issues: NIO Discussions

5. **Mr McNulty** asked the Minister of Justice why she has not made available details of discussions with the Northern Ireland Office on legislation for the implementation of proposals to address the legacy of the past. (AQO 522/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Stormont House Agreement was an agreement between the Northern Ireland Executive and the British and Irish Governments. Since coming into office, I have been in discussion with Executive colleagues and the United Kingdom Government to ensure delivery of the justice elements of that agreement. In particular, discussions have focused on the remaining policy issues that lie behind the development of the draft Bill to deliver the Stormont House Agreement. Members will recognise that, as with any policy development, Ministers require the space and time to develop thinking and establish policy proposals. Once the policy position is sufficiently advanced, I, along with the First Minister and deputy First Minister, will be in a position to discuss our agreed position.

Mr McNulty: Thank you for your answer, Minister. Justice officials have been meeting NIO officials for months on the implementation of and legislation around legacy proposals. Does the Minister agree that devolution and openness are undermined when the Minister refers questions to her on her Department's work to the NIO rather than giving answers to the people of the North?

Ms Sugden: As always, I am happy to provide answers to the people of Northern Ireland. I will provide clarity to the Member who has raised the question: the draft legislation in relation to the historical inquiries unit is led by the UK Government. It is the most appropriate thing for me to deal with any questions in that way, because I do not speak for the Northern Ireland Office nor the UK Government. I speak for the Department of Justice. I will confirm that we have been meeting regularly on how we can progress the issue. I am very much of the mindset that we need to progress the issue. It was agreed in the Stormont House Agreement. It is the only show in town, and I believe that it is the best way of addressing our past.

Ms Archibald: Has the Minister challenged the NIO to release funding for the Lord Chief Justice's five-year plan for legacy inquests and pointed out that the British

Government are in breach of article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights by not doing so?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. I have said publicly on a number of occasions that I support the mechanism that the Lord Chief Justice has proposed to bring to a conclusion a number of legacy inquests, which will go ahead regardless of whether we find a solution to do it in a shorter period. As I have asked the House before, do we want to address this in five years, or do we want to address it in 25 years? Our approach to addressing legacy is ultimately about the victims and their families. We are time-bound by that. I am keen to ensure that we move forward on it as soon as possible so that we can move on and provide some answers to the victims of our past.

Mr Kennedy: Does the Minister agree that the current mechanisms for dealing with the past operate in an incomplete, imperfect and imbalanced manner that serves only to rewrite history and disproportionately focus on the state? Will she give an assurance to the House that she will not permit that to continue?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. It is my preferred option that we address the HIU and the legacy inquests in parallel and move them forward together. When we talk about victims, let me say that I have met a number since becoming Minister, and not one of them is telling me that their pain or hurt is any greater than anyone else's. They just want answers. That seems to be the case right across the communities and with the people whom I have met in the past six months. From my perspective, we need to progress on this and on addressing our legacy inquests, which are progressing already, just at a very slow pace. We also need to get the HIU up and running as soon as we can.

Mr Lyttle: On 21 June this year, the Justice Minister said that, as a result of the support that she had from the First Minister and through the commitment of the Executive to work together, she was confident of progressing funding for the Lord Chief Justice's proposals to grant inquests, denied for decades, into the death of people's loved ones. How credible is that support and commitment, given the First Minister's ongoing veto of those legacy inquest proposals?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. From any discussions that I have had, I can reiterate my confidence that we will progress on legacy inquests. It has always been a case for me of when that will be. I am hopeful that it will happen as soon as possible, but I am afraid that I cannot give you a time frame, because I am unsure, and discussions are ongoing on the issues. I do have confidence that we will move forward, however. Post the May election, we are in a very different political space and there is a keenness to try not only to address the challenges that we find in the Northern Ireland Executive but to deliver and get things done. The opportunity exists now that perhaps did not exist before, so I am confident that we will move forward on this.

Orange Hall Attacks: Prosecutions

6. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been prosecuted for attacks on Orange halls since 2011. (AQO 523/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I will say up front that any attack on any symbolic building is unacceptable. I am aware that there

have been a number of attacks on premises across Northern Ireland, some of which have been investigated as hate crimes by the PSNI.

At a strategic level, my Department is committed to tackling hate crime from the criminal justice perspective through the delivery of the Executive's community safety strategy, and it works with a range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations to take that work forward.

At an operational level, I understand that the PSNI has a control strategy dealing with attacks on symbolic buildings and that patrols pay attention to such buildings. In addition, policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs), which are jointly funded by my Department and the Northern Ireland Policing Board, work at a local level to develop solutions to local issues and enhance community safety.

Information on prosecution and conviction data sets in my Department is sourced from the integrated court operation system (ICOS), which is the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) information management system. Within that system, information on the type of building that may have been attacked is held only in the detail of charges for which an individual is prosecuted at court and is not searchable in an automated way. Therefore, it is possible to identify prosecutions or convictions resulting from an attack on symbolic buildings only through a manual trawl of court records.

Offences committed through such attacks may be criminal damage or arson, of which there are a number prosecuted each year. For example, in 2015, there were 1,908 convictions, where at least one offence was that of criminal damage. While only a small percentage of those will relate to attacks on symbolic buildings, given the number of cases involved, a search of the records would incur a disproportionate cost.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I have time to allow a very quick supplementary and a very quick response.

Mr Allister: Is it not quite appalling that, having been able in another answer to indicate that there have been 132 attacks on Orange halls in the last five years, the Minister cannot tell the House how many prosecutions there have been? Is that because of embarrassment? Surely if there is a spreadsheet showing the number of attacks, there must be a column, so to speak, that shows whether anyone was prosecuted or brought to justice. Is the Minister too embarrassed to tell us?

Ms Sugden: No, indeed I am not embarrassed to tell you. The people who commit those crimes should certainly be embarrassed. They are something that I condemn. These types of attacks, whatever the intention behind them, are abhorrent. It is not that I am too embarrassed to tell you the figures; we cannot provide the figures due to the disproportionate cost of doing so.

2.30 pm

I am not quite sure why the Member is so focused on the figures. The point he raises is a good one in that the attacks are continuing to happen. We need to look at the reasons why hate crime is happening and see how we can best address it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): That ends the period for listed questions. We move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Criminal Finances Bill

T1. **Mr Aiken** asked the Minister of Justice whether she has been briefed by her officials on the possible implications for Northern Ireland of the Criminal Finances Bill that has its Second Reading at Westminster tomorrow. (AQT 376/16-21)

Ms Sugden: No, I cannot recall any such briefing. That could be down to my ignorance, but I will come back to the Member with a response as soon as I get it.

Mr Aiken: I am sure, Minister, it is not down to your ignorance; I imagine that if it was brought before you, you would be fully aware of it. Will the Minister make representation to the Home Secretary to ascertain whether any of the £9 billion that belonged to the Libyan regime and is being sequestered in the UK can be used to compensate victims of IRA violence? The IRA used, and republican terrorists still are using, weapons and explosives provided by the Gaddafi regime.

Ms Sugden: Yes, I am quite happy to take that request forward and see what response we can get.

Public Order Legislation

T2. **Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Justice whether, following recent comments by the Chief Constable that the legislative framework would benefit from a review, she too would support a review into part III of the Public Order (NI) Order 1987 in relation to acts likely to stir up hatred or arouse fear. (AQT 377/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. I have not had conversations with the Chief Constable on that particular issue. However, further to her question today, I am quite happy to raise it as a matter of interest to the House.

Ms Seeley: I thank the Minister for her answer and her honesty. Following that conversation, will she come back to us to explain whether she intends to initiate a review of the legislative framework concerned?

Ms Sugden: Yes, I am quite happy to come back to the House on that.

Safer Streets Projects

T3. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Justice whether she and her Department value the role of volunteers in Safer Streets projects in various towns. (AQT 378/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. I value the role of all volunteers and people who come from the community and voluntary sector. I am a big advocate of the community and voluntary sector because those people are best placed in their communities to know what is best for the people they are working voluntarily with. I very much support the work of all volunteers. As a Government, we are not placed and do not have the exhaustive resources to provide a lot of services, so it is appropriate that we look towards the community and voluntary sector to see how we can better produce the public services that Northern Ireland expects of us.

Mr McElduff: The town of Omagh recently achieved purple flag status as a safer town in relation to evening entertainment etc. That is down not least to the voluntary efforts of the Omagh Safer Streets project. Will the

Minister initiate discussions with the project leaders and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council regarding funding difficulties that they are having?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. I congratulate Omagh for that initiative. The role of local government and the community and voluntary sector in finding solutions to the problems that we find in our local communities is very important. That is an apt way to tackle crime, whether it is antisocial behaviour or other forms of crime. I am quite happy to speak to anyone; it is important that we listen to a lot of the stakeholders involved. I reiterate that people involved in the community and voluntary sector know their communities best, and it would be remiss of us to not take their views into account. So, I am happy to do so.

Enniskillen Courthouse Closure

T4. **Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Justice whether the fact that Enniskillen courthouse is open only two to three days a week for court hearings is the start of a process of closure by stealth. (AQT 379/16-21)

Ms Sugden: No, certainly not; closure by stealth is not my intention at all. However, as the Member is aware, and as I reiterate to the House time and again, courthouse closures are subject to a judicial review which will be heard this week. I imagine that the outcome of that will be known some time later. Until I am aware of the outcome of that particular judicial review, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further.

Mrs Barton: So, Minister, you cannot categorically give an assurance to the people of Fermanagh that the courthouse will not close within the next five years?

Ms Sugden: I cannot comment on any aspect of the courts estate, pending the judicial review. When that has come to a conclusion, I am happy to have a conversation with the Member on the issue she raises.

Magilligan Prison: Foyleview Buildings

T5. **Mr Robinson** asked the Minister of Justice to outline what action her Department has taken since closing Foyleview Buildings at HMP Magilligan following the discovery of asbestos. (AQT 380/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question and I can indeed confirm that Foyleview was closed due to the discovery of asbestos in that prison. We were able to move people in that facility to other parts of the prison, so it has not had a hugely detrimental effect. However, this consolidates the view that we need to look forward to a new build at Magilligan. Indeed, that is something that I have always been committed to, but it will be subject to securing the appropriate funding.

Mr Robinson: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she tell us whether any other buildings at HMP Magilligan were found to contain asbestos?

Ms Sugden: Not that I am aware of, but I am happy to come back to the Member with a written answer in case that issue arose in other buildings.

Prisoners: Educational or Behavioural-change Programmes

T6. **Mr McGuigan** asked the Minister of Justice what kind of educational or behavioural-change programmes are available for prisoners serving a sentence of six months or less given that there were a total of 104 such prisoners at the end of September 2016. (AQT 381/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. He will appreciate that it is very difficult to rehabilitate prisoners in custody who are serving such short sentences. Indeed, the number of challenges around resources and putting effective plans into place to ensure rehabilitation are really quite large. It is something that we need to look at. We must ensure that, whilst people are in our custody, in a lot of cases for a short period of time, we can put programmes in place to ensure that rehabilitation.

Ultimately, rehabilitation is for the safety of the community. Whatever the sentence, six months, six years or 60 years — it would not be for 60 years — prisoners will come back into the community and we need to ensure that they are being rehabilitated so that, ultimately, they will not reoffend.

Mr McGuigan: Given the fact that the Minister said that this is something she plans to look at, does she plan to introduce measures that will enable the administration of effective community sentences as a preferred option for dealing with those who would otherwise receive a short custodial sentence?

Ms Sugden: I am happy to do that. Alongside agencies like the Probation Board, we can look at how we can better prepare prisoners for when they come back into the community. The Probation Board does a lot of fantastic work in that area. It looks at the special individual circumstances of each offender and the community that they will come out into. It is important that that is the focus of anyone who is in the Prison Service because, again, it is about having a safer community and limiting opportunities for reoffending. The Probation Board is successful in doing that, but it is limited and there is more work that needs to be done. That is something that I am keen to look at.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Keith Buchanan and John O'Dowd are not in their places.

Education in Juvenile Justice Centres

T9. **Ms Ni Chuilín** asked the Minister of Justice for an assurance that the significant weekly reduction in education hours from 22 to 15 for people in juvenile justice centres will not have a huge impact on them when they return to mainstream education. (AQT 384/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I take the Member's point about young people's education while they are in custody. Education, particularly for young people, is critical in rehabilitating that type of behaviour. I have issues with the fact that we take children and young people into the criminal justice system. We need to provide support so that when they come back into the community they do not fall behind. If that is the case, it points to a wider societal problem. Along with the Education Minister and the Health Minister, we are looking at children and young people in custody and at the appropriate measures that are in place to better support them. Education needs to be central to all those things, because it will reduce the likelihood of reoffending and

give them better opportunities for employment when they come out.

We have found that people who have opportunities for employment are less likely to reoffend, so that is something that we need to focus on. Indeed, there is a programme at Hydebank Wood that has focused on education, but that is something that we need to strengthen. We need to look at that in Woodlands as well.

Ms Ni Chuilín: I thank the Minister for her comprehensive response. I will write to her on the details of the transition process. She has partly answered my question on the details of what is available for children and young people who go through the criminal justice system. However, we need to make sure that children who are not academically inclined have opportunities for vocational training and education as well.

Ms Sugden: Yes, that is entirely the right approach. Too often, we associate education with academia, but not everyone is academically minded, and that is perfectly fine. We need to look at vocational opportunities. Some of those initiatives are already happening in the custody arrangements, and, often, they are the ones that are deemed to be quite successful. We have to look at how we can strengthen that to provide young people with skills so that when they come out of custody they have better opportunities. To me, that is the best outcome for all.

Prisons: Mental Health Care

T10. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Justice what aspects of mental health care in prisons she hopes to prioritise through the project advisory group that is responsible for public protection matters. (AQT 385/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. Mental health in prisons, for prisoners and prison officers, has been given a renewed focus since I became Justice Minister and the new Minister of Health took up her post. As I have reiterated many times, I am pleased with that approach because a lot of the issues that we find in our prisons are primarily down to mental health, including addiction problems and learning disabilities, as we discussed earlier.

I was pleased to meet a group that I have mentioned a number of times already: a forensic mental health team that looks at the specific circumstances of people who find themselves in custody. Those arrangements are particularly for people with severe mental health issues. There could, perhaps, be an opportunity to extend that to everyone in prison. It is not just about the healthcare that they receive; it is about the wider support that they also receive, whether that is the social care aspect or the environment in which they are living. It has to be a before, during and after approach.

People are coming into our prison system with mental health issues and, whilst they are there, those are often being manifested because being in prison is not an easy environment. I am sure that we can all appreciate that. Coming out of prison is probably the critical stage, because we are almost putting prisoners back to square one. If we are sending them out into the community again and the support systems are not there, we are pulling the rug from under them that we have worked hard to put in place. There needs to be a threefold approach, with

a beginning, a middle and an end. This will not be an end for an awful lot of people who find themselves in the criminal justice system. I am quite pleased that the Minister of Health has made it one of her priorities and, moving forward, it will be one of mine.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): We have time for a quick supplementary question and a quick answer.

2.45 pm

Mr McAleer: I note and welcome the very good joint work that the Minister is doing with her colleague the Minister of Health in dealing with the mental healthcare needs of people who are in prison. Has that looked at support for young people who have ADHD and autism who are imprisoned?

Ms Sugden: As I mentioned earlier, we often talk about mental health. When I talk about mental health, I look not only at the specific issues of mental health but at mental disorders, including autism and ADHD, which can sometimes be seen as behavioural disorders. They are a contributory factor to people offending, their difficulties in prison and why they could reoffend when they come out of prison. We need a more holistic approach. It is a good sign that we now have this focus because, hopefully, an upstream approach will ensure that it does not get downstream.

Communities

Community Development: Female Participation

1. **Ms Bailey** asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 3432/16-21, to outline the organisations involved in the strand one co-design process of the action plan to increase the participation of women in community development in order to address paramilitarism, as outlined in the Fresh Start Agreement. (AQO 530/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): As outlined in AQW 3432/16-21, my officials are taking forward activity to increase the participation of women in community development in order to address paramilitarism, as outlined in section A, paragraph 3.9 of the Fresh Start Agreement through two related strands of activity. Strand one relates to a detailed co-design process. Through this, my officials are engaged with key stakeholders from the statutory and voluntary and community sectors, including my Department, the Department of Justice, the Executive Office, Co-operation Ireland, the Training for Women Network, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, the Women's Resource and Development Agency, the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, the Women's Support Network, the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network, the Rural Community Network, the Foyle Women's Information Network and Intercomm. This work between my officials and key stakeholders has been ongoing since June this year, and it is planned that the output from the co-design work will form the basis of a Northern Ireland-wide consultation process, with the implementation of an agreed programme early in 2017-18.

Ms Bailey: Given that women have been allocated so little targeted resource under the Fresh Start Agreement and that this new co-design process of working is meant to

target grass-roots organisations working in the field, is the Minister content that all the organisations that he just listed are expert in women's participation or, indeed, even have a strong record in the area?

Mr Givan: The rationale for how those organisations were identified was through their experience, the networks and sectoral intelligence to identify the key stakeholders whom we believe to be well positioned in the community development sector in the areas of women's participation and conflict transformation.

The proposed time frame for taking forward the process is challenging, and that was a major determinant in the selection of key stakeholders. Officials identified organisations with the key experience and capacity that could contribute to the co-design process, whilst ensuring that any other organisation that expressed an interest could join the process.

Membership of the co-design group represents the groups that were willing to become involved in the co-design process and agreed to the conditions outlined in the terms of reference. Participation on the co-design group is dependent on all stakeholders involved agreeing to be actively involved in a positive contribution to the process and not merely being part of an oversight group.

Ms Hanna: I thank the Minister for his answers. Will he confirm that, when the real stage rather than the preparatory stage of Fresh Start funding is advanced, that will give expression to the Fresh Start strand that is about empowering women and not just rolling it up with the wider aim of tackling paramilitarism? Does he agree that part of tackling paramilitarism will be about empowering women to stand up to paramilitaries in their communities and that therefore emboldening groups related to paramilitaries will be counterproductive?

Mr Givan: This is very much about emboldening women in communities to take a community forward. I know from my engagement across the community that women are very much to the fore in challenging government and those in their own community about the things that hold the next generation back. I very much want women to be empowered. That is why, in Fresh Start, we have identified a key role to be played, and this work is being taken forward to do exactly that.

Mr Stalford: The Minister outlined some of how the organisations were identified to be involved in the co-design process. Can he detail for the House what monitoring processes will be put in place while they carry out their work and how the Department will ensure accountability?

Mr Givan: My Department, which has oversight, is carrying out ongoing work to ensure that what is designed will deliver what we want it to deliver. The expectation is that the co-design process will be completed in the autumn, and that will be followed by a public consultation process. The tendering process for potential delivery partners is planned for early 2017, and the formal launch of the programme is planned for early 2017-18.

Ms Ni Chuilín: Minister, thank you for your answers thus far. I want to expand on the question that Clare Bailey asked. I do not want to be disparaging about some of the groups that the Minister said that officials have been in contact with, but, more often than not, officials go to the big groups in the voluntary sector and forget about the

smaller groups in the community sector that do a lot of the work on the ground. Can he give an assurance that, as the programme rolls out, those community groups, particularly women's groups, will not become invisible?

Mr Givan: There was a sound rationale for the identification of the groups: to ensure that the need was manageable for the size of the group responsible for taking this forward. I am happy to give the assurance that, as this is developed, we want to hear from all groups that will be charged with carrying out this important work.

Mr Beggs: I welcome the proposal to empower women and enable them to carry out a role in addressing paramilitarism, but one of the problems with paramilitarism is that individuals — sometimes, very strong individuals — can dominate their community and that many are also involved in domestic violence. How will the Minister ensure that he is not sending out a signal that dominant characters will be further empowered and further emboldened, potentially to dominate female members of their community?

Mr Givan: Let me use the opportunity on the Floor of the House to make it absolutely clear that there should be no role in a community for anyone who engages in domestic violence. A Government who supported any such individuals would be rightly ridiculed, and in no way should the Executive ever empower individuals to dominate a community. This is about empowering women to tackle some of the issues prevalent in our society.

Mr Lyttle: What is the Minister's response to Mr Stitt's description of North Down Defenders flute band as "homeland security" who will defend north Down from anybody?

Mr Givan: My colleague was clear about those comments this morning. We have a Police Service of Northern Ireland that is responsible for upholding law and order. Any individuals who do not support the rule of law should, in my view, not be worthy of support from this Government.

Mr Allister: In light of what the Minister says, how does funding those closely associated with illegal organisations as chief executives or otherwise help to address paramilitarism? Does that not just confirm them in their self-inflated idea that they are "Mr Big" in their communities, which they are still determined to dominate? Is it not folly to pick out such people and organisations for funding?

Mr Givan: In organisations that I have worked with some, indeed, had a past, and I recognise very clearly that there are people who have wholeheartedly moved way beyond the place that they were in. I will work alongside individuals and organisations that are very committed to taking their community forward. I believe that there are individuals who do that. Across the Chamber, there are individuals and political parties that very much support organisations that had associations with the past conflict. I do not believe that those individuals should be sidelined. I believe that we need to ensure that individuals who genuinely want to move on and who support the police are supported in doing so.

Motorcycle Road Races: Safety

2. **Mr Middleton** asked the Minister for Communities what support his Department is providing to improve safety at motorcycle road races. (AQO 531/16-21)

Mr Givan: Motorcycle road racing is an extremely popular sport across the Province. It generates a lot of passion, both amongst riders and followers, and fosters a strong cultural identity in Northern Ireland and beyond.

While responsibility for improving safety at motorcycle road races rests with the organisers and promoters of a road race event, it is important that my Department provides support to the road-racing fraternity in order that road racing is made as safe as it can be. Officials from my Department and Sport NI have engaged with 2 & 4 Wheels and a number of motorcycle racing clubs to identify priorities at a number of motor sport venues, including road-racing circuits. As a result, I am delighted that my Department has been able to provide financial assistance that will help to improve safety at a number of venues, including the North West 200, the Ulster Grand Prix and the Armoy Road Races.

To take this commitment forward, my officials are working directly with a number of clubs involved in delivering road-racing events to provide safety equipment and to deliver improvements to the infrastructure of the circuits. As a first step, I have announced funding of £124,000 specifically for the North West 200. That investment will improve the safety for the riders on the circuit through the provision of kerb protectors, safety bales and a new race warning system. In addition, the funding provided will help enhance the existing spectator safety equipment used at the event. I know that this investment will support the organisers as they continue to make safety improvements for the competitors and spectators at one of Northern Ireland's top international events. The organisers recognise that safety is an important part of their event management plans.

I take very seriously the importance of safety at sports events and will continue to ensure that my Department provides support where it can.

Mr Middleton: I welcome the funding announced by the Minister. Will the equipment be shared across other motor sport events?

Mr Givan: That was part of the conversation I had when I met Mervyn Whyte and the Member of Parliament for North Antrim. I felt that it was important to emphasise the need to share equipment, and the majority of equipment purchased, such as the safety bales and safety barriers, will be available to other event organisers. This investment will benefit not just the North West 200; other road-racing events will also benefit. Motor sport event organisers and promoters already share safety equipment where possible, and any investment by the Department will seek to ensure that that continues. Motorcycle racing clubs have long-standing arrangements to share safety equipment with other clubs and, indeed, event organisers outside of motorcycle racing.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for his commitment to providing additional safety equipment. What conversations has he had with the Minister for Infrastructure to make sure that the road surfaces are safe and suitable for racing on? He mentioned the North West 200 and the Armoy races. Could he also have a look at the Mid Antrim 150 in Clough?

Mr Givan: There are areas in which I can provide assistance, and I have stepped forward to do that in respect of safety. Obviously, road surface is a matter for the Department for Infrastructure. The Member's

constituency colleague Mr Storey and I met Bill Kennedy of the Army races. They are talking to the divisional roads manager about that. I had a conversation with the Minister for Infrastructure about the condition of road surfaces in Armoyle, but the organisers are dealing with that at a local divisional level. I got the opportunity to visit the racetrack in Armoyle. Ian Paisley, along with Bill Kennedy, brought me round the track, and they were able to identify some of the areas where, I believe, my Department can provide some support. I hope to make an announcement about that in the not-too-distant future.

Mr McGuigan: I welcome the Minister's commitment to ensuring safety at sporting events. Just following on from the previous question, can the Minister confirm that the organisers are working with other colleagues in the Executive and statutory partners to minimise the risks associated with motorbike racing?

Mr Givan: This is hugely important. Northern Ireland has a rich heritage in motorcycle racing: we have produced some of the world's greatest motorcycle racers. The sport is here to stay. Obviously, when there are incidents at races, it brings into sharp focus the debate around the dangers associated with the sport. While recognising them, I support the sport and want to see it continue. It is therefore vital that we provide support to clubs to enhance the safety measures at events. I do not believe that will remove the risk entirely from this sport, but we seek to do our best to ameliorate the dangers that exist.

3.00 pm

Market Square, Dungannon

3. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment of the public realm scheme in Dungannon's Market Square. (AQO 532/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department has provided funding nearing £4.6 million for the delivery of the two phases of the Dungannon public realm scheme. The funding was provided to Mid Ulster District Council for the design, consultation and implementation of both phases of the scheme. The council was responsible for the appointment of the design teams and the contractors delivering the scheme.

Phase 1 of the public realm scheme was completed in February 2015, with phase 2 being completed in September 2016. Before proceeding with the delivery of phase 1 of the project, there was an extensive consultation process with all key stakeholders in the town. The design of the scheme took account of all feedback, including that of Transport NI, formerly Roads Service, which is responsible for the readoption and maintenance of the scheme. The scheme involved the transformation of the town centre, including a new events space. Whilst the majority of the work has been received positively, there has been some negativity at a few aspects of phase 1 of the scheme. The main concerns relate to car parking, traffic signalling and the flow of traffic, and pedestrian accessibility in the Market Square area of the town. Mid Ulster District Council has identified a number of potential solutions aimed at further enhancing car parking, traffic management and pedestrian movement in Market Square and is currently engaged on public and statutory consultation on those. My Department provided

100% of the funding for phases 1 and 2 of the scheme, so the council will be required to fund any potential enhancements to the current scheme.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for that very comprehensive reply. He might have answered my supplementary in it. We will have a go anyway.

The scheme that is being done in Market Square has many attributes. There are one or two deficiencies, however, not least the traffic-flow problems and pedestrian safety. Minister, as you intimated, the council now proposes to do further enhancement of the scheme. What discussions have you had with it on its new proposals and to what extent, if any, is the Department funding that?

Mr Givan: I have set out how the public realm scheme was developed. It was led by the council but 100% funded by my Department. I know that some Members might ask why, given that every other council would be asked to make some contribution to the public realm, that council was allocated 100% funding. There was a context to that. The public realm scheme was designed to complement the council's development of the adjacent Ranfurly House Arts and Visitor Centre. That was officially opened in October 2012. The £5.5 million re-landscaped people's park and the arts and visitor centre were created by the then Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council with significant funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Given that funding at the time by the council for those elements, my Department did not provide any funding support to this key regeneration site in Dungannon that the council had provided. It was agreed, however, that my Department would fund the public realm works completely in order to support the regeneration of Dungannon town centre. Given that the scheme was designed and led by the council, if there are areas now in which the council has identified that it could be improved, it will be a matter for the council to provide funding for that.

Mrs Barton: Minister, while I hear what you are saying about the problems that there are with the public realm scheme, surely, as you provided 100% funding and problems have arisen perhaps because of issues that were not foreseen, you could provide some funding for remedying them.

Mr Givan: Again, given that the council led on this and designed it and my Department provided 100% funding, if there are areas of concern, it falls very much at the table of the council to deal with them. Rightly, other councils would turn around and ask my Department why it does not give 100% funding to all other public realm schemes that take place in Northern Ireland. To have a fair and equitable solution to this, the council needs to bear responsibility if it feels that there were inadequacies in the design that it implemented.

Ms Gildernew: The Minister has pointed out that he is aware that there are difficulties in the square in Dungannon, especially around the plethora of traffic lights and traffic movement in the square. There have also been a couple of years of roadworks. As a result, people have chosen to shop elsewhere. Is the Minister prepared to do anything to help to counteract that problem?

Mr Givan: Again, the Department gave 100% of the funding to help to regenerate Dungannon town centre. If the council has identified more ways in which it can

improve it, it is at liberty to raise the finances for that through its own systems.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Ross Hussey is not in his place.

Benefit Fraud

5. **Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister for Communities how many people are employed in his Department to address benefit fraud. (AQO 534/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department's single investigation service addresses customer fraud and error. It employs 193 staff. Of that complement, 75 front-line investigators deal specifically with suspected benefit fraud cases. In 2015-16, 931 sanctions were imposed for benefit fraud, with 272 convictions through the courts and a further 659 administrative penalties imposed by the Department.

Mrs Palmer: We were told a year ago that, under the Fresh Start Agreement between the Minister's party and Sinn Féin, there would be £125 million for the Social Security Agency to tackle fraud and error. I am concerned because, at his previous Question Time, the Minister said:

*"we first need to secure the funding from Treasury".—
[Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 118, p222,
col 2].*

What took so long?

Mr Givan: It is not a case of what has taken so long. Obviously, continuing conversations are taking place with Treasury to get the funding to help us to tackle fraud and error more effectively.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. What action is his Department taking to prepare an invest-to-save scheme for fraud and error, as set out in the Fresh Start Agreement?

Mr Givan: Obviously, discussions with the Treasury have been taking place about the invest-to-save proposal. That is in order for the Department to access £25 million, which was outlined in the Fresh Start Agreement, to help to address social security fraud. I have asked for those discussions to be expedited. Significant work has now been completed in preparing the operational basis on which savings will be delivered. Fraud investigation, customer compliance visiting and case review processes are all in place and working effectively. Underpinning those operational structures is a new case selection and routing function, meaning that cases can be dealt with more quickly and efficiently.

Ms Seeley: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Will he confirm that, as well as staff working on fraud, resources and an overview are given to looking at error?

Mr Givan: I am happy to give that reassurance to the Member. The team that deals with fraud also deals with error. It has identified that error has taken place, both with claimants making errors — that can be done unknowingly and very much innocently — and departmental staff as well. Over 99% of the Department's calculations are accurate, but, on occasion, there is some error on the part of staff. There is ongoing work to seek to minimise that.

Mr Mullan: What is the Minister's Department doing to address the very serious problem of housing benefit fraud, or dole drops, as they are more commonly known?

Mr Givan: The Department has very robust measures in place to identify where fraud has taken place. It is an ongoing piece of work. I will provide the Member with more details in respect of housing benefit fraud.

Ms Armstrong: My question has been answered.

Mr Agnew: How did we arrive at the situation where we conduct and pay for the investigation of benefit fraud but all the money recouped goes back to HMRC? Does the Minister have any plans to renegotiate that situation?

Mr Givan: Obviously, it is important that, wherever the money from Treasury is channelled, we seek to identify whether it is fraudulent. The end recipient of that saving is not the point; it is about the public having confidence in the benefit system and believing that people in receipt of benefit are receiving it legitimately. In terms of invest to save, this is a proposal that we have with the Treasury to finance further work that we can do. So, the Treasury will allow us to do that and, obviously, will benefit in respect of that.

Disabled People: Quality of Life

6. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister for Communities what action his Department is taking to improve the quality of life of people with a disability. (AQO 535/16-21)

Mr Givan: I am aware of the level of disability in Northern Ireland and the challenges faced by people living with a disability. One in five of the local population has a disability — around 5% of children, 17% of the working-age population and 60% of those people aged over 65. The Department is addressing these challenges through a range of activities. Some examples being driven by my Department are as follows: the development of a new wheelchair accommodation standard for new social housing in Northern Ireland; reduction in the backlog of those waiting for suitable accommodation; implementation of the Executive's employment strategy for people with disabilities; implementation of the Active Living: No Limits action plan, which is supported by £300,000 for a disability sport capital programme; improved library and museum access; the provision of additional sign language classes; access to a range of art forms ensuring participation and artistic excellence for people with disabilities, and the development of a new Culture Arts strategy.

In addition, improving the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families is a strategic indicator in the new Programme for Government for which my Department has policy responsibility. The draft delivery plan for indicator 42 has been developed through engagement with people with disabilities and their representative organisations.

The draft Programme for Government Framework, including the indicators delivery plan, will be subject to a full public consultation prior to being finalised.

As part of the welfare mitigations, we will financially protect individuals with a disability who are impacted adversely by the change from disability living allowance to personal independence payment to afford them time to adjust to the new welfare reforms.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. What is your Department doing to ensure that venues and historic monuments within its remit have access for all, including those with a disability?

Mr Givan: There is a range of areas where the Department is addressing this issue. Libraries, for example, are a free service to everyone in society. Material offered includes ClearVision, access to books for visually impaired readers, material from Barrington Stoke designed for those with dyslexia and e-books and audiobooks. They also provide a home-call service for anyone who has significant difficulty in visiting a branch or a mobile library due to ill-health, disability or lack of mobility and who do not have anyone who can collect library materials for them. This, again, can be provided via a dedicated mobile library, a dual-purpose mobile library or, indeed, a delivery van. National Museums provide free entry for registered disabled people and their carers to the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and the Ulster American Folk Park. This is for all disabled adults and children. All of the national museum sites comply with the relevant disability legislation.

With regard to the 190 monuments in state care, these are historic monuments. They range from prehistoric tombs to medieval castles and churches, ancient farmsteads, 20th century fortifications, and so on. Many of the sites, by their very nature, are difficult to access because of their location or the terrain around them. As part of the routine works to improve access to the sites, the Department has committed to ensuring that the monuments are as accessible as possible to everyone; that includes physical access to the sites as well as provision of information. Access arrangements have already been upgraded at many sites and all new projects will include consideration of how the sites can be improved for everyone. For example, we are hoping to facilitate disabled access on a stretch of the walls of Derry.

Ms Boyle: I thank the Minister for his commitment in this area. Can you confirm, throughout all the arm's-length bodies and functions of your Department, that a particular focus will continue to be given to delivery for people with disabilities and, as you mentioned, through sports, arts and libraries, that you will ensure that people with disabilities are aware of exactly what they are entitled to?

3.15 pm

Mr Givan: I am happy to give that commitment to the Member. When I was at Girdwood for the launch of Disability Sports and the £300,000 that I announced to allow councils to buy capital equipment that people with disabilities could access, I saw first-hand the young people and children who wanted to engage in sport. It is something that so many people take for granted, and those young people were getting so much fulfilment out of what they were doing. I do not believe for one moment that people with disabilities should be disadvantaged in getting access to services in Northern Ireland, and it is something that I am keen to pursue.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): That ends the period for listed questions. We now move to 15 minutes of topical questions. Mr Ross Hussey is not in his place. I call Emma Little Pengelly.

Schools: Battlefield Visits

Mrs Little Pengelly: Since 2013, the UK Government have facilitated school-age children in England, Scotland and Wales to visit the battlefields of World War I, providing an important learning opportunity around the devastation

of war and the cost of peace, freedom and democracy and the bravery of so many. Sadly, it was not rolled out in Northern Ireland by the previous Education and CAL Ministers.

T2. Mrs Little Pengelly asked the Minister for Communities whether he would support the implementation of a programme of battlefield visits for schools in Northern Ireland. (AQT 387/16-21)

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for raising what is a very important point, and she highlights how this has been taken forward in other parts of the United Kingdom. It is vital for our schoolchildren to have the same insight into the sacrifices paid on the battlefields of World War I as schoolchildren in other parts of the United Kingdom. The historical, cultural and educational benefits of such a scheme are undisputed. It is wrong that the scheme has not been operational in Northern Ireland, and I am committed to rectifying it. Therefore, I am glad to inform the Member and the House that, some weeks ago, I tasked my officials with working with colleagues in the Department of Education to implement a similar programme in Northern Ireland, and the Education Minister and I hope to make an announcement on a scheme in the near future.

Mrs Little Pengelly: I welcome the news. I also welcome the consideration that the Minister has given to the matter so far. Following his discussions with the Education Minister, can the Minister outline the numbers of school-age children from across the community in Northern Ireland who could avail themselves of this important opportunity?

Mr Givan: Part of the discussions with the Minister of Education and the Department of Education has been about the numbers that could participate in the scheme, and I am keen that it will be for as many as possible. I am particularly heartened to hear that controlled and maintained secondary schools in my constituency have engaged in joint visits to the battlefields, because there is a shared history in respect of the sacrifice made on the battlefields during the world wars. Progress has been made in recognising that shared history, and I believe that this would be a valuable contribution in continuing to make progress, so I am keen that it will be available as far as possible.

Sports Clubs: Capital Funding

T3. Mr Milne asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the capital funding currently available to sports clubs. (AQT 388/16-21)

Mr Givan: There is a range of capital funding that I would like to see released. The greatest priority is the soccer stadia strategy moneys. The Executive have committed to spend approximately £36 million, and we are in the final stages of what the proposal will be. When I am in a position to take the decision, I hope that we will be able to open it up to a public application.

I can highlight some of the thinking for the capital budget over the next four years, as there is great potential to partner with other third-party organisations on our sporting infrastructure. I am particularly keen to see another strand developed for infrastructure for the three main sports: rugby, soccer and GAA. That is a proposal that we are looking at and would like to bring forward. I would also like to see whether there are other ways that we could partner

with third-party organisations, potentially councils, that are identifying where the need exists for sporting infrastructure in their communities. Is there an opportunity to maximise the capital budget that will be available to us?

Notwithstanding all that, we obviously have issues with the development of Casement Park. That is an Executive commitment that I want to be implemented. I recently met those responsible for taking forward Casement Park. They showed me the revised plans for the capacity and the way in which it would be configured at Casement. The GAA is taking that process forward. My Department is supporting the process, and we hope to see progress.

Mr Milne: Buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. What advice would you give to clubs — GAA clubs, soccer clubs and rugby clubs — to prepare for any future funding that may become available?

Mr Givan: The Member raises a good point. Moneys can become available in-year, but the pressure is about how you will be able to spend those moneys and meet the necessary tendering processes. If organisations already have an approved business case and planning permission in place, that puts them in a better state of readiness should funding become available. Organisations can link in with official governing bodies to get advice from them, and I encourage people to do that. Councils have a key role to play in developing sporting infrastructure, so, hopefully, they can also provide assistance to sporting clubs as they take forward their plans.

Ashers Bakery Case

T4. **Mr T Buchanan** asked the Minister for Communities for his initial reaction to today's unjust ruling against Ashers bakery and to say how, he feels, the Equality Commission handled the case. (AQT 389/16-21)

Mr Givan: Time is needed to absorb and consider the ramifications of today's judgement. Needless to say, I am extremely disappointed, as many people will be, about the outcome of the Court of Appeal. I have had an opportunity to read the summary, in which the Court of Appeal indicates the importance of the faith community in playing an active part in commerce and the fact there should be no chill factor to their participation. I believe that, never mind the chill factor, the judgement puts those in the faith community who are involved in commercial life into the ice bucket. We need to be cognisant of that. I appeal to people to consider the faith community in the same way as the Court of Appeal has considered the LGBT community. The summary states:

"It is obviously of importance that the LGBT community should feel able to participate in the commercial life of this community freely and transparently."

I agree, but I also agree that it should be the same for the faith community.

The issues raise a challenge to our society about the type of community that we want. Is it one where we truly have a liberal society in which people have differences and different identity characteristics and we seek to balance that, or is it one where people of faith very much feel that, if they do not suppress or go against their conscience, they go out of business. I do not believe that that is what a truly liberal society is about. I am disappointed, as was

the Court of Appeal, about the way in which the Equality Commission went about taking the case.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I remind Members that, while they are entitled to their individual point of view, this is not a court of law.

Mr T Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he advise what implications the ruling will have in future for freedom of expression, conscience, faith, culture and business?

Mr Givan: I listened to how the McArthur family have responded, and they clearly feel that those fundamental freedoms have been undermined. That should cause everybody concern, and the House needs to reflect on it. The McArthur family handled the process, throughout the initial trial and the Court of Appeal, in a very gracious way, and they very much demonstrated the characteristics of Christian grace. I then compare that with the actions of the Equality Commission and the pursuit of the family through the courts. The Court of Appeal's judgement made it very clear that it did not provide support and advice to the McArthur family and the Ashers company, and, having today won the case, it now seeks to have costs awarded against the McArthur family.

The way in which the McArthurs have handled this stands in stark contrast to the way in which the Equality Commission has handled it. That reveals the nature of the character that exists in the Equality Commission.

Councillors: Complaints

Mr Butler: Thank you, councillor — I mean, Minister. We are practically neighbours, so he will let me off with that.

T5. **Mr Butler** asked the Minister for Communities how many current councillors are subject to complaints being dealt with by the local government ombudsman. (AQT 390/16-21)

Mr Givan: I will be happy to get that information for the Member, who, like me, was a councillor in the great city of Lisburn at one point and is now here. I am not aware of the number of councillors who are currently subject to an investigation by the ombudsman. I am aware of some individuals who have been subject to investigation, but I am not aware of the totality of it.

Mr Butler: Thank you, Minister, for your answer. This issue deeply concerned me when we had briefings from the ombudsman. Is the Minister concerned about the potential for vexatious complaints against councillors? Will he revisit the councillors' code of conduct to make sure that it is fit for purpose?

Mr Givan: The issue of the code of conduct has been raised with me by NILGA, which is the national association of councillors, and different council bodies. I am very clear that a specific standard is required for councillors who operate a quasi-judicial function on councils, namely those on planning committees. However, I should say that planning is a matter for the Department for Infrastructure, not me. Planning committee functions and quasi-judicial functions are somewhat different from other functions that councillors carry out, and it is important that the code of conduct reflects that. It is planned that a consultation process will look at the code of conduct, and that will, I believe, help to strike the right balance.

We want the highest possible standards in public life to be observed by our councillors, all of whom carry out their role in the interests of the people whom they serve. A code of conduct should not operate in such a way as to provide a straitjacket for councillors, who have highlighted the way in which it applies. The standards expected of councillors in their private life are not those expected of MLAs. There is a difference in how the code of conduct is applied in circumstances where, very clearly, you are not acting in your capacity as a councillor, just as there is when you are not acting in your capacity as a Member of this House. There is a contrast between the two, and I have been looking at that.

Personal Independence Payments

T6. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister for Communities what is being done by his Department to educate the public on the introduction of the personal independence payment. (AQT 391/16-21)

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for raising the issue. We recently launched a new campaign. My officials are implementing a comprehensive advertising, communication and stakeholder engagement activity plan to effectively inform all the citizens of Northern Ireland about the introduction of the personal independence payment and ensure that they are aware that PIP is replacing DLA for people aged 16 to 64. A multichannel advertising campaign that began today and will run until early December is specifically designed to raise awareness prior to the start of the managed reassessment of existing DLA claimants. The key aim of the current campaign is to ensure that existing DLA claimants aged 16 to 64 are aware that PIP is replacing DLA and that they will be contacted in advance of any change to their benefit.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): There is time for a quick question and answer.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. How is this being communicated to the wider public and those who have difficulty accessing the Internet and suchlike?

Mr Givan: The current media campaign delivers the primary message that DLA is being replaced by PIP. If you are of working age and are affected, you will be contacted. In order to support the media campaign content, it is on NI Direct, the government services website. It was redeveloped to allow claimants very quickly and easily to access information about PIP, including that in alternative formats such as audio and British and Irish sign language.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Time is up for questions. Members should take their ease while we change the top Table.

3.30 pm

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

Private Members' Business

HMP Maghaberry: Paramilitary Prisoners

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly notes that HMP Maghaberry is unique in the British Isles and much of Europe for the challenges it faces as a result of housing prisoners with such opposing political and ideological views and criminal backgrounds; further notes the continuing implementation of a flawed decision taken in 2003 to separate paramilitary prisoners and the impact that this is having on the operation of the prison and on the morale of public servants who live with its consequences; believes that the prison should gradually revert to its integrationist policy and that this should be reflected in the Executive's action plan on tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime; and calls on the Minister of Justice to put in place the framework to ensure that, by 2021, there are no new admissions to separate paramilitary wings and that, by 2026, there is a fully integrated prison regime. — [Mr Beattie.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after "Maghaberry" and insert

"is unique on these islands and much of Europe for the challenges it faces as a result of housing prisoners with diverse backgrounds who are subject to different court processes depending on the nature of their charges; recognises that all prisoners and all prison staff must be treated with dignity and respect; believes that there is a need for ongoing and comprehensive prison reform; and calls on the Minister of Justice to work jointly with the planned independent review to examine the operation of the separated regime, evidencing the need for any changes and providing useful information for stakeholders to take forward, as proposed by the report from the Fresh Start panel on the disbandment of paramilitary groups." — [Mr Kearney.]

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 50; Noes 15.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Carroll, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Ms Hanna, Mr Hazzard, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr E McCann, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCrossan, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McMullan, Mr McNulty, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Robinson, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Ms Sugden.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms J McCann and Mr McCartney.

NOES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allister, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Kennedy, Mr McKee, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Aiken and Mr Beattie.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Anderson, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lyons, Mr McCausland, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Lord Morrow, Mr Poots, Mr Ross, Mr Stafford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 50; Noes 15.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Carroll, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Ms Hanna, Mr Hazzard, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr E McCann, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCrossan, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McMullan, Mr McNulty, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Ms Sugden.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms J McCann and Mr McCartney.

NOES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allister, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Kennedy, Mr McKee, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Aiken and Mr Beattie.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Anderson, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Douglas, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lyons, Mr McCausland, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Lord Morrow, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Stafford, Mr Storey, Mr Weir

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes that HMP Maghaberry is unique on these islands and much of Europe for the challenges it faces as a result of housing prisoners with diverse backgrounds who are subject to different court processes depending on the nature of their charges; recognises that all prisoners and all prison staff must be treated with dignity and respect; believes that there is a need for ongoing and comprehensive prison reform; and calls on the Minister of Justice to work jointly with the planned independent review to examine the operation of the separated regime, evidencing the need for any changes and providing useful information for stakeholders to take forward, as proposed by the report from the Fresh Start panel on the disbandment of paramilitary groups.

Assembly Business

Mrs Overend: On a point of order, Principal Deputy Speaker. Following on from the point of order raised at the opening of today's business, and the unbecoming attempts by the Health Minister to close down last week's debate on waiting times, I would like to make you aware that in advance of today's debate on nursing shortages, I tabled a priority question for written answer asking for those statistics from the Health Minister. It should have been answered on 17 October, and it remains unanswered. How are we, as MLAs, meant to properly participate in these debates without such basic information? Can the Principal Deputy Speaker compare these practices with those of other regions and other seats of government?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I thank the Member for her point of order. I will refer the matter to the Speaker, and we will return to the issue.

Mr O'Dowd: On a point of order, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I would like to apologise to the House for not being in my place during questions to the Justice Minister.

Mr K Buchanan: On a point of order, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. I would like to apologise to the House for not being in my place. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: If we are all finished with our points of order, we will move on.

Private Members' Business

Nursing Shortages

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

Mr Anderson: I beg to move

That this Assembly acknowledges the ongoing problem of nursing shortages in Northern Ireland; recognises the work carried out by former Health Ministers and health and social care trusts to address this problem; and calls on the Minister of Health to build on these efforts by working proactively with our colleges and universities to promote nursing as a career choice and to work collaboratively with the relevant bodies to train and retain more nurses, thus reducing the total spend on agency workers and assisting long-term workforce planning.

I welcome the opportunity to bring forward this motion on addressing nursing shortages in Northern Ireland. I believe that this issue is one of significant importance that needs to be raised in the Assembly, and that is why I have brought this motion forward in my name and that of my colleagues. I also wish to declare an interest as I have family working in the nursing and midwifery professions.

It has to be recognised that the problem of nursing shortages is not unique to Northern Ireland but is a problem right across the United Kingdom and, indeed, the wider world. We all want to see the health service working properly, and we and our families all value and make use of it. Nursing shortages is an issue that has been highlighted many times in the media, and it is raised by my constituents on a regular basis. Throughout my time as an MLA, I and my colleagues have had regular meetings with the Southern Health and Social Care Trust and, at our most recent meeting a few weeks ago, addressing nursing shortages was a topic that was high on the agenda.

I would like to put on record my sincere thanks and gratitude to the dedicated nursing staff that we have right across Northern Ireland. They go above and beyond their call of duty to help and support the patients in their care, often working long, unsociable hours under significant pressure and stress. Nurses have a genuine compassion and caring nature and want to help others in need. It is not just a job to them. I feel that we must do all that we can to support them in the work that they do.

We must recognise that the circumstances and needs of our society and health service are changing all the time. We now have an ever-growing ageing population, which presents significant challenges to our health and social care services. In addition, we have witnessed an increase in the number of people with chronic conditions and have seen an increase in the number of people who lead unhealthy lifestyles. It has, in fact, been noted that the demand for health and social care services is rising by around 5% each year. Clearly, the health and social

care sector has had to operate in a more challenging environment in recent years. This means that we have to be more efficient and ensure that finances are directed to the areas that are most in need.

In recent times, former Health Ministers, the health and social care trusts and other key agencies have attempted to address the ongoing problem of nursing shortages. An example of this is that, during the previous mandate, nearly 1,200 more nurses and midwives were employed. At the end of March 2016, the previous Health Minister, Simon Hamilton, also announced an increase of 100 preregistration nurse training places in Northern Ireland from autumn 2016, taking the Department's annual commission of training places to 745 nurses.

It was noted in the document, 'A Workforce Plan for Nursing and Midwifery in Northern Ireland (2015-2025)', that 21% of newly qualified Queen's University nurses and midwives left Northern Ireland in 2011-12, compared with 10% in 2009-2010. Ulster University said that it had no official figures but believed that approximately 7% of its nursing graduates left Northern Ireland to work elsewhere in the United Kingdom over a four-year period. It has been suggested that the number of nursing graduates leaving Northern Ireland could be as high as one third. The Chief Nursing Officer highlighted the fact that many local nursing graduates were relocating to London after their studies. In some cases, they are attracted by packages additional to what they could receive in Northern Ireland, including resettlement and enhancement of their salary.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that it is virtually impossible for two nurses and two auxiliaries to deliver a proper standard of care in a ward with 17 or 18 patients?

Mr Anderson: I thank the Member for his intervention. I have heard of many similar cases. It happens regularly, but we cannot allow it to happen if we are to ensure that patients get the care that they need. I know, as I said, that nurses in those situations go beyond the call of duty to ensure that the patient comes first.

This is a serious issue and a worrying trend, especially when we have an ageing nursing and midwifery workforce, with research indicating that up to 46% are eligible to retire in some practice areas between 2015 and 2025. Those nurses and midwives will have to be replaced in the health and social care sector. In addition, from 2011-12 to 2015-16, approximately 1,600 nurses working across our trusts retired. The Chief Nursing Officer discussed the ageing profile in different disciplines of nursing and midwifery when she recently appeared before the Health Committee. She stated that there was a significant number in the over-50 age range who are due to retire, increasing from 11% in 2015 to 30% in 2018.

I understand that there are times when hospitals have to rely on bank nurses to ensure that they have enough staff to provide care for their patients. While we require flexibility in our system, it is unsustainable to over-rely on nursing banks. I am also aware that health and social care trusts have been asked to examine their reliance on agency staff. In each of our trusts, there has been an extensive increase in the amount spent on agency workers in the period from 2011-12 to 2015-16. I recognise the contribution that agency workers make to our health service in specific short-term circumstances, but it is

important that our health service manages and controls that expenditure.

In an immediate effort to address nursing and midwifery shortages, international recruitment drives have taken place in recent months. The most prominent of those was the mission to the Philippines, and it was noted that, in August 2016, a total of 488 jobs were offered to nurses from that country. I recognise that nurses from overseas play a very important role in our health service at this time, and I thank them for their dedication and their efforts to date. However, such international recruitment efforts can prove problematic. For example, there is a lengthy lead-in time before the nurses arrive to work in our hospitals and communities due to language testing and other training that has to be completed, meaning that the employment of such nurses will not address the serious pressures facing the health service in the short term. Although bringing in nurses from overseas has merit, it will stretch only so far. The Southern Trust recently informed me that, even after it has been allocated additional nurses as a result of the international recruitment, it expects to have 50 nursing vacancies.

4.15 pm

The motion also refers to working with our colleges and universities to promote nursing as a career choice. I feel that that is of significant importance moving forward. I am aware that, in 2016, over 2,200 applications were received for the 264 commissioned adult nursing and mental health nursing degree places at Ulster University. That highlights that a desire for a career in nursing and midwifery exists. It is therefore vital that the Minister builds on the progress of former Ministers to increase the number of places that are available in our universities. I am also aware that work has been commissioned to investigate whether we can have a fast-track programme for people who already possess a primary degree in the healthcare field. Potentially, this could shorten the time taken to complete the nursing training programme, and initiatives such as this could help to address nursing shortages as we move forward.

Ultimately, the fundamental issue before us is our appreciation of the nursing and midwifery professions. The work of our nurses and midwives and the responsibility that goes with their professions need to be recognised and rewarded. We need to be thankful and determined to support the professions as we move forward. It is imperative that we ensure that the health service is attractive to encourage students and newly qualified nurses into these professions, so that we retain nurses and midwives and sustain a stable workforce.

I hope that the issue of dealing with nursing shortage is one that we can all support and on which we can find common cause. As an Assembly, we are often criticised for what we do or do not do. It is imperative that we all get behind the nursing and midwifery professions as they face many difficulties and challenges right now and will do so in the future if those are not presently addressed. I call on the Minister to move on the issue, and I look forward to her comments later in the debate.

Mr Durkan: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "ongoing" and insert

"pressures facing nursing and midwifery staff in Northern Ireland; is concerned about the number of vacant nursing and midwifery posts across each

health and social care trust; acknowledges that staffing shortages have exacerbated pressures in the health system, impacted on the working conditions of staff and affected patient outcomes; and calls on the Minister of Health to work proactively with our colleges and universities to promote nursing and midwifery as a career choice and to work collaboratively with the relevant bodies to train and retain more nurses and midwives.”

I very much welcome the opportunity to speak on this important issue, and I am pleased to propose the amendment. It incorporates midwives into the original motion, which focused solely on nurses.

First, I want to put in place my party's gratitude and respect for our hard-working nurses and midwives. Nurses are the backbone of the health service, a health service that is under severe strain. We all know that, when we are under severe strain, it is the backbone that feels it first and feels it worst. Let me be clear — I hope that everyone is clear — that supporting the motion and amendment is in no way a criticism of the heroic, often thankless, work that nurses do. Last week, a call for the Minister's intervention to improve services was twisted by some here and portrayed as an attack on those who deliver that service.

What we want to do is attract and retain more nurses and midwives to the profession to help to shoulder the massive workload and responsibility of those already doing the job. The motion highlights the ongoing problem of the nursing shortage here. This is not a situation that has developed overnight, and, yes, efforts have been made over a number of years by trusts and previous Ministers to address it. Indeed, such efforts are still ongoing, but the fact is that it has not been fixed yet. It needs to be fixed and fixed now.

I speak to nurses regularly — nurses who work in hospitals, in care homes or in the community — and the common theme that emerges is that nurses and other healthcare workers feel overworked and undervalued. When I looked at the information pack ahead of the debate, it was clear to me that the sentiments that nurses express to me reflect a wider picture. While some statistics in the pack actually showed an increase in the number of whole-time equivalents, they certainly do not tell the story of nurses' increased workloads. Those increases in workload, unfilled vacancies and recruitment freezes in the workplace all contribute to additional stresses on workers already operating in an extremely stressful environment. It is so bad that, according to the Royal College of Nursing, almost one fifth of newly qualified nurses will probably look for another job elsewhere in the next 12 months. Imagine if that were to happen: the impact of that on patient care in Northern Ireland would be devastating.

Today, I, along with many other MLAs, dropped into an event upstairs hosted by the Patient and Client Council (PCC).

The PCC is the patients' voice. It would certainly concur with the view expressed in the amendment that existing shortages have affected patient outcomes.

While we applaud and support past and current initiatives to increase the nursing workforce, such as the overseas nurses recruitment drive, we have to question the potential impact of Brexit on nursing levels. Prior to the referendum, concerns about this were voiced by Jeremy Hunt. There may be damage caused by losing some EU workers who

work in Health and Social Care. Uncertainties around visas and residency permits could cause some to return home and some not to come here in the first place, with an unpredictable impact on hard-pressed front-line services.

Despite significant investment in the health services, there is an acknowledgement that current structures are not fit for purpose. In Northern Ireland, standards of care have been called into question due to the weak infrastructure underpinning the current provision of care. I know that the Minister will address that tomorrow with the long-awaited publication of Bengoa. It is hugely important that we enhance the quality of education and training for healthcare assistants and increase progression routes into nursing. We also have to look at progression routes in nursing. With the increased emphasis on community nursing, we have the bizarre anomaly in the Western Trust where a dedicated, skilled and experienced community nurse has to go back to working in a hospital for two years before, or if, they are to progress from being a grade 5 to a grade 6.

The Chief Nursing Officer has told us that nurses are suffering because of inconsistent decision-making by the trusts and the board. They are worried that they are being ignored. There are also genuine concerns that the bank system is being used as a mainstream recruiting mechanism rather than the flexibility tool that it was originally designed to be. More permanent nurses will, obviously, reduce the spend on agency workers and assist long-term workforce planning. Nurses are also being called in to do extra administrative duties.

An ageing workforce, as referred to by the motion's proposer, is a major worry. There is a big group in the over-50 age range that is due to retire in the very foreseeable future. Nowhere is that more pronounced — this brings me to the amendment — than in the area of midwifery. According to the royal college, Northern Ireland faces a shortage of 100 midwives by 2017. That is next year. Forty-one per cent of midwives are aged between 50 and 60. There is growing concern in the trusts that, inevitably, there will be an insufficient number of midwives to staff our already bursting maternity units due to an inadequate number of midwives being trained to replace those who are about to retire. We really are heading towards a midwife crisis.

With severely limited job prospects on completion of training, many midwives are forced to leave here to seek job opportunities elsewhere, where they are able to obtain permanent employment and progress in their career. Elsewhere, they can earn the experience they require and will also be paid substantially better than those employed here. We need to get new midwives in now so that they can benefit from the experience of that older cohort who are due to leave.

Maternity services here are performing extremely well given the circumstances in which they are operating, but that is due largely to the selfless dedication of midwives and other maternity staff. However, those who have the capacity to go the extra mile for mothers and babies day after day are feeling undervalued and overworked. A survey of midwives who have left or who plan to leave found that over half were unhappy with staffing levels. Around half are not satisfied with the quality of care that they are able to give. Most worryingly of all, only 9% of midwives who had left or were about to leave said that they felt that midwifery is valued by the Government. That is

something that we really need to address, and we can start that today by supporting the amendment.

We need midwives to know that we value them, not only for bringing our babies into the world but for their vital role in maternal mental health care. We need to see the full implementation of the Northern Ireland maternity strategy. The most obvious way to make our nurses and midwives feel valued is through fairly rewarding their invaluable work. We welcome the Minister's announcement last week on the 1% pay increase but cannot ignore the disparity that still exists between here and other regions. The motion and the amendment describe nursing as a career choice, but, for so many, it is much more than that. It is a true vocation. People do it because they care. They devote and dedicate their lives to helping others but feel that this good nature is taken advantage of and taken for granted. They often have to work several unpaid hours every week.

I urge the Assembly to support the amendment. It is time for us to care for our nurses and deliver for our midwives.

Ms Seeley: I thank my colleagues in the DUP for bringing forward the motion today, which we will, of course, support. Last week was International Nurses Week, and a local nurse posted a comment on social media marking this. She noted that:

"being a nurse means you carry immense responsibility. You make a difference to the life of those you enter. Some bless you, others curse you and, sadly, some even assault you. You see people at their worst, at their best, life begin and life end."

I contacted that nurse in advance of this debate. She told me that nurses are mostly drained and hopeless and that they face more and more strain and pressure every day. Watching their backs at every turn in a blame culture, enjoying very little positive feedback or recognition, despite working their fingers to the bone and bladders to bursting point. She described her children as spending early mornings and late evenings in childcare, all the while their mum or dad is saving lives or, at the very least, making lives better. She said how degrading it can be but explained that the guilt that they feel about letting society down keeps them going to work, tirelessly, every day. Although this story is not unique to the North, there is no doubt that our nurses are under immense pressure. It is important that we, as their representatives and their Government, respond to that in a manner that inspires hope and confidence whilst recognising, acknowledging and commending the invaluable work that they do.

I want to send out a very clear message to nurses across the North today: your Minister does care, your Minister is aware of your daily struggle, and your Minister is responding.

We do not have a problem attracting people into the nursing profession: for every nursing undergraduate place available, there are in excess of 10 other applicants. Therefore, I welcome the Minister's recent response to my question regarding the bursary in which she committed to maintaining it, at a time when the British Government intend to move to a loan. In her answer, she also outlined her plans to increase the number of nurses being trained over the coming years. Despite this, and in the immediate term, there are increased demands on nursing services due to an ageing population, increased complexity of

patients, and development of new models of care. In the North, 31% of the workforce is aged 50-plus. We must respond to that knowledge now, not in later years when it is much too late and retirement sends our health service into crisis.

I welcome recent comments that the Minister intends to make the North an employer of choice by attracting nurses to work here and encouraging our students to stay here. The retention of nurses must remain a priority. The web-based nursing and midwifery career framework, used to promote the North as an employer of choice for existing and future staff, will prove crucial to that. Local recruitment initiatives are being progressed regionally, including job offers to all year-3 students in training, streamlining, standardisation of recruitment processes, and open advertising by trusts of vacancies. The increased investment in the return to nursing practice programme, delivered by Ulster University, to 48 places per year is further testament of the Government's commitment to addressing nursing shortages. I encourage the Minister to continue with the implementation of her Department's 10-year nursing and midwifery workforce plan, which will prove key in ensuring that we have an appropriately resourced and skilled nursing workforce to meet the needs of our population.

The amended motion does not mention workforce planning, so we are unable to support it. The proposer of the motion specifically mentioned midwives in his opening remarks, so we are content that the original motion includes and gives plenty of focus to midwives.

4.30 pm

Mr Durkan: Will the Member give way?

Ms Seeley: I will, indeed.

Mr Durkan: By an extension of that logic, given that the proposer of the amendment mentioned workforce planning in his remarks, could the Member not see fit to support the amendment?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Ms Seeley: I thank the Member for his intervention. I have made our position on the motion clear and given the House an explanation for it.

I am sure that today's motion will give faith and hope to our nurses — those who work endless hours, some unpaid, some without a break — that we, their government representatives, care. I say a heartfelt thank you to each and every one of those nurses on every ward across the North.

Mr Butler: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion and the amendment. I understand the difficulties of the increasing pressures on nursing staff: my wife is a nurse and deals with these pressures daily. I have no problem with either the motion or the amendment. The only issue that I might have at home, in speaking to my wife, is that I am not sure whether she would agree that we commend any former Health Ministers for how they treated nursing. However, we will support the motion and the amendment.

It is ironic that, when reading over previous debates in advance of today, those who tabled the motion were most

irritated when concerns were raised in the last mandate about the pressures facing our nursing staff. Nonetheless, party politics should not be brought into today's debate. I really hope that we have a positive discussion, but there needs to be a recognition across all the parties that there is a problem.

Nursing roles have been systematically widened, and targets have been stretched without the appropriate provision being made for staffing levels through workforce planning. The failure to workforce plan, as can be clearly seen in the spiralling reliance on and cost of agency nurses, is impacting on every aspect of our health service. It does not matter whether it is A&E or care in the community, they all face serious challenges. Whilst I am aware that there has been an increase in nursing posts over recent years, it has been in conjunction with a major increase in nursing vacancies. A long-term vacant nursing post is about as much use as no nursing post at all.

I am also aware that there have been some efforts in recent times to increase the number of nurses entering the profession, and that has included the Department of Health's recruitment drive on the international stage. Whilst I welcome the foresight of bolstering nursing levels — the nurses already in post here who were recruited from overseas play an essential part in the local health and social care workforce — the obvious disadvantages of our increasing reliance on international recruitment have been pointed out. I believe that the Southern Trust and the South Eastern Trust have relied on a small number of foreign nurses recently, but I have to express disappointment that a small number is all that we were able to attract. A cost is also attached to those recruitment drives: travel, accommodation, additional examinations and, of course, supporting the nurses to become sufficiently fluent in English. How will the Minister ensure value for money in those circumstances? As a first port of call, we should seek to utilise all our local resources before investing large amounts of money in attracting nurses from overseas.

Nursing, like midwifery, is a wonderful career. In fact, it is the type of career that people queue up to enter, often not for the money but for the pleasure of helping people in need. That is most apparent in there being a far greater number of applicants than nursing positions. The previous Minister increased the number of nursing training places slightly, but we need to realise that it only slowed down the problem rather than solving it. The pressures under which our nurses work, as well as the traumatic scenes that they witness daily, are quite immense, but rarely do they let it spill over. At that point, I pay tribute to our hard-working nursing staff. They work long hours, come home at night and go back to work the next day, putting their uniform on to do it all over again.

The current Minister has an obligation — we will, hopefully, hear more from her tomorrow — to ensure that our local health service has the capacity to meet the rising demand. That means not just that more staff are needed but that the right intervention has to be made at the right time. Nursing staff, as I am sure every consultant or person responsible for commissioning services is acutely aware, are best placed to ensure that patients are safely and efficiently progressed through their journey. It is for that reason that the Assembly has an obligation to ensure that they are supported through this work.

Ms Bradshaw: I support the motion and the amendment, but, on balance, I prefer the text of the motion. The objective today is that, going forward, we secure concrete action.

Nursing is one of many areas of the health service in which workforce planning has been inadequate for many years. The motion is correct in its aim of reducing dependency on agency workers and emphasising long-term planning. No one is claiming that, going forward, this will be easy.

It is fair to recognise the rise in the number of nursing students, although that must be matched by a rise in the number of nurses working here. Here in Northern Ireland, our nurse training is among the very best in the world, and there is good provision for continuous professional development and return-to-nursing courses. However, the fact there is a campaign to attract nurses back to the profession indicates that education is not the only problem — perhaps it is not even the main one. Many of those qualifying do not enter the profession in Northern Ireland, although it is good that the number doing so seems to be on the rise. As I mentioned, workforce planning is a serious issue across the whole of the health and social care service, and, in fairness, it is not restricted to nursing.

It is hard to disagree with the recommendations of last year's workforce plan for nursing and midwifery: a strategic approach; a review of the workforce and the independent sector; proper forecasting; and the introduction of advanced practice programmes. However, even that workforce plan contains a lot of reviews and considerations, when what is required are concrete actions. In any case, all the workforce plans and reform reports in the world are of no use without an adequate commitment of resources.

At this moment, we should not underestimate the seriousness of the UK's decision to leave the European Union. Across the UK, it has led to an ugly expectation among a minority that the result of the referendum somehow equates to foreigners having to leave the country now. In fairness, it has to be said that local representatives, even those who were vocal in campaigning for a "Leave" vote, have been clear that the NHS simply could not function without the foreign workers doing such a great job. I think that all parties in the Assembly will join me in emphasising that nurses in Northern Ireland, regardless of where they come from, do a terrific job and make a significant contribution to the health and social care sector.

A similar motion was passed by the Assembly in January 2014, and the workforce plan followed the next year. I therefore emphasise that resources for reform need to follow, and, with that plan and countless expert reports now available to us, we need more actions and fewer considerations. Let us hope that the motion leads to those actions and to direct, tangible outcomes.

Mr Clarke: I apologise that I was not here for most of the other contributions as I had other business. I support the motion tabled in the name of my colleague Sydney Anderson. Although I have sympathy for the amendment, I do not believe that it is as strong as the motion. I do not want to get into the blame game: if we are all mature about this, we know that there is a problem in the nursing sector and in our hospitals. Many of us who visit the hospitals know the pressure that nursing staff work under. It is not a case of blaming one person or another for that; it is

about finding a solution. The motion refers to including our colleges in providing more encouragement to get people into the profession.

I want to touch briefly on comments made by the previous Member to speak. As someone who voted to exit the European Union — I do not want this turning into a European debate — I fully get our past and future reliance on foreign nationals coming to work in our hospitals, because of their work ethic and the compassion that those individuals show, but we should not tie that into a debate about whether we should be in or out of Europe. It is about the professional character of some of those individuals.

Indeed, some of those individuals work outside of European countries as well. So, they have come to this country and given an awful lot, and I do not think that we should underestimate their value, the role that they have played in our hospitals and the care that they have provided to our patients.

Moving on to the motion, the difference for me in relation to the motion and amendment — I have had this conversation with Mark privately — is that I could have seen myself supporting the amendment, however, the motion goes on to talk about the reliance on agency workers. We need to be prudent going forward, and I would not wish to have the difficult job that the Minister and all Ministers have in trying to balance finding the finances with delivering services, but until we get properly funded nurses in positions, we cannot remove the over-reliance on agency staff. Agency staff are much more expensive. That is one aspect. The other is around workforce planning and having a balance going forward. It is for that reason that I support the main motion.

The Minister has a difficult task ahead to try to get the balance right. It is for that reason that I find myself in support of the motion to try to come to a position where we can remove the pressures for some of the individuals who take nursing on as a career. I have friends who are in that profession, and I understand the difficulties that they have working in it, but one thing at the heart of all this is that we should not underestimate the care that the nurses provide. Whether they have pressure or otherwise, their first and foremost position is that they are caring professionals doing a caring job for the patients whom they serve. That said, we need to encourage more people into the profession. One of the ways to do that is to open up more recruitment places and to make it more attractive looking from the perspective of our colleges. I support the motion.

Mr Sheehan: I also welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. Any debate on the health service will be listened to very carefully by those who work in the service but also by those who depend on the health service for their treatment and care. For that reason, all of us should be measured in what we say so that no one is made to feel more insecure or vulnerable, whether they be employees or patients.

I will say again what I said last week: the best way to improve the health service is by everyone working collaboratively to bring about change. That includes political representatives in this Assembly, healthcare professionals, nurses, trade unions, patients and any other individuals or organisations that have a stake in the health service. That is what the people out there want. They want people working together. That, more importantly, is what they deserve.

Moving on to the motion, of course, there is a problem of nursing shortages in the system. Everyone knows that, and all the Members who have spoken so far have acknowledged and recognised that. Those shortages exist for a variety of reasons. First, there is a global shortage of nurses and midwives, which is impacting on health services across these islands. Patient needs are also becoming more complex in an ageing population. Added to that, there have been decisions in the past to reduce investment in preregistration nurse education. Those decisions lacked foresight and exposed a lack of vision around workforce planning. We are not going to resolve the issue of the shortage of nurses without proper investment and a clear workforce planning strategy.

It is not the case that young people are not attracted to nursing. On the contrary, as has been pointed out, there are more than 10 applications to study nursing for every place that is available. So, what can be done about shortages in the system? The Department has already increased by 15% the number of preregistration nurse training places in our universities. The Minister has also made clear that the nursing bursary will continue here. That is something that, I know, nurses are very pleased about. I am confident that the Minister will take further steps and introduce other measures to promote nursing and midwifery as a career choice and, moreover, create the conditions that will make qualified nurses want to stay and pursue their careers here. I am quite sure also that the Minister will take account of the recommendations of her Department's 10-year workforce plan for nursing and midwifery.

4.45 pm

Nurses make up 36% of the health service workforce, and anyone who has ever been in hospital, who has had close family members in hospital or who has even visited hospital will attest to the professionalism, dedication and commitment of our nurses. It is no exaggeration to say that, without nurses, there would not be a health service. Nurses are, indeed, the glue that holds our health system together. We could not do without them. I had the pleasure of visiting the midwife-led unit in the Mater Hospital last week with the Health Minister, and I previously had some experience of there because my four-year-old daughter was born there. Although at that time it was not midwife-led, it is mainly the same midwives who are operating the unit now. It is an absolutely excellent unit, and I hope that the Minister gives full support to it.

I am disappointed that the amendment detracts from rather than adds to the motion. Any amendment should add to the motion not detract from it. It does not give a nod to workforce planning, which is absolutely essential to ensuring that we have enough nurses in the system and that they are not overburdened in their work. For that reason, we will be opposing the amendment and supporting the motion.

Mr Middleton: I support the motion, and I agree with the comments made by my colleagues earlier. The motion has five key points in it, which I feel the House should support. Many Members have already agreed with the first of those points, which is the fact that there is a shortage of nurses and that that is an ongoing problem. We know that nurses make up a very large part of our Health and Social Care workforce and are delivering 24/7 care, 365 days of the year across a wide range of

sectors, in primary, secondary and tertiary care and in our schools, prisons and workplaces, to name a few. Of course, to assist and drive further the transition of service delivery from predominantly acute hospital-based care to community-based care, more nurses will be needed. They will be needed in specialist skills areas as well to provide complex case management and advanced and specialist practice knowledge. Of course, they will need to have the confidence to work independently in the community rather than in acute hospital settings.

The second point —

Mr Dickson: I thank the Member for giving way, and I concur with all that he is saying, particularly where he suggests that we will constantly need a new influx of nurses into Northern Ireland, whether that is through training or through trained nurses coming to us from other parts of the world or the EU. Will he agree that we should not be placing any barriers to those coming into the United Kingdom other than those of qualification? The sorts of barriers that exist in Northern Ireland to people coming here are freedom of movement and, indeed, sadly, racism.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr Middleton: I do not particularly disagree with anything that the Member has said, and I think that the issue of language has also been touched on. It is important that we ensure that those who come here are able to undertake the language as fast as possible and fit into our service. Ultimately, we have to pay tribute to those who are already here and doing a fantastic job in our health service.

The second point in the motion recognises the work carried out by previous Ministers. We touched on the fact that 100 additional nurse training places were made available earlier this year. That marks an 15% increase in the annual number of preregistration nurse training places, taking the number of places over the 700 mark for the first time since 2009.

That takes me on to the next point of the motion, which asks that the Health Minister build on that work. I have no doubt that she will strive to do so, and I appreciate that the Bengoa report comes out tomorrow, with the Minister's vision coming alongside that. Not to pre-empt what is to come, but I expect that nursing and the increase in nursing numbers will be a major part of that solution.

We also need to work proactively with our colleges and universities to promote nursing as a career choice. Mr Durkan referred to the fact that it is not just a career choice: people go into it to genuinely make a real difference and provide a first-class service. I do not have to go any further than my constituency to see the work that our colleges and universities do in nursing. The nurse training provided at the Magee campus is first-class. It is in the top 10 in the United Kingdom. The partnership working between the Department of Health and the universities and colleges should continue. I urge the Minister to ensure that that is promoted and that nursing is promoted as a real career choice that can make a difference in our community. There were over 2,200 applications to Ulster University this year for only 264 undergraduate places. There is an increase in demand combined with the return to nursing practice programme. These are two examples of where the universities and the Department can work together.

The need to train and retain more nurses has been mentioned. That obviously has to continue, but we also want to see the continued professional development of the nurses we already have. Finally, it is important that we refer to workforce planning, because the change in the demographics of the country continues. That is something that we have to bear in mind and work on proactively over the next number of years.

Mrs Dobson: I apologise to my Upper Bann colleague for missing the earlier part of the debate.

As has been said, our nurses are the lifeline of the local health and social care service. Over the years, we have seen a sea change in what it is to be a nurse. Their role, input, scope and responsibilities have all changed dramatically. That change is saving lives. I say that as a mother who has relied on nurses to help care for my son. Like so many other families, I can name the nurses who cared for our loved ones. I want to use the opportunity to publicly thank Hazel, Rozzi, Kathryn and Alison, all of whom still play a part in my son Mark's life. They became an extension of our family, and I cannot speak highly enough about how they all went above and beyond the call of duty.

Nurses are by far the largest group of health staff. I struggle to think of a health setting where nurses are not the first, middle and last point of contact for patients on their journey. It is absolutely essential, therefore, that they, as a workforce, are supported and properly planned for. In its document, 'A New Vision of Nursing and Midwifery', the Royal College of Nursing highlights that:

"Without adequate investment in all parts of the nursing workforce, health care organisations will continue to struggle with staff shortages, poor skill mix, bed pressures, preventable morbidity and mortality, and poor provision of community health services ... Nursing is also put under pressure when management assumes that nurses will 'fill the gap' whenever there is one to be filled, be it doctor, cleaner or administrator."

The challenges facing our local nursing workforce are nothing new. Whilst we have heard much about piecemeal investments in local nursing services, the Minister and her officials know, as do the nurses on the ground, that a 6% increase over five years is insignificant in comparison with the far faster rate at which demand and indeed the scope of their role is growing.

As was mentioned by my colleague, the Department appears reluctant to tell us the number of nursing posts that are vacant. What we know is that, earlier this year, there were 850 vacancies across Northern Ireland. The number in my trust — the Southern Trust — increased from 19 to 226 in just two years.

While nurses are, of course, the public face of local hospitals, they have an equally important role in caring for people in private nursing homes. I urge the Minister to instigate an investigation to assess the challenges facing our private nursing homes. Let me give you an example. Last week, my party was contacted by a local private nursing home owner. Her sheer frustration and distress were obvious. Recently, she lost her deputy home manager and four staff who were working 36 hours a week each. She lost a further staff member on 48 hours' notice, and several more all with significant contracted

hours have handed in their notice. So many nursing staff leaving was no reflection on her ability as an employer; it is simply because staff are being enticed away from our local homes to work for agencies.

Our private nursing homes are spiralling towards a crisis. They are haemorrhaging staff, particularly to agencies. Therefore, the Minister may shortly be required to take the unprecedented step of intervening to ensure that the patients and residents do not find those homes facing closure with all that entails for them personally and for their families. We do not want to see repeats of the scenes from last year. I am thinking particularly of Donaghcloney in my constituency.

Nursing staff deserve fair pay for the vital work they do. I support the royal college and all it is doing to ensure fairness. When we look at newly qualified nurses, we see that they must see a progression ahead of them, a clear stairway to career enhancement in their job. I support the motion and the amendment and urge the Minister to take action to support all our nursing staff.

Mr Milne: I, too, welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the shortage of nursing staff. It has been an ongoing problem for a number of years, as demand on health services continues to grow not just here in the North but across the world. The motion gives us the opportunity to hear at first hand what the current situation is, what impact previous measures to address the issue have had and, most importantly, what all this means in the short, medium and long term. Before I continue, I echo the comments of other Members and add my words of praise for the nursing staff and those who support them in their work. On a personal note, three years ago, my son's wife gave birth to twins who were 10 weeks premature, and I cannot praise enough the work, skill and care that the nurses in Antrim Area Hospital gave to bring those children from the point of death to being healthy boys today.

There is no doubt that nursing staff are the backbone of our health service. They are a highly skilled and dedicated workforce, and their contribution to providing a safe service and improving patient outcomes cannot be overestimated. They provide a high level of care and compassion to patients in the hospital environment and the community, working unsociable hours and often over and above expectations. The challenging circumstances they work in have been well documented and rightly so, but often that can mask the many positive and rewarding aspects of the job. I was very encouraged by the figures coming from the Ulster University that show that the level of demand for a career in nursing remains extremely high.

Continuing on that note of positivity, I welcome the 15% increase in the number of preregistration training places for this year's intake announced in March by the outgoing Minister and the commitment by the current Minister, Michelle O'Neill, to continue with the nursing bursary, which has been mentioned. Added to the increased investment in the return to nursing programme, those interventions will go some way to address the legacy left by the decision to reduce investment in nurse education a number of years ago. In the short term, however, as we heard, there are a substantial number of unfilled positions, and every effort should be made to continue to recruit staff from home and abroad to alleviate the pressures caused by the shortage. I acknowledge the nurses from, say, the Philippines and Europe and, indeed, from around

the world, who have taken up work here and have made a significant contribution to the health service. They are very much appreciated and valued.

It is crucial that the necessary support and continual development be provided to ensure that nurses feel valued, respected and able to do their jobs professionally and effectively, and I welcome the Minister's commitment to that.

5.00 pm

The standard that our nursing staff are trained to is amongst the best in the world, and that is something to be very proud of. In the midst of a global shortage, we must work hard to retain them.

As we move forward, workforce planning is central to addressing many of the issues facing the health service. Demand in the service has not only increased; it has changed, and so too has the method of delivery. The recent updated plan for nursing and midwifery highlights the impact of that. The move towards community-based care, an ageing population, an increase in the number of people presenting with complex needs and long-term conditions, and the move towards enhanced and specialised nurse-led care are some examples of that. All of them have brought their own pressures and challenges. The plan also puts a focus on the age profile of staff, the impacts of demographic changes, and a shrinking labour market. It makes a number of recommendations that it hopes will address those issues and will identify and plan for future challenges. That is the only way that we can attract, support and retain nursing staff, and it is the only way that we will deliver the healthcare that we want to see. As other Members said, we have to work together.

Mr Robinson: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, as I have a family member who is in the nursing profession and am therefore well aware of the problems for staff and patients due to the lack of nurses in our hospitals, health centres, care homes etc. There is a shortage of nurses generally, but there is a specific shortage of specialist nurses in many disciplines, which means that those with lifelong or life-limiting conditions are impacted the most. That needs to be addressed.

I praise my colleagues and former Health Ministers and health trusts who have intervened to boost nurse numbers, and I call on our current Health Minister to follow in their footsteps.

Nurses are the front line of our health service, dealing with the most direct and basic needs that a patient has; they are vital to the success of the entire health system. If there are fewer nurses, the medical profession is less effective. Our nurses are truly unsung heroes, and I thank all of them for the magnificent and, at times, thankless job that they do. We must also take into consideration the abuse, both verbal and physical, that nurses and other health staff have to endure in their line of work from day to day.

I appreciate that the University of Ulster and the Western Trust work well together, and the extension of that close working relationship should be examined. Many graduates find work in the trust and in Northern Ireland. I often hear about the lack of nursing staff from patients and professionals, and one thing that I frequently hear is that the dependency on agency workers needs to be reduced. Agency staff are essential and help to keep wards and

A&E units working. However, full-time staff are a less costly solution. I ask the Minister to look at how we can attract more young people into nursing and ensure they stay in the Northern Ireland health system when they qualify. We encourage those young people to stay and build Northern Ireland and use their specialist skills for the benefit of Northern Ireland people.

As the motion states, we must find ways to ensure that long-term planning is aimed at retaining the valuable group of young people who graduate with nursing skills. Those graduates are the future of our health service, and we must find ways of working with all relevant bodies to ensure that that future skill base is retained. We must also ensure that training and retraining are available for existing nursing staff, including time for each nurse to undertake that training, as that will enhance their skills set and possible future promotions. That will benefit staff, trusts and, most of all, patients.

As one who understands the demands placed upon our nursing staff and the struggles that they have due to staff shortages, I fully support this very worthwhile motion and ask all Members to support it too.

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): I very much welcome the debate and thank the Members for tabling the motion. It provides us with a timely opportunity to consider the issues we face with a shortage of nurses. I thank Members for their considered contributions throughout the debate. They all reveal a concern for and interest in nursing and midwifery that I entirely share, and I hope to respond to as many of the points raised as time allows.

I pay tribute, as other Members did, to the dedication and commitment of all our nurses, who play a vital role in the delivery of high-quality nursing care to our population across all sectors and settings. I greatly value and appreciate the work that our nurses do in the face of increased demands and the unique contribution they make to the lives of patients, clients and families daily. The evidence is clear that the number of graduate nurses has a strong effect on patient experience and outcome.

I share the concern expressed by Members regarding the challenge of nursing shortages impacting on our services. I wish to assure the Chamber of my commitment and resolve to address the problem. The situation we face reflects a nursing shortage on a global scale, which is impacting on the North of Ireland and across these islands. There are many other contributing factors, including increased demands on nursing services; demographic changes; the ageing profile of the workforce; increased patient complexity; new service models; and an underinvestment in preregistration nurse education since 2010. It is important to recognise that there is no single quick-fix solution to the shortage of nurses. However, my Department has plans under way and is proactively leading on a range of measures to address the nursing supply issues in the short, medium and longer term.

In the immediate term, I recognise that the consequences of past decisions to reduce investment in preregistration nurse education have come back to haunt us. Despite best efforts to recruit and retain nurses from anywhere on this island and, indeed, from Britain, there still continues to be in excess of 800 nursing vacancies in the system and a consequent reliance on bank and agency nurses. Nurses work in the HSC and outside it, and I am very aware of the

difficulties faced by nursing homes to recruit and retain qualified nurses. It has therefore proven necessary, in the short term, to implement an international recruitment campaign in collaboration with HSC trusts in order to maintain safe staffing levels and meet service needs. I warmly welcome into the North of Ireland those talented and caring individuals from the Philippines, Italy, Romania and Greece who have been recruited through recent international campaigns and the contribution that they will make to strengthen our workforce.

My Department has continued to support the nursing and midwifery workforce through increased investment in resourcing the registered workforce. The numbers of registered nurses and midwives across the HSC have increased by 8% since 2011, which is an additional 1,076, giving a total headcount of 17,027 staff in our system. Furthermore, the implementation of my Department's policy framework, *Delivering Care: Nurse Staffing in NI*, has resulted in a significant investment of £12 million allocated to trusts during 2015 for additional nursing staff for acute surgical and medical wards.

I am fully committed to local solutions, first and foremost, and I believe that investing in our local talent is strategically the right course of action, if we are to strengthen our existing nursing workforce and ensure its sustainability into the future. We are privileged to have a long-standing reputation of excellence in nurse training, and nurses educated here are sought after the world over. Furthermore, we are in the fortunate position that nursing remains a highly popular career, as we have no difficulty in attracting nurses into the profession, and I want it to remain that way. In each of the last three years, approximately 10,000 young people applied through UCAS to study nursing at universities, locally and elsewhere. There are in excess of 10 applications for each training position commissioned by my Department. When you consider those figures, combined with the low drop-out rate of less than 10%, I am sure that everyone in the Chamber will agree that attracting potential nurses into the profession is not a problem.

I share the concern that, in preceding years, investment in nurse education was reduced and, consequently, did not keep pace with workforce demands. Rectifying that situation will take some time. My Department has significantly increased investment in nurse education by commissioning an additional 100 preregistration nursing places at our local universities for 2016-17, giving a total of 746 nursing and 55 midwifery places. That takes our annual investment in nursing and midwifery to £27 million. I am giving consideration to further investment for 2017-18.

I am fully committed to supporting student nurses and midwives while they undertake their training. As I made clear to the House during questions on 18 October, I have ruled out the approach being taken in England: removing bursaries and requiring students to take on additional debt. The nursing bursary will continue in the North of Ireland.

I am very enthusiastic about providing a pathway into nursing for those already working in the HSC who wish to follow that path. In 2016-17, my Department more than doubled the intake for the Open University preregistration nursing course, which is a route that is funded for HSC staff, and more than 50 people commenced the course this year. The independent sector also utilises this route as

a means of retaining staff. It is a successful way of growing our own nurses and supporting nurse retention.

I am aware of the huge pool of talent that exists among our healthcare support workers. I have increased investment in the various access courses designed for healthcare support workers that provide a route into the Open University preregistration nursing course. Investment in this group of staff can reap huge dividends in developing our own nurses and retaining them in our services.

My Department has also increased investment in the return to practice nursing programme delivered by Ulster University. It is designed to enable nurses who are out of practice and whose nursing registration has lapsed to re-enter the profession. A return to practice media campaign was launched by my Department in January 2016 to target this specific group of nurses and encourage them to avail themselves of the opportunity to return to practice and have their fees funded. Thankfully, a total of 83 nurses successfully completed the programme in 2015-16. My Department has since increased the number of commissioned places for the return to practice programme on an ongoing annual basis from 32 to 48 and will consider further targeted campaigns as necessary.

Workforce planning is an essential element of ensuring the sustainability of the future nursing workforce. My Department has completed a 10-year nursing and midwifery workforce plan, and its implementation will be key to ensuring that we have an appropriately resourced and skilled nursing workforce to meet the needs of the population. The workforce plan makes a series of recommendations, including the need for a strategic approach to the supply and demand of nursing. It highlights the importance of making the North of Ireland a destination employer of choice by attracting nurses to work here and encouraging our students to stay here.

A shortage of band 5 nurses in particular is posing a significant challenge, with each trust investing heavily in time and effort to recruit nurses at this pay band in order to support the existing workforce. Encouraging local students to work here on successful completion of their training is, therefore, an important recruitment strategy. Local nursing students in year 3 of their training are now being offered permanent band 5 posts by each trust when they qualify, in an effort to encourage them to stay. I am pleased to advise that we have well-established collaborative working relationships with our universities, and my officials are in regular communication regarding nurse education and commissioning matters.

I recognise the importance of investing in post-registration education and training to build the capability of our existing nursing workforce. Education of the registered workforce directly impacts on the quality and safety of clinical services, and it improves patient outcomes through enhancing the knowledge and skills of nurses in front-line care. My Department has invested £8.5 million in the post-registration education commissioning budget for 2016-17.

I support the development of new nursing roles as the nursing profession seeks to respond to the challenges of healthcare delivery in the 21st century. I believe that our nurses are well placed to expand their roles and take on enhanced roles, blending doing so with the strong nursing values of care, compassion, dignity and respect. My Department has invested in the growth of an advanced

nurse practitioner role and has commissioned Ulster University to develop and deliver this new programme from 2017. Initial pathways will be in the areas of emergency care and primary care, with paediatrics to follow.

In assisting to address the nursing shortages in the short term, my Department has commissioned the Business Services Organisation to provide regional oversight and coordination of nurse recruitment. A regional team was established in January of this year on a collaborative basis across all trusts. The international recruitment campaign has been progressing this year, with over 700 job offers made to nurses from Italy, Romania, Greece and the Philippines. The first of the European nurses arrived here in September, with more to follow in the coming months. Initially, the overseas nurses are employed as healthcare support staff whilst they undergo the necessary stages to enable them to register with the British nursing regulatory body, the Nursing and Midwifery Council. This is a lengthy process that will take several months.

Finally, I wish to assure the House that I recognise that investing in the workforce is essential if we are to effectively address the problem of nursing shortages. The short, medium and longer-term measures that I have outlined will, taken together, get us back on track and secure our valued nursing and midwifery workforce now and into the future.

5.15 pm

Ms S Bradley: I welcome the motion and the chance to speak to it and to an amendment that, I believe, brings added value.

Moving the amendment, Mark Durkan, my colleague, outlined how it incorporated the work of midwives. I ask the House not to just overlook that point. He referred to the heroic and often thankless work of nurses and midwives working in our trusts, and he highlighted the fact that one fifth of newly qualified nurses look for a job elsewhere. He rightly pointed out the uncertainties arising with Brexit and the visa problems that could derive from that. He looked at the problems with skills programmes and training. He referred to a 100-midwife shortage by 2017, and the inadequate numbers being retrained to make up the number when we look at the age profile of our existing cohort of midwives. In his true style, he referred, although very seriously, to the midwife crisis that is looming. He also referred to the disparity of pay, which is an issue that perhaps would not get enough attention in the time allowed today.

Robbie Butler spoke to the amendment, and he expressed his concern that the roles have widened in what it means to be a nurse or midwife and resources are subsequently overstretched. He expressed concern at the low level of nurses we have and are able to attract from overseas. No doubt that is a costly exercise, and we are not getting the return that we would hope. He said that extra nursing training opportunities had eased the problem but, as he rightly pointed out, had not yet solved it.

Also speaking to the amendment, Jo-Anne Dobson identified the role of nurses, and very publicly and in a nice way, she thanked the nurses who have helped her family along the way. I think that we would all like to express that sentiment, because we have all shared those stories. Jo-Anne, I am maybe not as good as you at remembering the names — I am impressed by that — but that is something

we would share across the House. She referred to the problem of staff in private nursing homes, and those nurses who are attracted out of the private nursing home sector, creating another cohort of problems, and no doubt going to work as agency staff.

There was a bit of debate about whether the amendment brought added value or not. The original motion states:

“to train and retain more nurses, thus reducing”.

“Thus reducing” are the two words. There are many things that we could add to that “thus reducing”. In this instance, the motion states:

“thus reducing the total spend on agency workers and assisting long-term workforce planning.”

We could add, “Thus promoting the sustainability of our nursing and midwifery workforce”. We could add, “Thus reducing our need to undertake expensive recruitment exercises overseas”. We could add, “Thus allowing the continuity in nurse and midwifery/patient relationships”. There is plenty we could add to that.

What is in the motion is good. Nobody is arguing that that is not a valid point, but we cannot then just say that, because two words — “workforce planning” — are missing from an amendment, the spirit of that amendment has not been embraced by the House. I ask people who are uncomfortable with those two words not being in the amendment this: are you therefore saying you are happy to not acknowledge the pressures facing nursing and midwifery?

Cat Seeley, although I may not be quoting her word for word, quite rightly sent out a reassuring shot to those nurses, saying that the Minister was listening and does care. We are simply asking the House, “Please extend that to midwives”. Recognise that that problem extends to midwives. Let us not be so pedantic as to hang on two words, and come in on agreement that, based on those two words, this is our flow and travel of direction. Embrace the spirit. I ask the Minister, and every Member in the House, to extend your care and support to all nurses and all midwives.

Ms P Bradley: I welcome the opportunity to wind up the debate. First, I thank my colleague Sydney Anderson for asking me to put my name to the motion. I was more than happy to. Many Members on our Benches go home to nurses at night-time. I know that many in the Chamber do that. I can hear Mr Poots in the background heckling, and I know what he has to put up with: worse still, I know what she has to put up with. Anyway, I digress. I will go back to the subject.

I join all my colleagues and everyone in the Chamber in showing our gratitude to our nursing staff throughout Northern Ireland. As someone who worked for the health service for a number of years, I know only too well the pressures that they face. I know only too well the work that they put in and how they go over and above, day and daily, to fulfil their duties. I do not want to minimise the debate in any way by looking at all our different types of nurses in a different way; I see them all as nurses. We have very much focused on hospital-type nursing and midwifery. We also need to look beyond that, because part of the way forward for health and social care in Northern Ireland is to look at primary care. We have our district nurses, our acute-care-at-home team nurses and our practice nurses, all of whom

are essential to keeping our health service going. I pay tribute to them for the work that they do. We heard at the Health Committee last week about the crisis that faces GPs in Northern Ireland, and, without those practice nurses, district nurses and acute-care-at-home teams, GPs would be in an even worse position. I do not rule out any type of nurse when I stand up and speak. I have worked across the board with them all at some stage in my time in health and social care, and I have used several of them over the years. I will go on to talk about Members' contributions in a moment, but it is very telling how many people in the Chamber have had very close contact with nursing. I thank Jo-Anne and Ian Milne for bringing up their experiences. I know about that on a personal level, too. The nurse is the one person whom you come to rely on, especially in that hospital setting. You can tell from the comments in the Chamber — Mrs Bradley is the same — just how important those services are when you have to use them.

I want to touch on the nursing degree. I am of an age that I remember it way back before it was a nursing degree, and I remember working with all the nurses who had to go through their nursing degree. I am very encouraged by what the Minister is saying about the pathways, especially the Open University pathway. We all know so many high-quality healthcare support workers or healthcare assistants and the invaluable work that they do and the level of nursing that they provide on the wards. I would like the Assembly, in any way possible, to pull all that experience together and enable them to progress through a nursing career and a nursing pathway. I am also encouraged about the fast-track programme, whereby we look at people who have other health-related degrees and fast-track them through nursing. There are some very welcome things there.

My colleague Gordon Dunne, who has left, made an intervention on safety and staffing levels on wards during Mr Anderson's speech. I am sure that the Minister takes that extremely seriously, given that we are hearing information that, because of a reduction, there are only two healthcare assistants and two nurses to manage wards. We need to identify that pretty quickly in our hospitals and in our trusts, because that should not happen. We know the pressures that those nurses are under and how that type of unsafe working can lead to mistakes and an increase in sickness among staff.

I will move on to some of the comments that were made. I thank Mr Anderson again. He and a lot of Members said that the problem was not unique to Northern Ireland. We are seeing an increased need and a reduction in nurses worldwide. He said that when he meets his trust — I am sure that we are all the same — the issue of our nursing and medical staff is brought up time and time again. I believe, even from the tone of the debate, that we all take this seriously and want to see and effect change.

Mr Anderson also mentioned that the needs of the service had changed over time. Mrs Dobson brought that up as well. The role of nurses is diversifying all the time. That is due to, among many things, the number of people with long-term conditions and multiple co-morbidities, which has led to changes in what nurses have to deal with and how they work.

Mr Anderson also brought up the age of the workforce in nursing and especially in midwifery, which has become a great problem and needs to be addressed. He mentioned,

too, the reliance on agency staff — many Members pulled it into the debate today — which costs our health service a vast amount of money. There are vacancies for nurses in care homes and other parts of the health sector that cannot be filled, and that is very much to do with the overuse of bank nurses. Some nurses have decided that that is a better course for them. I cannot blame them, because they can choose their hours, decide what days they want to work and get paid slightly better. We cannot throw the blame on nurses. Why would you work unsociable hours, weekends and night shifts, when, through banking, you can pick and choose what you do? We need to address all those things, as everyone said, through workforce planning for the future.

I find the amendment to be a rather good one — I do not think that any of our Members said that it was not — but we felt that it did not address some of the specifics. We are not knocking it; we certainly have not done so. I hope that the tone from these Benches has not been heard in that way. I think it was Mr Butler who said that he did not want to politicise this; in fact, he was the only Member to politicise things when he talked about Health Ministers not doing anything. I wonder whether that includes his Health Minister when his party held it, but, at this stage, I will not know the answer to that. I am glad that it did not become a political football in the Chamber. Time and again, when we debate health in here, that is not how any of us want to take it forward.

I will just touch on a few more contributions if I can fit them in. Catherine Seeley talked about International Nurses Day and the feelings of being drained and hopeless of the person she spoke to. That is certainly not what we want to hear of our health and social care staff. They are the people who, when we are feeling drained or hopeless or go to visit loved ones in that state, we want to comfort us. We forget that no one is comforting them through their trials.

I have already touched on some of what Mr Butler had to say, so I will move on to Mrs Bradshaw. She was absolutely right when she said that we needed to reduce our dependency on agency workers. She also said that workforce planning was a major issue across the entire health and social care service. That, again, is entirely correct: it is not just nursing that we need to look at but everything else as well.

I was delighted to hear that Mr Sheehan had been in my wonderful constituency of North Belfast, at the Mater Hospital, for whatever reason it might have been. I thank him for his contribution. I know that I am getting to the end now and need to wind up. I thank everyone who took part, especially those who told their personal stories. I was glad to hear Antrim Area Hospital getting a mention for the work that it has done for Mr Milne and his family. There is an overall consensus in the Chamber that we cannot thank our nursing and healthcare staff enough for the work that they do for us.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Perfect timing.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 34; Noes 57.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Ms Hanna, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Long, Mr E McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McGrath and Mr Mullan.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Anderson and Mr Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly acknowledges the ongoing problem of nursing shortages in Northern Ireland; recognises the work carried out by former Health Ministers and health and social care trusts to address this problem; and calls on the Minister of Health to build on these efforts by working proactively with our colleges and universities to promote nursing as a career choice and to work collaboratively with the relevant bodies to train and retain more nurses, thus reducing the total spend on agency workers and assisting long-term workforce planning.

Adjourned at 5.44 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 25 October 2016

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Nesbitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Today we deal with the Bengoa report, October monitoring and the rationalisation of the court estate. Yet, half an hour ago, three sets of papers on Bengoa were delivered to Members' pigeonholes, but I found nothing on October monitoring and nothing on the rationalisation of the court estate. Following your discussion with Committee Chairs last night on how we can do business better, can we reflect on the fact that the non-delivery of papers and information does not necessarily lead to good debate and scrutiny?

Mr Speaker: I will deal with at least one of those matters now. I have received notice from the Minister of Health that she wishes to make a statement —

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is on a different matter and refers to the Hansard report of the debate last week on health and cancer services. At the beginning of that debate, the Minister of Health raised a point of order that lasted over a minute and ran to 233 words. During the point of order, the person then in the Speaker's Chair at no time encouraged the Minister to bring her comments to a close. Will you review the conduct of that point of order?

Mr Speaker: I will look at the point of order that you have raised, Mr Attwood.

Members, I have received notice from the Minister of Health that she wishes to make a statement on Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together. Before calling the Minister to make her statement, I remind the Minister that Standing Order 18A(2) requires her to make a written copy available to Members at least half an hour before delivering it in the Chamber. The Minister did not meet that requirement this morning. Therefore, in accordance with Standing Order 18A(2), the Minister must state the reason for this prior to making her statement.

Ministerial Statements

Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): I apologise for the lateness of the statement. We had an Executive meeting this morning, and I endeavoured to get the statement into the pigeonholes. I believe that we did so at 10.00 am.

Mr Speaker, having received Executive endorsement this morning, I am grateful for the opportunity to make a statement setting out my ambition for a world-class health and social care system, Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together.

As I have said before, and I want to put on record again, I am proud and privileged to be the Minister of Health. I am proud of our health and social care service. I am proud of the dedication, the commitment and all the hard work of all those working right across our health and social care system. I am proud of the quality of the full range of health and social care services people here receive from staff whose key focus is to improve our health and well-being. I have witnessed at first hand the amazing work of Health and Social Care (HSC) and the positive impact it has on people's lives. The depth of the dedication, commitment and compassion of all those who work right across our health and social care system continues to astound me.

However, the system itself is at breaking point. This is not news. Every person in the North and everyone working in our health and social care system understands this to be the case. Put simply, the system has not changed quickly enough to meet the demands and the needs of the population. While not always accurate, reports of long waiting lists and failed targets feature regularly in the media. This is why, in my first week as Minister, I made a statement to the House acknowledging the challenges but, more importantly, pledging my commitment to transform health and social care. I promised I would reflect on the expert panel's report and put my vision for health and social care before you, and today I am doing so.

I thank Professor Bengoa and the expert panel and commend them for their work. I received the report, 'Systems, not Structures' in the summer and since then have spent time carefully considering the report, its implications and the next steps. Professor Bengoa has told us that we need whole system transformation if we are to meet the needs of the population. The expert panel's report, alongside the Sir Liam Donaldson and Transforming Your Care reports, has been instrumental in developing Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering

Together. To be clear, Delivering Together is now the only road map for reform.

As I have said, the case for change is universally accepted. When I addressed the Assembly in June, I spoke about the prevailing challenges that exist. By 2039, the population, aged 85 and over, will have increased by 157% compared with the position in 2014. Living longer is of course great news for us all, but, as we get older, we are more likely to live with one or more long-term conditions. In addition, our health and social care needs change, and we quite rightly have higher expectations. Our health and social care system needs to change if it is to meet the needs and the expectations of a growing population.

Health and well-being is shaped by many factors but above all by our social and economic environment. To our shame, the inequalities between health and social well-being outcomes across our society are stark. Where you live should not determine how long you live. A simple illustration of this is that people who live in Belfast city centre will live up to nine years less than those living at the top of the Malone Road. We should all be deeply concerned by that.

Across the North, the proportion of babies born with a low birth weight in the least deprived areas is lower than that in deprived. Children born in deprived areas are more likely to experience childhood obesity and to be in care. It is an outrage that, in 2016, your life experience may be predetermined by your social and economic circumstances. This must change, and that change must start now.

Like Ministers before me, I continue to increase investment in front-line services and in service developments and improvements, and this has gone some way to alleviating the pressures the system faces and the consequences for those requiring health and social care services. However, this is not enough. Our current delivery models are having an increasingly negative impact on the quality and the experience of care, and they are constraining the ability of the system to transform itself to meet 21st century health and social care needs. There are excellent examples of innovative practice, but these are often in pockets and not widespread.

The reality is that the current model is unsustainable. If we continue to provide services in the same way, using the same current models of care, demand projections show that 10 years from now the HSC will need 90% of the entire Executive Budget — that is 90% of the entire Executive Budget.

Since coming into post, I have spent much time listening to HSC staff and to users. Not only are they ready for change, they want change and they are demanding change. They are not alone. The political summit hosted by the expert panel secured a mandate for change and the principles that underpin it. We have a “fresh start”, supported by the Executive — it is not down to one Minister or one Department. There is total agreement across the Executive that this needs to be done.

Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together provides a road map for radical transformation in the way we receive health and social care services. This is not a quick fix. Given the size and scale of the challenge, I fully expect that the transformation process will take two mandates to properly plan, implement and embed, but we must start now.

In line with the Programme for Government and the Executive's population health framework, ‘Making Life Better’, my overriding ambition is for all of us to lead long, healthy and active lives. Health is a human right, and I believe in a universal health service, based on need, free at the point of delivery. I want to see a future in which people are provided with the information, education and support to enable them to keep well in the first place.

When care is needed, it should be safe and of high quality. Those who use services should be treated with dignity, respect and compassion. Staff are the system's greatest asset, and they must be empowered and supported to allow them to do what they do best. Put simply, I want to see a health and social care system that is efficient and sustainable, where best practice is the norm and where investment is made in areas that will positively impact on service users rather than prop up a failing structure.

My vision for health and social care is ambitious. It will require whole-system transformation across primary, secondary and community care, and a radical change to the way in which we access services. We will work across sectors to build capacity in communities. That will allow them to develop the skills and knowledge needed and the assets required to tackle effectively the underlying determinants of health and well-being. Tapping into their ideas and energy, we will build on and support the real strengths that they have. We will support the development of thriving and inclusive communities. Through building community capacity, developing social capital and investing in health-visiting and school nursing, we can ensure that every child and young person has the best start in life and is supported to fulfil his or her potential.

We will support those who are more vulnerable in our society, those living in deprivation, our older population and those with learning disabilities and mental health issues. We will help them to live the life that they want, maximising independence and maximising choice.

The early intervention transformation programme (EITP) is a good example of joined-up government, with the Department of Justice, the Department of Education and Department for Communities all working together to find ways of intervening earlier in their lives to improve outcomes for all our children. We will build on that success, including building the capacity of staff to work more effectively in delivering early intervention approaches.

We will also strengthen the work of the existing network of family support hubs available right across the North, which show how community, voluntary and statutory organisations can work together to help families doing their best as they face the challenges of bringing up children.

Improving the life chances of children and young people is a priority for me, particularly of those children for whom the state has taken on parental responsibility, or “looked-after children” as they are known. Those children experience much worse health, social, educational and employment outcomes than children generally have. That is not acceptable to me. I will expand the range of placement options and support available to them to support their mental and emotional well-being, educational attainment and overall health outcomes. We must and will become better parents for those children.

When people need care and support, very often, their first port of call is their GP. Primary care is the bedrock of our health and social care system, but it is still largely based on GPs working independently, with limited input from other skilled professionals, such as district nurses and social workers. There are many examples of how we have improved that integration, but we must go further. People do not live their life in silos, so we should not provide services in them. I will invest in our primary care services. I will put in place multidisciplinary teams embedded around general practice that will maximise the benefits that can flow from our integrated system of health and social care. Their focus will increasingly be on keeping people well in the first place and the proactive management of long-term conditions. They will be equipped to identify and respond to problems earlier, whether they relate to health or social needs.

The teams will include people from a range of disciplines, including GPs, pharmacists, district nurses, health visitors and social workers. I am also keen to explore new roles that are having positive impacts elsewhere, such as advanced nurse practitioners and physician associates. We need to be open to new ways of doing things, looking to approaches elsewhere, such as the model used in the Netherlands, where district nurses lead the assessment, planning and coordination of care in self-managed teams. I believe that the best of that approach and other approaches can be adapted and even improved on in our integrated health and social care system.

I recognise the challenges in recruiting and retaining GPs, and, given the importance of building multidisciplinary primary care teams, I will increase the number of GP training places to 111 a year, with 12 additional places next year and 14 beyond that the year after. Building on the increase in training numbers made earlier this year represents an increase of more than 70% in GP training places within a three-year period.

10.45 am

Alongside increasing the number of GP training places, we must make sure that general practice is a key part of the medical undergraduate curriculum. To that end, funding provided for undergraduate training will be redirected to support Queen's University in increasing the percentage of the undergraduate medical curriculum spent in general practice. I can also announce that 25 GPs have been accepted onto a GP retainer scheme, which was launched earlier this year. This has meant that GPs who may otherwise have been lost to general practice are attached to practices, are working in the out-of-hours service and have access to a supportive continuous professional development programme and mentoring.

I have initially commissioned five training places for an advanced nurse practitioner programme in primary care to start in February 2017 in addition to eight for emergency departments. I plan to at least double those numbers from September 2017 and then incrementally grow this cadre of staff for an increasing number of specialties over the next five years. By further extending the role of the nurse, I want to ensure that I still have sufficient nurses to continue to do the jobs they already do so well. Therefore, I am increasing the number of training places for new nurses by a further 100 from September 2017 to ensure that we will not be as reliant as we currently are on the international recruitment of nurses to fill vacancies in the years to come.

The role of physician associates (PAs) is one that I am keen to build on. I provided funding to support placements in primary and secondary care for an annual cohort of 20 PA students on the new postgraduate course being commenced in the University of Ulster in January 2017. I will also continue to invest in the practice-based pharmacist scheme, with close to 300 pharmacists expected to be employed across the North by 2020-21, taking the pressure off GPs, improving the use of medicines and supporting patients. The askmyGP online and phone triage system, which is allowing GP practices to see patients the same day and when they need to be seen, will be rolled out to a further 30 practices. These investments reflect some of the recommendations of the GP-led care working group, which reported earlier this year. I intend to provide a full response to the recommendations of the working group before the end of the year.

We must also make use of our valuable community pharmacies much more. They have an important role to play, particularly in supporting people to keep well in the first place and to use their medicines appropriately and safely. I want to develop a new framework for how we work with Community Pharmacy to fully realise pharmacists' potential.

There has been a long-standing ambition to shift more health and social care from hospitals to settings closer to people's homes. I believe that this is the right thing to do, and I want to ensure that we realise that ambition. New models and services continue to develop and emerge such as acute care at home. For example, in the Belfast Trust and the South Eastern Trust areas, 460 frail elderly people have received enhanced or acute care at home services, avoiding 4,102 days in hospital. I want to ensure that patient-centred initiatives like this are implemented right across our health and social care system.

Ambulatory assessment and treatment centres are a further example of innovative patient-focused initiatives that I plan to develop further. These centres will provide a one-stop shop, allowing patients to be assessed and diagnosed and, if required, to receive a treatment or procedure all on the one day. In the Belfast Trust, in the past six months, over 9,000 patients have been treated in ambulatory care instead of waiting in the emergency department, and 81% of them were discharged home without needing to be admitted. Over 4,000 have received treatment on a planned basis through this approach without needing a stay in hospital. In the South Eastern Trust area, over 1,000 patients have benefited from this approach in the last six months. This and similar models in other trusts provide for a better experience for patients and a more effective use of our inpatient beds, and we need to build on the new services and expand their use.

Given the changes that I have set out for the rest of the system, it follows that the nature and focus of our acute hospitals will change. As well as enhancing the support received in primary care, we need to reform and reconfigure our hospital services. The expert panel has provided us with a road map to do so, and I plan to consult on the criteria recommended by it next month. Once agreed, this will form the basis of a programme of service reviews, seeking to ensure that our services are configured and built around what people need.

This is not a standing start. We have recently conducted clinically led reviews in pathology and imaging, and I intend to move to public consultation on these two important areas. In the future, the role of our hospitals will fundamentally change to focus on addressing the needs of patients requiring complex planned surgery or emergency care in an inpatient setting. There is strong evidence that concentrating specialist procedures and services in a small number of sites produces significantly better outcomes. Adopting this approach will mean that not every service will be available in every existing hospital, but, where those services exist, each and every one of us will benefit from more timely, safer and better outcomes.

Over the last few years, we have seen the development of very successful regional networks for a number of specialist services. These provide services to our whole population rather than to a small locality. We have seen that developed increasingly on an all-island basis, as in the case of the congenital heart disease network. I have already commenced a programme of work with counterparts in the Department of Health in the South to identify areas of mutual benefit and develop more cross-border and all-island services. I am keen to explore the potential benefits of this approach, particularly around delivering better perinatal services and support for new mothers, as well as considering ways that we can help young people who are struggling with mental health and addiction problems.

Evidence also shows that delivering planned and emergency care using the same facilities and resources can have an adverse impact on activity and, therefore, lead to an increase in waiting times. Far too often, scheduled appointments and surgeries may be cancelled when vital resources are diverted to deal with unscheduled care. Moving forward, elective care centres will be developed to carry out less complex planned treatments. These centres will make better use of the resources that we have through organising them differently. This may mean that a patient may travel further for their treatment, but there is strong evidence that elective care centres, such as those used in Scotland, can reduce waiting times and provide a better experience for staff and patients. I cannot tell you where these centres will be or how many we will have. The answers to these questions will be for the clinicians and professional managers in the HSC system to develop based on the evidence of what people need and working in partnership with service users and patient groups.

However, elective care centres are not the sole solution to the unacceptable delays currently facing patients. Rather, they are part of a long-term process moving towards a more sustainable model. This future model cannot succeed if it inherits the unacceptable waiting lists that blight our system. Urgent and sustained action is required to bring these under control. In light of the recommendations set out in the expert panel's report, I intend to bring forward a strategy to reduce waiting lists.

I have set out the changes that I believe are appropriate for the delivery of services, but how we plan and manage these services is just as important. We need to reduce bureaucracy to make the decision-making process more streamlined and, importantly, to plan and manage services in a way that promotes collaboration, integration and improvement in service delivery. In the context of the decision to close the Health and Social Care Board,

I know from speaking to staff that they are anxious about their future. They have already been involved in the design process, and that will continue. This is a priority for me and, now that the direction of travel has been fixed for the delivery of services, I will move very quickly on this matter. I will engage with the board staff as a matter of priority.

I believe that the approach that we take to transformation is as important as the transformation itself. From the outset, I was clear that this vision could be achieved only through partnership working and co-production. It is no coincidence that the document that I am publishing today is called 'Delivering Together'. It sets out in clear terms how I will bring forward transformation. We all have a stake in our health and social care system. It belongs to us all and, therefore, we all have a responsibility to work together to ensure that it is sustainable for the future. We must all work in partnership to design and deliver the changes.

The principle of co-production will underpin how we operate in the future, whether that be at a system level, designing how our services and hospitals should be configured, or at a service level, designing how care pathways and individual care should be delivered differently. However, very importantly, it also signals a collaborative approach between the people who provide services and those who depend on them. Care should be planned around the individual and the unique needs of that person, and this must be based on real and meaningful partnership. Our mental health recovery colleges are an excellent example of the benefits that can be realised through co-production, recognising and using the expertise that people with mental health difficulties have. We will now harness the energies of people who use all our services.

I want to align quality improvement and regulation far more closely to the voice of those who use our services and those who deliver them. We will replace a culture of targets and blame with one that focuses on outcomes and improvements. Outcomes should be shaped by what matters to people, not just by what is wrong with them. Improvements will be led by staff on the front line, not distant officials. This is already happening. Committed staff, working with the people they serve, are taking forward initiatives to improve outcomes, shorten waiting times and reduce bureaucracy.

Quality improvement initiatives, such as the integrated respiratory service in the west, are happening every day, designed and led by the staff on the ground. The community respiratory team provides patients with joined-up specialist support focused on self-management, and coordinated care. This is a much more streamlined and responsive service for patient, GPs and hospital services and benefits all.

Another example is the rapid assessment, interface and discharge team in the northern area, which is known as RAID. That innovative project is based on international best practice and recognises the links between good mental health and good physical health. Instead of the traditional approach to mental health referrals for people who go into emergency departments or are admitted to hospital, that team operates seven days a week, 24 hours a day to respond quickly to need. It also acts as a link to community mental health services, promoting recovery and well-being and ensuring continuous care and better outcomes.

Those are strong local examples, but they raise the question of why those services are not available to all the people of the North. I want to develop a system that will learn from such approaches and see them adopted across the system. As a first step towards that, I have asked that a group is convened of professionals and people who use services to establish an improvement institute. That will not be a new building or a new layer in our system, but it will help to bring existing experience and knowledge together to work in a different new way for a much greater impact. That will be supported by a new approach to learning and team working. Rather than concentrating power at the top, I want all those working in health and social care to feel able to effect change and improvement in care. We must support and equip teams to do what they do best — namely, provide excellent care — and not micromanage them and load them down with unnecessary bureaucracy. That means having greater collective clinical and professional leadership throughout the HSC, supported by skilled and able managers.

Too often, I have heard that the current culture in the HSC is characterised by competition and silos, and that must change. I want to see a culture where staff feel empowered and where collaboration and partnership working define the way things are done. The positive results of that way of working are clear to all. In one of our trusts, a head and neck cancer specialist nurse introduced a follow-up telephone aftercare service by working in partnership with patients, which resulted in a patient-led follow-up service that enables fast-track referrals to follow-up clinics. There are many more examples across the system, but that type of working needs to become the new norm. For that to happen, our staff need to be equipped with the tools that will allow them to lead change. That is why I have asked my officials to develop a system-wide HSC leadership strategy by next summer.

I am determined to realise the potential that modern information technology provides. The pace of technological change is rapid, and that is no different in health and social care. I want to ensure that the right information is available to the right professionals or, indeed, service users themselves when they need it and in the way they need it. We have too many systems; people often have to tell their stories or provide the same information over and over again. At best, that is frustrating, and, at worst, it is unsafe. I want to ensure that the double and triple handling of information ceases by consolidating our patient records, enabling greater access to citizens and freeing up health professionals' time to care.

That is a major undertaking. Even starting now, it will be a decade before we see real change right across our HSC system. However, progress is being made. Every day, more health and social care information and resources are added to NI Direct, and I expect to have a patient portal in place for dementia patients next year. We plan to roll out online access to health and social care records over the next five years, where service users and patients want it. As users of the service, information about us belongs to us, and having access to that information will help us to make informed choices about our lives.

This morning, I have set out what I believe to be a very ambitious vision for the future of HSC. What I am proposing is not a quick fix but a significant and radical programme of change. That is why I have been upfront

about the time frame. However, I want to be really clear that the size of the task and the length of the journey will not dictate the pace of change. I have witnessed the pressure that staff are under every day. I know that 10 years is too long for them to see a difference, which is why I have set out my priority actions for the next 12 months: change starts today.

I am committed to taking a personal role in this process and will bring progress reports to the Assembly every six months. In short: I am up for this.

Change cannot happen, of course, without investment. We need to continue to deliver the existing HSC services to those who need them whilst developing and implementing change, so a period of double running will be necessary. Once I begin the process of co-production, I will be clearer about the financial requirement. What I can say today is that additional investment is needed.

I acknowledge that the cost of transformation may be significant, but standing still is not an option. There will be consequences if we do not deliver planned and managed change in our health and social care system. Even with the best efforts of all the staff, waiting lists will continue to grow, expertise will continue to be diluted and the best possible outcomes for our citizens will not be realised.

I believe that we have been given a fresh start. We are facing into a time of change, but it is change that must happen. Delivering Together sets out a direction of travel that I hope all our society can embrace and support in the challenging but potentially rewarding times ahead.

11.00 am

As Minister of Health, I will provide the leadership needed to drive change. I have no doubt that those working in the front-line service will not be found wanting in leading the transformation of the health and social care system. Today I hope that colleagues from all political persuasions will show the political leadership and courage needed to support the system in transforming itself. Together we can deliver the health and well-being outcomes that all our people deserve.

I commend the statement to the Assembly.

Mr Speaker: Before I call a Member to ask the first question, I inform the House that a very large number of Members have indicated their desire to do so. In order that I can get in as many Members as possible, I ask that those who get the opportunity to ask a question ensure that it is short, sharp, focused and relevant to the statement made by the Minister.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for her statement and for the eventual publication of the two reports. She talked about “a period of double running” and said that she will be clear about the finance when that begins. Does she recognise that Transforming Your Care (TYC) failed because of the lack of budget? What assurances can she provide to the public, patients and health professionals that this report will not fail? Was the Minister surprised by the apparently limited detail in the ‘Systems, not Structures’ report?

Mrs O’Neill: I start by commending the expert panel for the work that it did. The report that it produced was very clear and pointed out the stark challenges in our system. It was a very detailed and meaningful piece of work that engaged staff right across the health and social care

system. I very much welcome the report. It has informed me of the direction of travel that we need to take.

I believe that, in going forward, we have no choice but to transform our health and social care system. If we are all invested in making sure that we have better outcomes for the population, we should all play our part and get on board for the transformation journey that we need to take. The Executive have endorsed a plan of action for going forward and realise that transformation costs money. They want to deliver better outcomes for our population. The clear direction of travel set out today shows that we will make a meaningful difference. We have to transform the system and support the staff who do an excellent job every day and are under pressure.

We have set out today a very clear programme for the implementation of change to make things better and deliver better outcomes. We should be focused on making sure that we deliver the best possible outcomes for all of the population. We have a real opportunity to make a meaningful difference and to be world leaders in what we provide through our health and social care system. We are already the envy of many areas that look towards our integrated system. Let us build on what is good, transform the system and put our health service on a sustainable footing. I believe that the rewards will be seen in the years to come, when we can stand over a first-class health and social care system in which staff, patients and carers are involved in the planning, production and design of the services that we provide.

Ms P Bradley (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health): I thank the Minister for her statement outlining her vision for Health and Social Care. Your vision is very ambitious, Minister, but I believe that, with consensus in the House, it is achievable. The statement mentions that tough decisions need to be made and refers to the Bengoa criteria. Will the Minister tell the House what process she intends to put in place to involve communities, front-line staff and political representatives in order to make that a reality? Will she also advise what preliminary work has been done to cost the proposals set out in her statement?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for her positive contribution. I look forward to working with you as the Chair of the Health Committee. We have a shared interest in delivering better outcomes for our population. This is a real opportunity, and I know that you will be happy to work with me to make sure that we deliver a first-class service.

We should not start the conversation about money. Obviously, it is very important and we need it to transform the system. However, the principle behind all this is transforming services to deliver better health outcomes for the population. I am deeply committed to universal healthcare that is free at the point of delivery for the whole population. For the first time ever, the Executive have collectively endorsed a programme of action and the plan for going forward. In doing so, they recognise that there is a cost. We will enter the Budget process in the weeks and months ahead and will, I hope, secure the transformation funding that we require.

The Member asked how we will work and build confidence in the system.

That is about meaningful engagement and listening to staff and patients. It is about making sure that the decisions that we take are clinician-led. If those decisions are clinician-

led, people will know that they are about better health outcomes for them. It is about having a frank and honest conversation with individuals about the plan and about where we need to go. We want them to help us deliver the services. People are up for that; the staff and patients whom I am engaging with are up for that. I am, personally, going to embark on a process of engagement, and I will go anywhere that health service staff want to talk to me about getting involved in the conversation. I want to make sure that we collectively go on this journey, but I also believe that it is about genuine ownership — giving staff and patients ownership of the direction that we are going to take.

Ms Seeley: I thank the Minister for her statement and welcome the work that has gone on behind the scenes to get us to today. She has made it clear in the past that mental health is a priority of hers. Will she set out her plans in relation to mental health and how we can achieve parity of esteem for it?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for her question. I have said in the House on many occasions since taking up office that mental health will be one of my key priorities. When it comes to reshaping services, co-production and looking at how we are going to deliver services in future, mental health is one of those areas, through recovery colleges, where we can see how co-production works. I want to do more of that. We have to work towards the point where we have parity of esteem for mental health, which, to me, means recognising the true impact of mental illness on society. It is about a focus on recovery and greater involvement of experts and the experience of the service user and those who are living with mental illness. It is about investing in service developments where resources allow. It is about exploring the potential for all-island developments. As I said in my statement, there are a number of areas where we could work more collaboratively, particularly in perinatal mental health and in relation to young people who find themselves with a dual diagnosis.

There is so much that we have still to do. I am going to receive the review of the Bamford report action plan in the next month, and that is going to help me inform the direction of travel. I want to set out very clearly a plan of action for the next number of years, which will set out how we are going to achieve parity of esteem for mental health. It is so important that we help people to remain well and that we promote positive mental health messages. I want to prioritise this, and, as I said, over the next number of months, I will produce a plan for taking that forward.

Mr Durkan: I very much thank the Minister for her statement and welcome the publication of this report, which contains some extremely sensible and necessary proposals. However, the lack of specifics in the report and in the statement on the transformation or rationalisation of our hospital estate means that a spectre of doubt will loom over services in several areas. When will she be in a position to put more meat on the bones of this statement and let us know what this means for where?

Mrs O'Neill: We did not just arrive at this scenario overnight. The health service did not get to the state it is in overnight. This has been a process that happened over many years, and it is for a number of reasons, including an ageing population, growing expectation and demand, financial challenges, the Tories cutting the block grant and all the implications of all of that. I could list the challenges,

which are well rehearsed and, I think, universally accepted. We have to get better about how we deliver our services.

What I set out this morning is a true reflection of the length of time that it is going to take to properly transform the system. There is no quick fix, so we need to have a sustained plan of action, which is what I have clearly set out. We cannot just sit back and wait for 10 years to go by and see what happens. We have to be part of everyday actions that are making a difference. I have clearly set out my plan of action for the next 12 months, which is very much focused on co-production and co-design. If I am serious about co-production and delivering services in conjunction with patients, carers and staff, I should not run too far ahead of the ball. That would not lead to meaningful collaboration or engagement. What I have set out, clearly, is a plan of action for the next 12 months, which is going to inform the year after, the year after and the year after. I think that what we will see is incremental change.

I would suggest to the Member that we should not allow any seed of doubt to be sown out there. This is a positive development. We all want to see better health outcomes for all of the population, and the best way to do that is to work together. I have said that I will come back to the House every six months throughout this journey to update Members on where we are and on how far we have got in our progress. I think that this is different from anything that has come before. We have an Executive that have put their full weight behind this direction of travel. We have an Executive that realise that we need additional funding to transform and that want to tackle waiting lists. I have said that I am going to bring forward a plan in January that will set out very clearly, over the next five years, how we are going to bring those waiting lists down.

That is the plan of action to deal with the backlog, but if we do not transform the system, the waiting list picture is not going to get any better and staff are going to come under even more pressure. I suggest to all Members that this is a positive day. This is a fresh start for health, and we should go out and tell the public that we are committed to delivering this transformation.

I, as the Health Minister, will not be found wanting in the leadership that I will show in driving forward meaningful transformation, because I am committed to tackling health inequalities and delivering first-class health outcomes for all the population.

Ms Bradshaw: Thank you, Minister. The reports are very good and very much reflect what we, as Health Committee members, have been hearing over the past few months. The increase in GP places each year to 111 is very much to be welcomed. As you know, however, the British Medical Association and the Royal College of General Practitioners have a lot of urgent and pressing matters that need to be attended to, not just about more places. I am talking specifically about more finances. How do you plan in the shorter term to address finance issues?

Mrs O'Neill: We all recognise that GPs are under pressure. The focus that I placed today on primary care will really help improve that picture and really help support GPs. The fact that, within the next number of months, all GP surgeries will have a named health visitor, district nurse and social worker shows in itself the commitment to multidisciplinary teams, which the BMA and GPs are asking for. The other thing is around working with

Community Pharmacy. Our community pharmacists can do so much more, and they are crying out to do so much more, so I want to work with them. I will develop a framework over the next number of months with them. Whenever we come to agreeing a new contract, we can work more collaboratively with Community Pharmacy.

As a combination of building community capacity, all those things will make a real difference to primary care. When it comes to making difficult decisions in the future about where services are based, we have to invest in primary care. People have to feel that it is different in primary care. The initiatives that we have set out today are going to do that.

The GP-led working group has set out a number of asks, some of which we have addressed today. However, I will respond to the full report by the end of the year, and we will look at other areas in which we can work together.

GPs are the bedrock of primary care, so this is a good opportunity for us not just to give a nod to primary care but to make a real, meaningful difference. I think that the implementation of some of the initiatives that I have set out will make a real difference.

Mr Middleton: I thank the Minister for outlining the report. The expert panel report states that action must be taken to address elective care waiting times. The Minister stated that she intends to bring forward a strategy to try to address and reduce waiting times. Can the Minister outline what content she foresees being in the strategy?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. I consistently say, and I say it again here today, that waiting times are unacceptable. They are unacceptable to me and, I think, to all of us. We share that.

I understand absolutely that, if you are waiting to be seen as an individual — a parent, a daughter or a son — it is so stressful and worrying if you cannot get to see someone as quickly as possible, so we need to do two things. We need to address the backlog, and that is what the plan will very much be about. Alongside that, we need to develop and transform our system so that we do not get to that point.

These are new ways of working. We are trying to operate a 20th-century health and social care system trying to deliver 21st-century care, and those two things do not marry. If we do not transform the system, our waiting lists are not going to get any better.

I have already done a large body of work on waiting lists and am bringing forward a plan. We are going to need additional funding to be able to do that. To build public confidence that what we are doing is the right thing, we need to address waiting lists alongside the transformation piece. Transformation is the longer-term solution. In the meantime, we have to bring forward a plan, which I am going to do by January, that will clearly set out how, over the next five years, we will try to bring down the waiting lists.

Mr Milne: Buíochas fosta leis an Aire as an ráiteas seo inniu. I thank the Minister for her statement this morning. Our community pharmacies are providing vital services every day. Can the Minister explain how she plans to utilise them better to help deliver the vision and changes that she has set out today?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. I 100% agree that community pharmacies play a vital role in our health and social care system. Recently, when I was out

visiting one of the community pharmacies, I saw at first-hand how they contribute, which included doing things that you would not believe that a pharmacy does.

Quite often, they can be the first port of call for a lot of people, particularly in deprived areas, where people may be more likely to go to their community pharmacist than to their GP. They are crying out about wanting to do more. I want to work with them to do more. Our community pharmacies dispense over 40 million prescription items every year and have unequalled access to people in local communities. That gives them the opportunity to promote well-being through the best use of medicines and delivering important support about healthy lifestyles. When we look towards winter, pharmacy in the community has a critical role in supporting people to stay well and to make informed choices about HSC services.

11.15 am

I want to maximise the potential of Community Pharmacy: they are up for it, I am up for it, and we can make a real, positive difference. This is all bringing it back to the focus on primary care. It is about the GP. It is about the district nurses. It is about the allied health professionals. It is about the social worker. It is about the community pharmacists. It is about the community itself. It is about that partnership and collaborative working. If we successfully get to that point, we will see real, meaningful differences, particularly in tackling health inequalities and in making sure that we are reaching people at a very early stage. Early intervention and prevention are absolutely key when it comes to the health service.

Mr Robinson: I thank the Minister for her statement. Can she outline the timescale for the additional GP retraining to impact on the front-line of out of hours care in areas such as the western out of hours? In towns such as Limavady, there have been occasions when there is no GP service between 8.30 one evening and 8.30 the next morning.

Mrs O'Neill: I have outlined a number of areas where we will work with GPs, and one is recruiting and increasing the number of GP training places, but it is also about looking at the role that associate physicians can play. We need to explore new ways of working, and I have announced some moves on that. I also think of advanced practitioner nurses. A lot more people can support the GP in that setting. We need to move to the point where we truly have these multidisciplinary teams in place. GPs are under pressure, particularly in rural areas. We have seen some particular challenges in relation to that. I am committed to increasing the numbers of GP places by, I think, 12 next year and 14 the year after. We have also seen, in the last year, an investment package of up to £5.1 million in 2015-16 and a further £7 million this year. We are continuing to work with GPs. We have increased the number of GP places, but I will respond in due course to the recommendations of the GP-led care working group in the context of the Budget process.

Mr Butler: I thank the Minister for her answers so far and, indeed, for the report. The Minister thought it important enough to mention extending the role of nurses and midwives, and recommendation 3 talks about innovative approaches. I hope that she will agree that that is not an innovative approach. It is doing more for less. With that extension in role that she talks about, will she also recognise that an additional responsibility payment may

be required for those people, and will she commit to recognising that our nurses, midwives and care staff are appreciated and treated fairly?

Mrs O'Neill: When I talked about innovative approaches, I meant supporting the staff to do what they do well. I pointed out a number of examples of when staff have gone ahead and developed innovative practices, and I think that we need to scale those up. If something works, let us do it across the board. Quite often, a lot of the innovative projects and initiatives that staff have taken are done in pockets, but we should replicate it across the whole of the North if it works.

As I have clearly set out, I will make a workforce strategy plan. We do not have a workforce strategy plan right across Health and Social Care, and so, if we are to transform the system, we also need to look at what our workforce challenges are. I have set out that I will take forward that programme of work. For me, that will allow us to make sure that we have the right staff who are trained in the right way and in the specialisms that we need. I think that it is innovative to look towards more areas such as advanced practitioner nurses and physician associates and see how they can support the staff to do the excellent work that they do. Try not to be too critical. I think that this is a good day for health. We should embrace it and take it on board.

Ms Dillon: I thank the Minister for her answers. Can she outline how her vision, set out in Delivering Together, will help address the health inequalities that exist?

Mrs O'Neill: This is one of the things that Professor Bengoa picks up in his report, and I went on to highlight it. The health inequalities that we face are stark. I do not think that we should ever be comfortable with that picture. However, I believe that the only way to tackle health inequalities is through collaborative working. The new Programme for Government approach allows us to do that.

It is not right that where you live determines your outcomes in life, but we know that that is the case. We know that deprivation is linked to health outcomes, job choices, employment and housing. We need to tackle them all. The vision that I have set out in Delivering Together is focused on keeping people well in the first place and on providing the education, information and support that they need to make informed choices, regardless of where they live. By building capacity in our multidisciplinary teams in primary care and ensuring that there is a named health visitor, district nurse and social worker for every GP practice, they will be better equipped to respond earlier and work with people to address the lifestyle choices that impact on their health and well-being.

What I have outlined is investment in, and development of, community resources. We will work with our partners and all the community to develop the strengths and assets to tackle the determinants of health and well-being. We have to tackle the root causes of health inequalities head on. We can no longer tolerate the correlation between deprivation and health outcomes. We can truly judge our system when we have improved that picture. I think that the direction of travel that we are going to take will lead to that improvement.

Mr Dunne: I too thank the Minister for her long-awaited report on what is a very important issue. How does the Minister see improvements to patient flow in our hospital

system, given that bed-blocking has been critical and has had a serious knock-on effect throughout the system as many patients await community care packages?

Mrs O'Neill: Some innovative practices have improved patient flow. Our emergency departments are full, particularly in winter, and patient flow is very difficult. Often, older people cannot be discharged from hospital because there is no domiciliary care package in place, and there are particular challenges in relation to the workforce there.

In December, I will receive the report on the review of domiciliary care. I passionately believe in domiciliary care. These people, mostly women, are the lowest paid in our health service. Quite often, the trusts contract the work out to independent providers. Care workers do not get any mileage allowance and, if they work in a rural area, there could be 20 miles between one person's house and another's. That takes what are already low wages down even further. I am committed to supporting these people and helping them with their professional development. I look forward to the report, but I am passionate about making sure we do more to support domiciliary care workers, because support the system. They keep people at home longer and patients can be discharged from hospital more quickly.

Alongside this, in March, we will consult on the review of adult social care. That will also allow us to improve on how we deliver services and will make sure that we have settings to care for people that are appropriate and adaptable, because not everybody fits into the one approach. That is the conversation we will have about this matter.

Mr McGrath: I thank the Minister for the report. The statement suggests that there may need to be some changes to, or indeed closure of, emergency departments. Often, rural communities are impacted most by these changes, yet I note that there is no reference in the statement or the report — in what I have skimmed of it — to the Ambulance Service and the vital role that it plays in delivering front-line care to people in their moment of need. Will the Minister comment on whether the Ambulance Service will receive additional resources as part of this programme?

Mrs O'Neill: The Ambulance Service plays a key role in health and social care and has been very progressive in the new initiatives that it has brought forward to ensure, in particular, that an ambulance crew does not sit for a long time at a hospital waiting to drop a patient off into the care of a clinician. We need to do more of that.

Some of the challenges we have in the Ambulance Service are in relation to the workforce. We will look at every element of the health and social care system, including ambulance staff, to make sure that we have proper workforce planning and meet the needs of the service. I am committed to working with the Ambulance Service. The report does not talk about the Ambulance Service, but it is an integral part of the HSC system and we need to work with all elements of the system.

You talked about closures. We need to frame the conversation on the best outcome for individuals and on what delivers the best possible health outcome for individuals. The report that Professor Bengoa and the expert panel took forward very rightly focused on delivering better systems, not structures. I could have spent the next five years focusing on structures, but the

outcomes would not have changed. If we get the system right, the structures will change in time. If we invest in primary care, we can make a real difference to what people get in their community. Let us remember that the traditional model of going to hospital is not a 21st century one; there is a recognition out there that we need to do things differently. People want to stay at home, and we should support them there as long as possible.

Only those who are acutely ill or are in for emergency reasons should be in hospital. If we can work towards that, people can see a real difference to the support that we provide in communities. Acute care at home is a really fine example of how that works. All the staff and clinicians go into people's homes and support them to stay in their own bed at night. That can make a big difference to someone who is not well. For me, it is about doing more of that. Structures will change in time. Let us invest in primary care. That is certainly my vision for what I want to do.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Minister for her important statement. Where does she think there is any further potential to deliver specialised services on an all-island basis?

Mrs O'Neill: There are definitely areas where we can build on that. Some of the collaboration that already exists, particularly in children's cardiac services and radiotherapy for cancer patients, shows that we have been able to develop really innovative services for the population on the island. That benefits not only patients but staff because they are allowed to specialise in the areas that they wish. There are so many more opportunities — for example, transplantation of organs and rare diseases. We have also developed a programme of work with the Department of Health in the South to identify other areas of mutual benefit. I set out in a statement areas where I think that we could collaborate more — for example, mental health and perinatal mental health in particular. There is no service on this island to support women with mental illness in pregnancy. I would certainly be very proud if we were able to deliver such a service, and I think that we could do it collaboratively across the island. That would allow us to develop it a lot more quickly than perhaps we could do individually. Recently, I have had conversations on dual diagnosis and young people and adolescents with mental health and addiction problems, and I think that, again, we do not have any service right across the island. If we include transplantation, those are just three areas where there is scope. A scoping study is ongoing, which I look forward to receiving. I want to take forward measures that allow us to develop a first-class service for the population.

Dr Farry: I thank the Minister for her statement. She has welcomed the report and commended Professor Bengoa and his colleagues for their work, but she has not taken the opportunity to systematically go through the recommendations in her statement or documentation and give her response. It is traditional for Ministers, when they receive reports, to give their view of the report as a whole. For the avoidance of any doubt, will the Minister clarify whether she fully accepts the report that has been presented by Professor Bengoa in its entirety and, if not, what aspects she does not accept?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that I do; I believe that I said that at the outset. I said that I endorsed the recommendations that the expert panel had put forward. I said that very clearly in, I think, the opening paragraph. Let

me say it again in case you missed it: I endorse the expert panel's report, and I have set out my plan of action on how I will take those things forward.

Mr Kennedy: I refer the Minister to action point 12 on page 26 of the report, under the heading "Transformation":

"Establish and seek members for a transformation oversight structure with membership drawn from within and outwith the HSC."

That target is to be met by or during November 2016. Will the Minister outline what the size of the structure would be; how many members it would have; who would appoint those members — practitioners, academics or politicians; and how it would avoid duplication with those with existing responsibility?

Mrs O'Neill: It is clear that we have to drive change. I will provide the political leadership for change, but we need clinician-led oversight of service reconfiguration. November is next week. Over the next couple of weeks, I intend to set out what that panel will look like. Suffice it to say that it needs to be clinician-led. It also needs to include people from inside and outside the health and social care system. I am working up the detail of that and will make an announcement in the coming weeks. We can have a lovely direction of travel, but it is important to drive the implementation. I will drive it politically, but I am asking for clinicians.

I remember that, when I first came into office and was speaking at an event somewhere, my message to the health service was this: help me to help you. That is the message that I will leave as your answer: it is about how I can help the health service to do more and support it to deliver the first-class service that it is committed to delivering. I think that the direction of travel that we have set out here is the correct one. Hopefully, it will command universal acceptance. We need to recognise that, for the first time ever, the Executive have endorsed a plan, and they are committed to tackling waiting lists and delivering better outcomes for the population. To me, that is how we should be measured because, in government, you take tough decisions and deliver better outcomes for the whole population.

11.30 am

Mr McPhillips: I thank the Minister for her statement. I welcome it and the acknowledgement that the health service is at breaking point.

The Minister noted the need for change in the configuration of acute services. At this stage, does she have any information on where regional services will be provided, especially those in the Western Trust?

Mrs O'Neill: You cannot help being parochial. The expert panel has set out the criteria that it believes should be considered when it comes to service reviews. It also set it out very clearly that we cannot keep delivering every service in every hospital, so we need to specialise. That is good not only for patients and patient outcomes but for the staff who get to build their skills and knowledge. When it comes to the direction of travel, today is not about closures or hospitals; it is about changing the picture and about better health outcomes. What does that mean? Does it mean that you travel a little further to get a first-class service? If, for example, after a stroke, people have to travel 20 minutes extra, but their outcomes are better — they will live longer, their mobility will not be as reduced

and their speech will be better — I think that they will be prepared to do that. This morning, I listened to Janice Smyth from the Royal College of Nursing clearly say that people will travel if they get a first-class service. People need to understand why you make changes, so I want to communicate with staff, patients, carers and families to make sure that we are all part of designing the services and that people understand the care pathways and why they have to travel to services. Let us not focus today on closures; let us focus on building a first-class health and social care system.

The criteria for service reviews will go out to consultation over the next number of weeks, and I look forward to receiving Members' views. When the criteria are agreed, let us get on with the service reviews and making sure that we design a first-class health and social care system.

Mr Nesbitt: I welcome the Minister's commitment to parity between mental health and physical health, but I also challenge her: parity will have real meaning only if she addresses the imbalance in funding and resource, so will she commit to that over the 10-year period?

Mrs O'Neill: Maybe the Member misunderstands what parity of esteem is. It does not mean giving the same resource to physical health and mental health —

Mr Nesbitt: I did not say that.

Mrs O'Neill: The Royal College of Psychiatrists clearly said that in its report when asking for parity of esteem to be established. When I talk about parity of esteem, I am talking about moving towards true recognition, attention of resource and the Department's attention to the mental health issue. When we focus more on recovery and promoting good, positive mental health messages; when we invest in service developments; when we do more for perinatal health; and when we review the Bamford action plan — I have set out a plan for the next five years — you will be able to see how we will deliver parity of esteem. I am very committed to doing that, and I think that all Members share that aspiration. For far too long, mental health has not had the attention that it deserves. It blights all our communities, and people who find that they are vulnerable because of mental health issues need to be supported.

Mr Mullan: This is a follow-up to Mr Middleton's question about elective care. As far as the lack of care centres is concerned, does the Minister intend to increase capacity here, especially through new capital build projects in the public sector, rather than having a total reliance on the private sector?

Mrs O'Neill: Elective care centres are within the HSC estate, so they will be developed in line with need. As I said in my statement, we do not yet know the number or where they will be placed, but the service reviews will allow us to do that. Elective care centres will really help us to deal with waiting lists by allowing people who have been scheduled for minor surgery to be seen without interruption to the service. That, in itself, will bring down waiting lists in the longer term. We will consult on the criteria, and, next year, we will move towards deciding where the elective care centres should go, and I think that they will make a real, meaningful difference to patient outcomes.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister, for your statement. Recommendation 6 requires additional funding for the

transformation and transition. Have you secured that money from your Executive colleagues?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. The Executive have endorsed the direction of travel and have endorsed the plan. In endorsing it, they have also recognised that transition is going to take additional funding. They also endorsed the fact that, in order to bring down waiting lists, it will need additional funding in the short term. So, for a time, we are going to have dual running. We have to keep the health service delivering every day alongside the transformation piece, but we cannot be distracted from transformation because, if we do not do it, the system will be in crisis in years to come.

Ms Armstrong: Thank you very much, Minister, for your statement. Recommendation 7 refers to the creation of a transformation board. Will the Minister confirm that — outwith what happened with Transforming Your Care, where there was no implementation plan — the implementation plan that is mentioned in part 5 on the actions will be followed and monitored regularly with published outcomes?

Mrs O'Neill: I am absolutely committed to moving to outcomes-based analysis; that is where we need to be. We will not do that overnight, but it is certainly what we are working towards. I will update the House every six months on the plan because that shows that we are serious about transformation and driving it forward. It is also about saying to Members that I want to work with them and deliver better health outcomes for all of the population. There is no danger of this falling down if there is genuine effort to implement it. I will not be found wanting in my political leadership. Also, the oversight structure that we have put in place, which is clinician-led, will make a real, meaningful difference and is something that has not happened before.

Mr Carroll: Will the Minister give a guarantee that this report will not lead to the further encroachment by the private sector into our NHS?

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously, I am working towards a position where we do not need to use the independent sector. In the meantime — it will take a number of years to get to that point — there are people on waiting lists and we cannot just leave them there. We are going to have to do a combination of things in the short term. We are going to have to make sure that we are at full capacity within the health service, but also, in the short term, we are going to have to use the independent sector. I cannot let patients suffer whilst we get to a transformed health and social care system. I believe that, in the short term, we are going to need the independent sector. Certainly, for me, the longer-term goal is universal healthcare, free at the point of delivery for all people who need health and social care services. We should not have to rely on provision outside of the health service to deliver all those services that are much-needed.

Mr Allister: So, here we go again. Another fresh start in health. The recycling of a great plethora of fine words from an Executive that, since 2011, have reduced beds in our hospitals by 10% and then are surprised by the chaos that results. How can the Minister come to the House with grand proposals that she has not costed? What is the costing of what the Minister is proposing? Surely any

proposal, to be credible, needs to be costed before it is embraced.

Mrs O'Neill: It must be exhausting being so negative all of the time. *[Laughter.]* I have clearly said that I have set out a direction of travel. I have also said that the Executive have endorsed that direction of travel, in the recognition that we need additional funding. We are about to go through the Budget process, and I would like to see, at the other side of that Budget process, that we will also have a funding allocation that allows us to transform the system. It is very clear that what we have here is a real road map for change and transformation; one that will deliver incremental change, year-on-year, that will see staff and patients supported and that will lead to an open and honest conversation about where we are going.

Mr Allister: Is it costed?

Mrs O'Neill: I have costed everything that I am talking about. With the Minister of Finance and my Executive colleagues, I am working through the due process of the Budget decisions. That will all become very clear to you, so do not be too worried. You will see it all in due course.

Mr E McCann: In light of the Minister's assurance that, in future, more attention will be paid to the perspectives and opinions of front-line staff than those of a manager sitting in an office with a spreadsheet — I paraphrase, of course — what steps will she take to ensure that we have no repetition of the grotesque situation that arose in the Western Trust area when £8 million earmarked for learning disability services was not spent on learning disability services? No explanation, of an adequate or clear nature, has been produced for this shortfall. We deserve to know this, and we do not know it. Will the Minister take steps at least to ensure that there is no repetition of this happening?

Mrs O'Neill: On the Western Trust issue, I have met the families and the carers, and I continue to do so. I have given them all reassurances that we will get to the bottom of it. What we seriously need to be about — this is the core tenet of what I am talking about — is co-production and co-delivery meaning that. It means proper collaboration. It means people understanding that, if you make service changes, patients need to understand why you are doing so. They need to know that it is about trying to provide a better service for them. They need to understand that and be given every piece of information. I am committed to that. In building capacity in communities, co-production, co-delivery and co-design are going to be instrumental in helping us deliver a first-class health and social care system. Openness, honesty and transparency are key. The trusts are up for that, and the Department is up for that. Together we can, as I say, deliver first-class health and social care outcomes for all the population. That should be the only aspiration that we all work to for the health service.

Mr McNulty: I thank the Minister for the report. 'Health and Wellbeing 2026' refers to ambulatory assessment and treatment centres. Are those similar to the community care and treatment centres that are planned for such places as Newry? Will an ambulatory assessment and treatment centre include facilities such as a minor injuries unit?

Mrs O'Neill: No, ambulatory care centres are a different set-up altogether. They allow people whom a GP thinks need to be seen by a consultant to go into a centre. For example, I visited one centre last week in the Royal, and

there is also one in the Mater. One of the things that they do is, if you are referred to one, you can have your blood tests and X-rays, see the consultant and be assessed and watched throughout the course of a day. The stats show that quite often, as I said, you can then be sent home and do not have to be admitted to hospital. That is the ideal, for nobody wants to be in hospital unless it is absolutely necessary. If we can scale up the number of those ambulatory centres — the form that they take may be different, depending on where they are placed — that will make a real, meaningful difference to individuals. Again, it will prevent hospital admissions, which is what we should all be working towards. People do not want to be in hospital. I look forward to the development of these ambulatory centres. I think that they will make a real, positive difference to bed blockages and waiting lists.

Ms Gildernew: I also welcome the Minister's statement and the publication of the report. There is a lot in there that I welcome, especially on mental health, children and looked-after children.

The Minister is aware that there is a lot of pressure in the system on nurses, social workers and other front-line staff. I very much welcome the increase in GP places, Minister. You are aware of the increasing pressure on GP practices in rural areas, particularly in Fermanagh. In reference to an earlier question, do not forget that, when people are travelling further for services, the road goes both ways. Hopefully people will be travelling west for some services rather than us travelling east all the time. Do you see the increase in the number of GP training places having a very positive influence on the delivery of the report, given that most people's point of contact is their GP?

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. This is about trying to address the challenges for GP services, but it is very much about, as I said, building up that team. The multidisciplinary approach is going to make a real difference, I believe. The fact that GPs have a team around them that can interact and that can rely on one another will make a significant difference to primary care. Staff are working even harder and are under a lot of pressure, so we have to get this right. We have to do it. Social workers are telling me about the pressures that they are under. I constantly hear about social workers going home and having to sit up until 2.00 am writing up reports. That is not sustainable for anybody's working pattern. I want to do more to work with all those teams to make sure that they support one another. Furthermore, we have a real opportunity to make sure that primary care is embedded, multidisciplinary and action-based. This is really going to change the picture.

On rural services, I absolutely agree with the point about designing services. Although people are always happy to travel if they are getting a better outcome, we do not want to starve them. It does not mean that everything has to be centralised in Belfast, for example. It can be the case that services are spread across the North. I am not going to give examples, because people will seize on them, but there are really good, innovative things being done in each trust. Each trust has a crucial role to play in determining where we develop services and where they are safe, because at the core of all of this has to be patient quality and patient safety.

11.45 am

Mr Attwood: I welcome the statement and acknowledge that it is challenging work. I think that everybody

recognises that the Minister is applying herself to this challenging work and there should be no doubt about that assertion. If it is the case that, in years 2 to 5 of this mandate, there will be increased health budget allocations in the existing structures and double running as the reforms are rolled out, have the Executive agreed this morning, and has the Minister of Finance confirmed to you, that double running will be permitted during this mandate and that, from year 2 to year 5, can you give a broad indication of the increased budget allocation that will be required to facilitate double running?

Mrs O'Neill: The Executive have recognised that we will need a period of double running, but they also appreciate that it will not be forever; it will be until we transform the system and put Health on a sustainable footing. We do not have a choice, because if we do not do it, the system will be in crisis and the entire block grant could be sucked up by Health. What would we do then for every other service and Department — for Education and roads and everything else that is important to people's lives?

We do not have a choice. The Executive have clearly committed to the plan and, in doing so, have clearly also committed to the transformation fund. We will see the allocation of funding as part of the Budget process in the next few weeks and months, and I am sure that we will discuss it in the Chamber. We do not have a choice. I cannot say that enough: we do not have a choice. We have to transform Health and Social Care, otherwise the system will break at some stage in the future. In recognition of that, the Executive are fully behind the strategy and the two-mandate plan. We have never had a two-mandate plan before, so that is really significant in itself. It sends out a very strong political leadership message that the Executive are committed to delivering this transformation programme alongside tackling all of the immediate issues that we have.

Mr Beggs: The Minister talked about investment in primary care. My constituents from Larne, Carrick and Newtownabbey have most of their care provided from Antrim and Belfast, so I welcome that there will be a greater focus on primary care. There needs to be investment in order that our GP practices can be improved and services provided. What investment will follow in capital and resource budgeting to enable more services to be provided locally from our GPs and other allied professionals?

Mrs O'Neill: I have already answered that in relation to the number of places that we have announced for GPs, nurses, named social workers, health visitors and district nurses and the roll-out of askmyGP to 30 more practices. All those things come with a cost, but I have decided that I can do them within the budget I have set out and that I am planning with the Executive. This is about real, meaningful change; it is about investment in the front line; it is about investment in primary care. For us to be successful in this transformation programme, we have to do that.

Ms Mallon: The Minister will not be surprised by the content of my question, which relates to the devastating, ongoing problem of mental health and addiction among our young people, not least in my own constituency of North Belfast. I wholeheartedly welcome the Minister's commitment to exploring specialist treatment, on a regional and all-island basis, for our young people who are struggling with mental health and addiction problems. Could the Minister shape her thinking on that matter further? Does it involve the provision of a specialist

treatment centre or a unit for dual diagnosis, particularly for those at the most acute end of the problem?

Mrs O'Neill: I am committed to developing services with the Minister in the South. We have embarked on identifying areas where we can collaborate, but the issues of perinatal mental health and dual diagnosis stand out as areas where we can do something, because we do not have a service on this island. We are actively looking at what is available in the Twenty-six Counties, and we will then develop the conversation further.

We need to do more to support those young people, and there is a lot of debate about what that might look like. We need to have that conversation. I have met with you and Carál Ní Chuilín and Gerry Kelly about how we can do more, particularly given the challenges and recent deaths in North Belfast. I am committed to tackling mental health issues, and I am very committed to making sure that we support our young who find themselves in such a vulnerable situation and making sure that the health service responds to their needs.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Minister for her statement and wish her well. My question is in relation to — you will not be surprised as you have given me a namecheck — mental health. It is really in relation to dual diagnosis and the partnership with our health and social care staff as well as our partners and stakeholders in the community sector. I am aware that the Protect Life 2 strategy is out for consultation, and perhaps the Minister would like to wait until then, and Bamford, but can she give us some assurance that our partners in the community and voluntary sector will not become invisible when reforming our health and social care practices?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for her question, and I can absolutely give that assurance. The community and voluntary sector does amazing work and is very engaged in all our communities. It is absolutely part of the picture in supporting all those people who find themselves with mental ill health. Going forward, obviously, I am consulting on the Protect Life 2 strategy, the suicide prevention strategy, and I intend to engage personally on that issue as I believe we can continue to improve what is good out there and learn lessons where we need to do so. I want to work with the community and voluntary sector.

Recently, and you are aware of and attended it, the Future Search event in Belfast looked at bringing together all the partners across the community, voluntary and statutory sectors and looked at how, collaboratively, we can do more to deal with suicide in our society. I am very much committed to that collaboration, that partnership working, and I am very much somebody who wants to listen to those who are engaging with people with mental ill health, day and daily, in their communities at 12.00 midnight. I know the commitment of some of the community and voluntary sector individuals, and I really want to work with them in the time ahead.

Mr Speaker: Members, that concludes questions on the Minister's statement.

October Monitoring

Dr Farry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We are about to hear a statement from the Finance Minister on the October monitoring round. The Minister is at pains to stress the new procedures that the Executive are now using, and I do not necessarily dispute their right to have a different approach to monitoring rounds. However, it is my understanding that very few Committees in the Assembly, if any, have had a full briefing on the financial situation as it pertains to their Departments.

We are also likely to be facing a situation where there is no draft Budget for the forthcoming financial year. We also see a curious line in the Minister's statement where the Executive are saying what is appropriate in terms of parliamentary scrutiny. I, and many others, are concerned that we are seeing a shift by stealth in the balance between the Executive and the Assembly regarding financial scrutiny; and, indeed, the deputy First Minister has been at pains in the past to stress that the Assembly has to be given its place in that regard. Therefore, Mr Speaker, I ask you to look into this matter and ensure that the Assembly — and its Committees, in particular, which have a statutory duty to hold Departments to account and provide scrutiny — is being given its proper place in the financial process.

Mr Speaker: Mr Farry, I am being very generous to you.

Dr Farry: I am done.

Mr Speaker: That is more than a point of order; that is a speech in itself. I might be tempted to ask you to refer to which Standing Order you were making the point of order under. However, I note your comments.

I have received notice from the Minister of Finance that he wishes to make a statement on October monitoring.

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): In answer to Mr Farry — I know it is not my job to answer Mr Farry — I can assure him that I am giving this statement to the Assembly to give the Assembly, and all Members, their due place in our deliberations.

As I move through another lengthy statement, I apologise to Members because they have had a long morning already. However, they will be pleased with some of the statements in here, for example, in relation to the British Government being pressed on a fiscal stimulus in the autumn statement on 23 November. Also, there is a shot in the arm for our local economy through a small stimulus package here today, and some good news on financial transactions capital that will not be returning to the Treasury.

A Cheann Comhairle, ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leat as an deis seo a thabhairt dom an Ráiteas seo faoi Bhabhta Monatóireachta Dheireadh Fómhair agus faoi phacáiste Spreagthach an Fheidhmeannais, An Chéad Chéim a chur faoi bhráid an Tionóil inniu. Seo an dara babhta monatóireachta i mbliana a thagann sna sála ar mo Ráiteas i leith Babhta Monatóireachta an Mheithimh.

A Cheann Comhairle, sula labhraím ar Bhabhta Monatóireachta Dheireadh Fómhair, ba mhaith liom an deis seo a thapú uasdátú beag a thabhairt do na baill ar na cainteanna a bhí agam le cúpla lá anuas le Príomh-Rúnaí an Stáitchiste agus le hAíre Airgeadais na hAlban agus na Breataine Bige.

Mr Speaker, thank you for affording me the opportunity to present this statement to the Assembly today on the October monitoring round and the Executive's First Step Stimulus package. This is the second monitoring round of this year and follows on from my statement on the June monitoring round.

Before turning to the October monitoring round, I will take the opportunity to update Members briefly on discussions that I have had over recent days with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, David Gauke, and the Scottish and Welsh Finance Ministers, Derek Mackay and Mark Drakeford. Yesterday, along with my Scottish and Welsh colleagues, I met David Gauke. During that meeting in London, we discussed a number of important issues, including the outworking of the EU referendum decision. All three Administrations expressed concern at the impact on their economies and the need for the British Government to provide clarity on the way forward. We also discussed a number of specific finance issues, which I will touch on shortly.

Before turning to the detail of this round, I want to pre-empt questions that I expect will follow from Members about the monitoring round process adopted by the Executive. The approach now adopted by the Executive to the monitoring round process no longer requires the submission of bids by Departments. The submission of a wish list of bids did not give a good indication of real pressures and led to slow and cumbersome negotiation, as Members from all parties know. Instead, key pressures are now identified through ongoing engagements between my officials and Departments.

The new process allows the Executive to focus on and react quickly to the key emerging pressures. It is consistent with the position adopted in Scotland, Wales and the South of Ireland, where parliamentary scrutiny takes place through the Estimates process and focuses on in-year changes to budgets with no references at all to bids. In keeping with the practice in those jurisdictions, the Executive do not disclose their deliberations in reaching an agreed monitoring round outcome. The focus of scrutiny is and should be on outcomes. The swift conclusion of the June monitoring round and the fact that I am standing before you today providing details of the October monitoring round demonstrates the efficiency of the new approach.

Before we get into the detail of the monitoring round, it is important to highlight the fact that significant constraints face our resource DEL position in the current year. In that context, aside from meeting a small number of prior commitments, the focus in this monitoring round has been on the capital DEL position and measures that will deliver an economic stimulus to our economy. The starting point for this monitoring round is the outcome of the June monitoring round, which concluded with an overcommitment of £13·5 million on resource DEL and £11·4 million on capital DEL.

I now want to turn to the specifics of the October monitoring round, starting with a number of adjustments relating to centrally held items. Updates to forecasts of regional rate income, interest payments on borrowing and statutory salaries have resulted in a small easement of £0·2 million that can be made available to the Executive in this monitoring round.

Members may recall that, in the 2013-14 January monitoring round, as part of an agreement to provide £35 million of ring-fenced financial transactions funding to

Ulster University (UU) for its greater Belfast development, the university agreed to return £7 million to the Executive from its accumulated reserves. Some £3·5 million was returned in 2014-15, and a further £3·5 million was to be returned in 2016-17. The Executive have now received the £3·5 million from UU relating to this year, and it has been made available for reallocation in this round.

In 2015-16, receipts from the carrier bag levy exceeded allocations to environmental programmes by £0·5 million. As receipts from the levy must be used to support environmental programmes, the Executive returned the £0·5 million to DAERA for that purpose in the June monitoring round. However, updated numbers have now been received, and the Executive must now return a further £0·3 million to DAERA for the carrier bag levy. That has been taken into account in this monitoring round.

The Budget for 2016-17 set aside £15 million capital DEL for allocation under the Delivering Social Change programme. The Executive Office has now advised that £7·1 million of that funding will not be required in this year and can be made available for reallocation by the Executive in this monitoring round.

Members will also be aware that the Executive's Budget faces pressures relating to the renewable heat incentive scheme. I will say more on this later; however, the Executive have set aside £20 million of resource DEL in this year to meet pressures arising from the RHI scheme, and that must be taken into account in assessing the resources available to the Executive. In total, taking into account the opening overcommitment and other central issues noted above, it resulted in an overcommitment of £30·1 million on resource DEL and £4·3 million on capital DEL. That was before taking account of departmental reduced requirements.

12.00 noon

Departments declared reduced requirements in this monitoring round of £11·6 million resource DEL and £16·2 million capital DEL. Full details are provided in the tables provided with the statement. On the resource side, the most significant reduced requirements declared include £8 million relating to employment services programmes and welfare support measures from the Department for Communities, and the Finance Department surrendered £3·2 million relating to the development costs of devolving corporation tax. On the capital side, the most significant reduced requirements include £4·3 million from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs relating to the planned relocation of its headquarters; £4·5 million from the Department for Communities due to slippage on the subregional stadia programme; and £3·5 million from the Department of Health relating to the mother and children's hospital.

It is good practice that Departments seek to manage any emerging pressures internally before bringing forward bids for additional allocations. Whilst the public expenditure control framework allows Departments scope to undertake many such movements on a unilateral basis, movements across spending areas in excess of the de minimis threshold are subject to the Executive's approval. In some instances, Departments also seek permission to move allocations across spending areas to facilitate the transfer of responsibility for a particular function from one business area to another. The internal reallocations agreed by the

Executive in this monitoring round are included in the tables for information. Departments may also, for a number of reasons, seek to reclassify expenditure from resource to capital or vice versa. All such reclassifications need Executive approval, and they are also shown in the tables accompanying the statement. All of those adjustments impacted on the total resources available to the Executive in this monitoring round. Once all of those issues were taken into account, the Executive had an overcommitment of £18.5 million resource DEL and £11.9 million capital DEL available to allocate.

Before turning to the mainstream allocations, there are other important issues I would like to highlight to Members, starting with ring-fenced financial transactions capital (FTC). The Executive concluded the June monitoring round with £17.2 million of ring-fenced financial transactions unallocated, and, as detailed in the tables accompanying the statement, Departments have declared reduced requirements totalling £4.5 million. As colleagues will recall, the Executive have agreed to establish a £100 million investment fund. The overall aim of the proposed fund is to promote investment, economic growth and jobs, with a focus on urban regeneration projects, including, of course, grade A property, energy efficiency and low carbon projects.

The preferred delivery option involved the European Investment Bank taking an active role in the delivery and ongoing monitoring of the fund. In August, I visited the European Investment Bank and met vice president Jonathan Taylor. During the meeting, Mr Taylor informed me that the European Investment Bank could no longer take an active role in the delivery of the fund. The European Investment Bank will, however, continue to work with the Department of Finance in establishing the fund and providing technical assistance, and the bank's president has now confirmed its position in writing. My officials are reassessing possible delivery models. I remain committed to the £100 million investment fund, and I will update the Assembly on the outcome of that work in due course. However, it is now clear that the fund will not be in place before 31 March 2017, and the £55.8 million of financial transactions capital set aside for the fund in 2016-17 is now available to the Executive for alternative use. Taking account of the funding held centrally and the reduced requirements declared, the Executive will leave the October monitoring round with £77.5 million of ring-fenced financial transactions capital DEL unallocated.

As recently as yesterday in London, the Scottish and Welsh Governments have also expressed concern over the use of financial transactions capital, and we took the opportunity to raise the issue when we met the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

I raised some specific concerns that I have on the use of financial transactions capital. I requested from the Chief Secretary a special dispensation on the use of FTC that will facilitate the creation of the planned investment fund. I am pleased to say that my request was positively received, and I have now asked my officials to expedite the delivery of the fund.

I turn now to central funds. As part of Budget 2016-17, the Executive set aside £14 million resource and £15 million capital in respect of Delivering Social Change in this financial year. A range of allocations were agreed in the June monitoring round, leaving no resource DEL

and £7.9 million capital DEL available for allocation in the October monitoring round. The Executive Office has advised that £0.8 million capital should be allocated to the Executive Office for capital grants to a range of projects under the social investment fund. The Executive Office has also confirmed that the remaining £7.1 million capital DEL will not be required for Delivering Social Change in this year and can be made available to the Executive for reallocation. As a result, there is now no resource or capital DEL remaining unallocated in the Delivering Social Change fund for 2016-17. Budget 2016-17 set aside £8 million resource DEL for the Atlantic Philanthropies programme. Following the June monitoring round, £2.6 million of that funding remained unallocated. The Executive Office has advised that £2.3 million should be allocated to DE for the shared education signature programme. Following that allocation, there is now £0.4 million resource DEL unallocated on the Atlantic Philanthropies fund.

The Fresh Start Agreement secured £60 million over five years to support the creation of a shared future. The Executive's Budget 2016-17 set aside £12 million resource DEL in this year. Allocations totalling £11.5 million were processed in the June monitoring round. The Executive Office has advised that a small number of allocations should be processed in this monitoring round, including £0.3 million to TEO for shared future and Urban Villages and £0.2 million to the Department for Communities for arts and cultural programmes. My officials will engage with Treasury in securing access to that funding through the Westminster Supplementary Estimates. Following those adjustments, all the funding available for a shared future is now allocated.

Members will recall that, in line with the Fresh Start Agreement, the Executive's Budget 2016-17 identified £10 million resource DEL to tackle paramilitary activity. Of that, the Executive contributed £5 million, with £5 million to be accessed from the British Government, the latter being subject to the Executive agreeing a strategy to address continued paramilitary activity. The Secretary of State has advised that UK Government funding will not be released until the Executive agree a more detailed action plan. The Department of Justice will progress this to ensure that access to that funding is secured.

The Executive allocated £1.3 million to the Department of Justice in the June monitoring round from the resources that they had set aside for this purpose. Following the publication of its strategy to tackle paramilitary activity, DOJ has now confirmed that a further £2.5 million should be allocated in this monitoring round for measures to tackle paramilitary activity. The most significant allocations are £1.7 million to DOJ, £0.2 million to the Public Prosecution Service and £0.6 million to the Department for Communities. That leaves £1.1 million of the funding set aside by the Executive unallocated following the October monitoring round.

Following June monitoring, a total of £97.3 million was allocated to Departments under the public sector transformation fund, leaving £77.7 million of the £175 million set aside by the Executive this year as unallocated. The public sector reform division has continued to liaise with Departments over recent months to identify easements on allocations agreed in the Budget and any new allocations to schemes with the capacity to deliver further savings for the Executive's budget.

Details of changes to allocations under the public sector transformation fund are detailed in the tables accompanying the statement. Following those changes, allocations under the scheme in this year total £75 million, leaving £100 million of the public sector transformation fund unallocated.

I turn now to the Executive's First Step Stimulus package, a prudent pick-me-up for the economy, if you wish.

The Fresh Start Agreement provides the Executive with flexibility to access the full amount of borrowing made available under the Stormont House Agreement when the voluntary exit scheme does not require all the funding available in any given year. In view of the latest forecasts of spend on the public sector transformation fund, the Executive have agreed to divert borrowing to deliver a short-term economic stimulus through accessing additional borrowing to support capital investment in our economy. While I envisage that a longer-term economic stimulus package will be agreed by the Executive in the near future as part of our capital budget process, it is important that we send an early signal of intent to our citizens through the stimulus measures that I will now outline.

The Executive have agreed to support two schemes in the Department for Infrastructure that will provide a boost to our local economy. First, we will provide £15 million of capital DEL for roads structural maintenance. That allocation will not only enhance our road infrastructure but provide a boost to our local construction sector. A further £10 million of capital DEL will be made available for the purchase of new buses, helping to improve our public transport services and providing a boost to our local manufacturing sector.

I am very pleased that the Executive have also agreed a £5 million community regeneration fund for 2016-17. That fund is specifically aimed at improving infrastructure in our most deprived and marginalised communities, which, of course, are working-class communities. That is a great opportunity. They will be relatively small-scale but focused interventions that improve the quality of key assets for local residents. I will work with ministerial colleagues to identify suitable capital projects in our communities in the weeks ahead and will provide an update to the Assembly in the January monitoring round. The allocations will be funded by accessing an additional £30 million of reinvestment and reform initiative (RRI) borrowing in this year. Full details of allocations under the Executive's First Step Stimulus package are set out in the tables accompanying the statement.

As previously indicated, the resource DEL position in this year remains constrained, and, as a consequence, the majority of allocations agreed by the Executive in this monitoring round are on the capital DEL side. However, while the position does not allow us to progress a full resource DEL monitoring round, there are a small number of prior commitments, totalling £8.9 million, that the Executive have confirmed in this round. Those allocations include £2.5 million resource DEL to the Department for the Economy for route development at the City of Derry Airport; £4.8 million to the Department of Health for Translarna muscular dystrophy drugs; £1 million to the Department of Education for nurture units and other pressures; and £0.6 million to the Public Prosecution Service for service pressures.

I turn now to the capital position. The capital DEL allocations in this monitoring round total £22.7 million and include £13 million to the Department of Education for minor works and the purchase of furniture and equipment for schools, which will please Members; £8.7 million to the Department of Health for essential maintenance and the purchase of ambulance defibrillators, which has also been a demand of many Members; and £1 million to the Department for Infrastructure for investment in LED street lighting, which is an invest-to-save initiative. Full details of the allocations are set out in the tables accompanying my statement.

Ring-fenced resource DEL is strictly controlled, and funding cannot be moved out of that area. Changes to that area are shown in the tables accompanying the statement. Colleagues will note that we exit this monitoring round with £4.1 million of ring-fenced resource DEL unallocated. That funding may only be used to address pressures within the ring fence — depreciation and impairments — and is therefore not available for allocation by the Executive.

Members will be aware that a significant additional resource DEL pressure exists from commitments under the renewable heat incentive (RHI) scheme. The Department for the Economy has, through internal reallocations processed in this round, sought, where possible, to manage the budgetary impact of the RHI this year, and I welcome that. As mentioned earlier, the Executive have set aside £20 million of resource DEL centrally to meet pressures anticipated from the RHI scheme. The Executive will further assess the extent of that pressure in the January monitoring round. However, I understand that the Economy Minister is fully engaged on the issue.

I turn now to the October monitoring outcome. As a result of the allocations detailed above and the funding set aside for the RHI, the Executive exit the monitoring round with a £27.4 million overcommitment in resource DEL and £10.8 million in capital DEL.

I believe that, with the cooperation of all Ministers, this position is manageable over the remainder of this year.

12.15 pm

As I have said before, I am strongly opposed to the austerity agenda. I think that that is true of Members across the House, or, if not of every Member, most Members. The austerity agenda places constraints on the Assembly and our capacity to provide much-needed funding for our public services. I will continue to fight against austerity at all levels, and, alongside that, I will continue to develop innovative funding solutions, as demonstrated by the first phase of the Executive's economic stimulus package that I have announced.

I commend the October monitoring outcome and the first phase of the Executive's economic stimulus package to the Assembly.

Mr Speaker: As was the case with the previous statement, a large number of Members have put down their names to ask a question. Again, I ask Members to be brief and direct their question towards the Minister's statement. I call Mr Stephen Smith.

Mr Smith: Thank you, Mr Speaker —

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, Philip Smith.

Mr Smith: Thank you, and I thank the Minister for his statement. I appreciate that, from the Minister's perspective, this new monitoring round process may well be more efficient, if not open and transparent. To aid transparency, will the Minister detail what other pressures were identified in discussions between Departments and his officials and have not been addressed in this allocation? Without this clarity, would it be fair to assume that all other budgets, including that for Health, are adequate?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Thank you, Mr Smith. Go raibh céad maith agat. If you want to wander into the office of any Minister in this Parliament, you will find that there are pressures on all fronts. I have yet to meet a Minister who says that he or she does not need any money or funding. Pressures are unremitting; but, as you know, while the demand is infinite, resources are finite. What I have done today, rather than focus on the process — you say that it is efficient, but it is more than that: it is a process, a delivery and an outcome that will accelerate growth, create jobs and give a boost to those who want to invest further. It will inspire confidence. I know that, in this House at times, people focus on the minutiae. I think that, instead of focusing on opposition, today our focus should be on delivery. I welcome questions and, certainly, if you want to focus on minutiae, I welcome it; but I think that we should focus on the delivery, the pledges made and the investment that we are making in our future.

Mrs Little Pengelly (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance): I note that in the statement there is in and around £100 million unallocated for public-sector transformation. I am sure that the Member agrees with me that significant reform and change is urgently needed in the system if we are to ensure affordability while protecting front-line services. We have heard that outlined already this morning in terms of Health.

Will the Minister inform the House what actions or special measures he has taken to ensure that good projects and initiatives are coming from Departments that will best meet the need for public-sector transformation across the system?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for her question. As she will be aware, one of the reasons we are able to deliver October monitoring in October — last year, June monitoring was delivered in November — is what I refer to as a common-purpose Executive. You can see the benefits of that. The Executive met this morning, and Ministers are resolved to bring forward proposals which will provide greater efficiencies and better services and, in particular, schemes that involve investing to save. In that regard, we have reduced the number of Departments that serve our people. It does not make sense to have repetition across former Departments or structures. All Ministers are now focused on outcomes and, in that regard, therefore, instead of trying to protect fiefdoms or trying to ensure that systems that were there in the past have to endure, they are saying, "If we have nine Departments instead of 12, perhaps we do not need people doing a particular job that can be done somewhere else."

At the same time, the voluntary exit scheme (VES) offers those who wish to take redundancy an excellent package, and it frees up money for us to deliver and place in the front line of the services for our people. We are now speaking in particular to the arm's-length bodies. There has been a taking of the burden by some Departments, including the Department of Finance and the Civil Service, and I think that other Departments will now look at what

they can do in the time ahead to deliver a more efficient government service. I will work closely with Ministers in that regard.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Minister for his statement and his answers thus far. We were continuing to face austerity measures from the Conservative Government when he came into post, and he has outlined his position on that. There were dire predictions of further cuts in the in-year monitoring rounds but, thankfully, he has avoided any cuts in the June and October monitoring rounds. How has he achieved that?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I would like to claim that it is all my own work but the principal never let me away with that in school, so I will not get away with it here. What is happening is that, instead of going back to the past, where every Minister paddled their own canoe, made all their own bids and demands and insisted that they could not make any efficiencies, we now have a united Executive which are trying to be as efficient as possible to deliver real value for money. That common purpose is feeding through into our budgets.

As well as that, it is very interesting and should be noted now that six years after the austerity agenda was launched by UCUNF and the Conservative Party in Britain, we have had six years of pain, hardship, penury, unemployment and emigration for people. Members on both sides of the Chamber are saying this, because the DUP also opposed Tory austerity while some parties helped to introduce it. Throughout those six years, we said to the Conservatives that they should end austerity because it is a self-defeating strategy. The good news is that yesterday, in London, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury all but confirmed that in the 23 November autumn statement they will agree that there should be a fiscal stimulus, that austerity has failed and that they are now going to embark on a new start in relation to infrastructure stimulus. Unfortunately, our argument to the Chief Secretary that he should also stop the austerity pressure on our resource budget has not got through yet. Certainly, part of the message that we have been giving for many years about investing to grow the economy is now getting through and we will get a boost to infrastructure spend in the 23 November statement.

Mr Mullan: Does the Minister agree that Executive secrecy is no way to do business in the House and that bypassing the Finance Committee's scrutiny of the draft Budget and the full Budget does not facilitate a proper scrutiny process?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question but I do not agree. I have appeared at the Finance Committee twice and I am happy to appear again at its request. What you have seen here is a division between those who want to oppose and those who want to invest, those who want to complain and those who want to build, those who want to find a reason to pick at a scab and those who want to heal. What we are seeing here today is a first-step economic stimulus, which we have not tried for many years. We tried it at the height of the crash. We are seeing money being released for defibrillators in ambulances and to maintain and repair our roads. Money is going into our schools to buy new equipment and to maintain, do up and enhance the school estate.

For me, those things are what today is about. I will make neither excuses nor apologies to anyone for delivering on behalf of this Executive. In fact, had I come here today and

said that we are facing an October monitoring round of further cuts, then there would be something to apologise for. Instead, we are coming here and saying that we are able to buy more buses and ensure that we have a 21st-century bus fleet for Translink. We are saying that, for the first time, we are trying to partner community organisations in a very focused way over the next few months to try to buy some key properties in working-class areas so that they can continue the work of building a shared future. So, I am sorry for the Member, but I do not agree with him.

Dr Farry: I thank the Minister for his statement. He will be well aware that, before the reforms announced by the Minister this morning, healthcare inflation was running at 6% but the Budget increase for the Department of Health this year was only about 2%. However, in this statement, the only money for Health is in the form of the very welcome muscular dystrophy funds.

Is it safe, therefore, to assume that the Department of Health can live within its budget this year and there will not be recourse to monitoring rounds to fund healthcare, as there has been in previous years, and that we will avoid what happened last year, when a last-minute bid for waiting lists was not fully spent on waiting lists?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank Mr Farry for his question. I see that our efforts to take the politics out of health have not made it to the afternoon.

My commitment to the Minister of Health is that we know that there will be a cost to the new path on which she has set all of us in this society. She is outlining a vision of trying to manage change rather than managing crisis. The Executive as a whole will have to step up. I hope that one of the lessons or messages from the joint meeting of the Executive today was that we all understand that this is a priority, and, when Professor Bengoa says, rather forthrightly, that if Governments across Europe cannot control expenditure on health, health will take up the entire public purse.

The Health Minister is setting us on a bold and ambitious path. It is a path that requires partnership not only among the Executive parties and with the Minister of Justice but across the Assembly where we take the politics out of health and commit ourselves to trying to improve outcomes in a more efficient health service.

We stand ready to support the Health Minister as she comes forward with her request. The allocation of resource DEL is as outlined, but the Member will not have missed the point — he was here for the Minister of Health's statement — that there will be an added requirement on all of us to make sure that we have the fiscal firepower to deliver the change that everyone wants to improve our health service.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the money that has gone towards health through the allocations, albeit that we could probably have had a lot more. I am sure that the Minister came to you with many emerging priorities.

I want to follow on from what my colleague, the Chair of the Finance Committee, said about the transformation fund. Will the transformation fund be used to support the healthcare reform as the Minister outlined earlier?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Reform and improvement have to go together. We are now set on a path of improving, changing

and transforming our health service in a way never seen before. I heard the Minister refer to the two-mandate challenge, and there will be a role in that for the public sector transformation fund. However, let us be clear about this, and I know that the Member will agree with me: we will protect front-line services in health and, of course, in education. The Ministers will manage their budgets and will do so in partnership with the entire Executive. Common purpose means that we are very understanding and sympathetic of pressures when they emerge, but it also means that Ministers give the lead. In that respect, we saw strong leadership this morning not only from the Minister of Health but from the Executive.

Ms Dillon: I thank the Minister for his statement and his answers so far. He referred to a more efficient process, which a number of Members mentioned. How does the timing of this year's delivery of monitoring rounds compare with previous years?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: It is no surprise to the public that, because we have an Executive facing in the one direction and firmly focused on a shared and prosperous future and on making the investments we need to build a strong economy, I have had the good fortune to be able to deliver the monitoring rounds in a more expeditious fashion than heretofore. I spoke about the difference in timings between now and last year. More important than that is this new start, this fresh start and this Executive, who, despite deep political differences, are able to make common cause on these key issues. I think that people on the ground will see the difference in that. If I was a school principal or governor waiting for urgent moneys to repair classrooms or improve and enhance a school estate, I would be pleased. I would be more focused on the outcome than on any concerns about the timing of the announcement.

In all these matters, alacrity is important, and I am really keen to work with the Committee, the Assembly and my Executive colleagues to deliver as we promised. That means June monitoring in June, October monitoring in October and January monitoring in January. The added bonus is that, if we work together, we can identify the pressures that are most urgent. As Executive Ministers, we are making choices together, not just in our own little patch or silo, and we are making decisions that are for the good of all the community and all of society rather than just on behalf of our Departments.

12.30 pm

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his statement. I have campaigned and continue to campaign for nurture units, so I am glad that there is an allocation of an additional £1 million in his statement. Given that Holy Family in Londonderry received the nurture quality mark just this week, it will be welcome news to those involved in nurture.

May I specifically ask the Minister about the planned investment fund and his request to the Chief Secretary for special dispensation? Will he consider widening the urban focus of the planned investment fund beyond the two cities of Belfast and Londonderry so that areas in my North Antrim constituency, such as Ballymena, Ballymoney and Ballycastle, could benefit?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. My concern extends to his constituency and wider. That said, when I was in Portrush last week, I was deeply impressed

by the plans to develop the town to coincide with the Open. What made a real impact on me was the number of small, indigenous businesspeople in the private sector who want to make a contribution and want to invest. They now see an opportunity that would be good for them as businesspeople and really good for Portrush. I have visited Ballymena and Ballycastle, and, as you know, in Ballycastle, evidence of an investment can be seen in the hotel right on the beachfront. That has made a difference.

I say to the Member that we will have the investment fund. We did, of course, have a difficulty with the European Investment Bank that we did not expect, but the response is not to abandon ship but to find an innovative and novel way in which we can have the investment fund. I agree absolutely that TLC is needed not only in the jurisdiction's two large cities but for the opportunities that exist outside them.

My final point is that perhaps still the most impressive initiative that I have visited since my appointment was the South West College in Enniskillen, and I know that it hopes to get new premises. There are opportunities like that across the region — I hope that they will not depend on the investment fund — and I hope that we can seize them, not just those in Belfast and Derry.

Mr Nesbitt: Earlier, the Minister encouraged us to move away from the fine detail and focus on delivery, so let us do that but include non-delivery, such as the £5 million that the UK Government are not delivering to address paramilitary activity because the Executive do not have a proper plan. This is an either/or question: is the Minister embarrassed that the Executive have to submit their homework to London for marking, occasionally getting an F for "failure", or is it UCUNF's fault?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. I am happy for you to focus on minutiae. In fact, I know that it is an area of expertise for the Opposition, but I am focusing on delivery. I made it clear to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury yesterday that we would ensure that we deliver stable, sustainable budgets and that we would work in partnership with them on Fresh Start funding but, ultimately, our Ministers would make the decisions. I am confident that the Minister of Justice will be able, in negotiation with our colleagues in Treasury, to deliver an action plan, as they desire.

For me, the overarching point is this: we have taken decisions today that are to the benefit of the community. We have taken decisions that will accelerate economic growth. We have taken decisions that will create jobs. We have taken decisions that will make a real difference in the heart of areas such as east Belfast, Tiger's Bay, the Creggan and Ballymurphy.

It does not surprise me, because the Member is focused on opposition for opposition's sake, that he can see nothing worthy or to be lauded in that. Instead, he wishes to give succour to the British Government, who have created perhaps the greatest economic mess of our time *[Interruption.]* I know that the Member would like to interrupt, but I will push on. He is very fond of and close to the British Government. He was involved in the architecture of the Tory austerity programme at the very start in 2010. We will focus on making a step change in delivery for our people.

You have my full blessing to focus on minutiae, if you wish. I am happy to go there with you as necessary. You

have my full blessing to support the NIO and the Treasury in what they do. However, what I say to Members is this: regardless of taking the politics out of health, let us take the politics out of creating a better future for our people. Let us applaud what deserves to be applauded and criticise where criticism is necessary. To give no welcome at all to this first-step economic stimulus or to our efforts to grow jobs and to create a better future says everything that needs to be said about the failed austerity politics of the British Government, which, of course, were brought into being in the company of our friends in the Ulster Unionist Party as part of the gloriously named UCUNF.

Ms Archibald: I welcome the Minister's statement and the first phase of the economic stimulus package. Will the Minister elaborate on his discussions with the Chief Secretary on protection for financial transactions capital going forward, le do thoil?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a ceist. I should put it on record that, at our meeting yesterday with the Chief Secretary, David Gauke, at the Treasury in London, we had full and firm support from our colleagues in Scotland and Wales. Of course, when we speak together, we speak for 10 million people, not only in our opposition to austerity and our demand for a fiscal stimulus in the autumn statement but in our particular difficulty with financial transactions capital because of the new approach taken by the European Investment Bank. I am pleased to say that, with the three Governments speaking together, we put our case. The Scottish and Welsh also brought up issues that the Treasury — I do not want to say "gave ground on" — moved to a compromise on.

I am now confident that we have £77 million financial transactions capital. Some of my colleagues in the Ulster Unionist Party were fretting in the newspapers that it would be lost to our Budget. If they had called into my office to speak to me first, they would not have made the mistake of thinking for a minute that we would allow any of our resources to go back to London, resources that are given to us to build this society. I am confident that the Treasury will work with us now; that we will not lose any of the financial transactions capital, even if it is unallocated at year end; and that we can now move confidently forward to create the investment fund, the idea of Simon Hamilton when he was Finance Minister. The investment fund concept has been really welcomed by the business community, and people are lining up to engage in new projects if they can get some of the investment fund. We are on course, and it is appropriate to thank David Gauke for his flexibility on the issue.

Mr Stalford: I thank the Minister for his statement to the House. I also want to briefly welcome the allocations that the Minister detailed for Urban Villages and the social investment fund. Does the Minister agree that it will be essential for the work of the Executive Office in China to become a baseline budgetary item, particularly as Northern Ireland becomes more outward looking and tries to secure international investment?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I do not think that the First Minister and deputy First Minister would allow me to take over their budget or budget priorities. However, I will say this in agreement with the Member. I was speaking at the weekend with Shaun Kelly, the global CEO of KPMG, who sits on the north-east USA advisory panel for the Minister for the Economy. He is just back from China and met our

lead representative there, Tim Losty, who did sterling work for the Executive in Washington and, before that, when the Member was still at kindergarten, for LEDU on investment in working-class areas of the city.

I have found any project that Tim Losty has led on behalf of this Government to have been a worthy one. There are great opportunities there. They require diligence and focused effort. I am pleased to see Ulster University, Queen's University, Belfast City Council and the Executive really lining up together to make sure that we seize those opportunities. I am very sympathetic to efforts by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to ensure that our efforts in China have adequate resources in the time ahead.

Ms Hanna: I share the concerns of other Members about the bypassing of Committees. My question refers to the £5 million community regeneration fund, which is referred to in writing as "improving" key assets but which the Minister just described as "buying" key properties. Can he outline the process for applying to the fund, what the maximum capital will be for projects and whether he can guarantee that this will be transparent and not an invite-only fund like the previous social investment fund?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for her question. When we were here for June monitoring, the Member discovered allocations that were not made and issued a statement immediately saying that my wonderful officials had got it all wrong, so I am glad that at least this time she accepts the figures. We are making progress. I hope that by January monitoring she might be in a position to welcome the investment that we have made in our health service, our education service and other projects.

The Member might not understand this, but allocating capital DEL is quite a challenge at this stage of the year. It really means that, if, for example, you take the Ballybeen autism centre, which is a really imaginative, innovative and important project in the heart of a working-class area, we could not allocate funds to build because you could not tender and build at this time of the year. Other projects, such as an Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich, are being well advanced. As everyone in the Irish language sector — pobal na Gaeilge — knows, it has a really inspiring plan to build up what is already the country's greatest Irish language arts centre into a beacon of progress for the entire city at the heart of the Gaeltacht Quarter. It has a project that involves the swift allocation of capital moneys. There are, in fact, projects already on the table. Members who work at the grass roots will know about some of them.

The Member and I share concerns about the speed of delivery. The window of opportunity of £5 million to make transformative investments largely has to go into property or land acquisition or into equipment in some cases. What I will say to the Member is that she and I share the desire that this money be allocated before 1 April, so it cannot be a long-run process. I think that it will be a process that will be welcomed across the community. It is a test for us, because, when I talk about First Step Stimulus, what I am really presaging is what I hope will be the Executive coming together and saying that, from the capital budget for 2017-2021 plus whatever additional infrastructure Barnett consequential there is on 23 November plus hopefully a £200 million loan facility for councils from the European Investment Bank, we are able to fashion a much more strategic, large and meaningful stimulus package — really a Fresh Start package — in our budgets next year.

For now, this is a first step in a stimulus package. For me, it was important that we did not do the First Step Stimulus package without putting some into the communities that have not received enough of the peace dividend. I represent South Belfast, parts of which have done well and some not so well. For me, the First Step Stimulus package would have been incomplete if we had not made a commitment to communities that have great opportunity and are really thirsting for a brighter future.

Mr Humphrey: I welcome the announcement of a £5 million community regeneration fund. It is not enough, but it is a good start. I also welcome the £15 million for roads structural maintenance. That is vital. The Minister will recognise the importance of Belfast as a tourism and transportation hub for Northern Ireland. It is Northern Ireland's economic driver.

Despite the politicking of last week, does the Minister agree with me that the York Street interchange is vital to Northern Ireland, particularly in terms of industry and commerce? It connects three motorways, the George Best Belfast City Airport with the west, and the port of Belfast. Does the Minister agree with me that the York Street interchange remains a key priority for the Northern Ireland Executive?

12.45 pm

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his comments. I note that he waited until Mervyn Storey left before he turned the focus back on Belfast. I agree with him: York Street interchange is a key project for the Executive. I go further: I believe that, together, we will deliver the York Street interchange.

I made the point yesterday to David Gauke that, if I were to build a new home and I had the money to build 60% of it, it would not be prudent to move ahead, build 60% and hope that I get the other 40%. The Member will understand that we moved the British Government on their commitment. At first, there was no guarantee over EU funding. They then moved to guarantee a certain degree. Now, they have moved to guarantee until an exit, if it happens. Yesterday I said to David Gauke, "Look, go the extra mile and commit to funding. Even if it comes a month after you exit, you should still commit to cover that". There is still a gap there that we will start focusing on with the British Government in the time ahead.

As the Member knows, the commitment was made that no funding or projects would be lost. I hope that, in the days and months ahead, we get that commitment. That will enable us to really press ahead with all types of projects that could have funding streams coming and letters of offer issued after March 2019. The Member and I are agreed on the importance of York Street interchange, and I hope that we will see it delivered by our Government.

Mr McAleer: As my party's infrastructure spokesperson, I very much welcome the announcement of the £15 million additional money for road structural maintenance. Coming on the back of the £10 million rural roads initiative, it is very welcome news.

Yesterday, Minister, you joined your Scottish and Welsh counterparts in calling for a shift from austerity to stimulus. How confident are you that that message will be heard? What can the Executive here do to inject much-needed economic stimulus?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I would love to say that David Gauke and Theresa May took my advice, but I will quote from what the 'Financial Times' has been saying about stimulus for some time, not only because borrowing rates are at historic lows. It said:

"Stimulus policies cannot reverse the long-term effects," —

of the uncertainty following the EU referendum, but it can:

"lessen uncertainty and mitigate the shock."

That is true of a stimulus package at this time. It also said that a stimulus package can accelerate economic growth and improve opportunities. There has been a Damascene conversion on the part of the British Government on the issue. Members will know that we asked for additional investment over many years at the height of the lunatic drive towards ideological austerity, and we did not receive a hearing. Now, because of, whatever about our import and influence, the voices of influential bodies, including newspapers like the 'Financial Times' and economic commentators like Robert Reich, the British Government realise that they need to invest in infrastructure. We will get a Barnett consequential from that, and we will then put our shoulder to the wheel to create, I hope, with the agreement of the Executive, a greater stimulus package.

Mr Ford: Since I never had any connection with UCUNF but did have a small part in setting up the three-person panel on paramilitarism, I hope that the Minister will give me a straight answer. I welcome his statement, but he acknowledged that only £3.9 million out of £10 million budgeted for tackling paramilitary activity has been allocated at this late stage in the year — the last occasion for planned realistic changes to budgets. That is largely because of the failure to publish the proper action plan that was due in June of this year. Given the expertise that the Minister and his Department have, will he advise the House whether he has given any advice to other Ministers about their complete failure so far to put together the action plan that is so sadly needed? It means that we are losing out on £5 million of Treasury funding.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. The last time I saw him, he was on the stage with the Belfast Community Gospel Choir singing, 'Oh Happy Day'. I thought, perhaps, you would give us a few verses of that today in response to this first step economic stimulus.

When Claire Sugden was appointed, she asked, "Who will I turn to for advice?", and I said, "David Ford, of course". Here you are today, giving her advice. I do not know whether it is tinged with envy; I am not going to suggest that it is. I am confident that all Ministers will deliver and that the Justice Minister, in particular, will deliver on her promises and pledges based on the budget she has been allocated; that that money will be spent and that none of it will be lost, and that it will do the work that the Member worked towards in uniting our community and tackling paramilitarism. I am confident that it will deliver on that pledge in the time ahead.

Mr Swann: I thanked the Minister earlier for his blessing in dealing with the minutiae, because I will do that. The Minister refers to renewable heat incentive (RHI) and to the Department for the Economy's management of a number of internal reallocations, such as £1.4 million from apprenticeships and youth training, £600,000 from shared

skills and £1.7 million from Invest NI to cover a shortfall of £3.7 million in the RHI scheme. What period does that £3.7 million cover? Has any of the £20 million that has already been brought down by the Executive been utilised yet?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question to go with the minutiae. The good news is that the Economy Minister is up for questions shortly and you can probe him on how he made his allocations.

One of the things that pleased me greatly over recent weeks is that, first, we moved £20 million to the centre, as you know, in June. That has not been used yet, but it is a contingency, and we know that RHI is causing us problems. You will know about this, more than most, since you chair the PAC. I was pleased that the Economy Minister and his Department tried to absorb some of the pressure rather than coming back to October monitoring saying that they needed an extra £7 million or £8 million. The Economy Minister will have to answer in more detail as to why he was able to do that. We will take that money and see how it can be used to offset the costs of RHI.

The second thing that I would say to the Member — I know it will please him as well — is that I think we are making progress with regard to RHI. Last week, your colleague talked about the exorbitant costs if we do not get it in check. I hope that the Economy Minister, at Question Time in the near future, will be able to give you some comfort in that regard. We are absolutely united in making sure that we control the RHI cost and that we, as far as possible, eliminate it in the time ahead because it is a drain on our budgets.

Mr Robinson: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will the very welcome £2.5 million resource DEL allocation to Eglinton Airport be used for new national or international routes?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank Mr Robinson for his question. As the Member knows, some of this was trailed previously in the press in relation to drugs and the city of Derry investment. It is the hope of the City of Derry Airport that it can actually create a jobs boost by locating a manufacturing or maintenance facility at the airport which can use the resource that the airport has — for example, the hangars, not only the equipment but the airport itself. I hope to hear more news coming out of the City of Derry Airport on its plans. We know that all airports are under pressure, not least because of air passenger duty, and there were a couple of body blows to the City of Derry Airport earlier in the year. I am confident that the City of Derry Airport realises that it has to use this money in a way in which it will actually try and base jobs there and perhaps create a new initiative. I hope that that happens in the time ahead.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Minister for his statement. Referring back to your meeting yesterday, did you raise the issue of corporation tax with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury? Given Mr Gauke's previously stated views that this will happen only when his Government agree a reform package with this Government, has the issue of corporation tax devolution, 18 months from now, been put firmly on the back boiler?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I think that the RHI has got you confused; it is the back burner that you put things on. We have many boilers going in the RHI.

I can tell you this about Mr Gauke in all honesty: to save his own blushes, he did not pretend for a minute that the delay in corporation tax was on our side. Let us be honest: these are the guys who have no idea what they will announce about their own corporation tax on 23 November. This is the Government who have created what Mr Hammond refers to as “economic turbulence” at this time. This is the Government who cannot tell us with absolute certainty what they will do with our resource budget in the time ahead. There were indications yesterday but not absolute certainty.

The Chief Secretary, by the way, did not mention the issue of reform at all, but I went back over the rule book with him. I am committed and confident that we will introduce a reduced rate of corporation tax on 1 April 2018. We will do so to create thousands of jobs and a step change in our economic growth, which will benefit, in particular, communities that have not seen the economic bounty that they should have in the past. I am taking his own views from him on the issue. The Member will know — he has spent many years in the corporation tax furrow — but he understands that there is a negotiation ahead. He also understands that, until the 23 November statement, which is around the corner, and a clear declaration of where their corporation tax is going, we cannot have the type of intense negotiation that we need to have, but we are on track.

If the Member wishes to put pressure on the British Government in this regard, he can be my guest. Let the British get the 23 November statement out of the way. Will they commit to 17% or something else? I think that there may be no change, neither that suggested by George Osborne nor by the papers at the weekend. We will do our bit, and I am committed and confident. We will make it affordable, because that is in the Fresh Start Agreement as well. We will make sure that it opens up a discussion and conversation with the British about how we grow the economy in the time ahead and how they make sure that we have all the fiscal measures to do that, not just corporation tax. We are very much on course; it is not on the back burner at all.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his statement. Many schools across the country continue to lobby MLAs. They are crying poverty, and the wells have truly run dry. Many redundancies have been made, and the delivery of the entitlement framework is under threat. While I welcome the £13 million capital budget given to the Department of Education for minor works and the purchase of furniture and equipment for schools, I am disappointed that there is no resource budget allocation. Has the Finance Minister had any discussions with the Education Minister about the way that schools can spend the money allocated to them, so that they have more control and can achieve better value for money? If not, will he commit to doing so?

Mr Speaker: Minister, I must ask you for a short, sharp and concise answer.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for her question and would be happy for her to put that question to Peter Weir. I welcome her welcome of the extra injection of capital funds into schools.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to meet at 1.00 pm. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The

first item of business will be Question Time. Questions on the ministerial statement will resume after Question Time, when the next Member to be called will be Richie McPhillips.

The business stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.59 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I advise Members that question 9 has been withdrawn.

Annsborough River: Pollution

1. **Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the ecological harm caused by the recent pollution by NI Water of the Annsborough river. (AQO 540/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): Officials from my Department first learned of the incident in the early afternoon of Saturday 8 October 2016, and on-call officers from DAERA's Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and inland fisheries division immediately travelled to the scene. By late afternoon, the source of the spill had been traced and samples taken with a view to enforcement action. Inquiries at the source site also quickly determined the precise nature of the chemical involved in the incident and thus the detailed ecological and toxicological information on the potential hazards that it poses. Officials from my Department promptly notified, and have continued to work closely with, a range of other agencies to ensure that every possible risk to the environment or public has been considered and addressed.

As far as the potential ecological harm posed by the spill is concerned, there are three broad lines of inquiry into mitigation: first, the absolute necessity of protecting public health; secondly, an assessment of the pollutant's effects on fish and fauna in the river; and, finally, an assessment of any potential damage to commercial shellfish beds where the river enters Dundrum Bay.

As far as the risk to public health is concerned, the data on this chemical confirms that although it is toxic to fish, it does not pose a significant risk to human health. Nevertheless, my Department has worked closely with relevant agencies, including the Food Standards Agency and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, to ensure that all possible risks are considered and addressed. All of the evidence to date confirms that there has been no risk to or impact on public health.

With regard to the effect on fish and fauna in the Annsborough river, the chemical involved is toxic to fish. Inland fisheries officials have confirmed that in excess of 1,600 fish were killed, including adult salmon and sea trout, and this will undoubtedly have an effect on the river for many months to come. However, the inland fisheries division is already working with others to consider how the river could be restocked. NIEA is also carrying out a biological survey of insects in the area.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

Mr McKee: I thank the Minister for her answer thus far. Does the Minister agree with me that until people in public bodies, such as NI Water, begin to be held to account for these incidents of pollution, the current penalties will continue to prove ineffective?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question, and I agree with him about those responsible for pollution incidents such as this, be they from public bodies, in business or private individuals. There is a process within which my Department has to operate, but we also need to look at education and advocacy alongside our enforcement rules. While NI Water has admitted that it is responsible, there is an ongoing investigation.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. I understand that Northern Ireland Water has accepted responsibility for the fish kill at the Annsborough. Has it been associated with many fish kills previously?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Since 1 January 2012, there have been 44 major or moderate fish kills in Northern Ireland where the cause was a polluting discharge. Northern Ireland Water has been determined by NIEA as the source of two of the 44, with a further two incidents, including last week's in the Carrig river, at various stages of the enforcement process. In 2010, a moderate fish kill associated with Tandragee waste water treatment works resulted in a £5,000 fine, and, in 2014, a moderate fish kill associated with the pumping station in Ballynahinch resulted in a warning letter from NIEA, and £1,600 in fishery restoration costs were recovered from Northern Ireland Water.

Mr Lunn: The Minister is aware, as she commented herself, that this is only the latest in a long string. We have had the Faughan, the Ravarnet, the Comber river, the Lagan — I forget some of the others — the Sixmilewater and the Three Mile Water just in recent times.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Can we keep it to south Down, please, to the Annsborough?

Mr Lunn: Does the Minister agree with me that, in fact, the sanctions and the punishments are available through the existing law to deal with this kind of pollution incident much more seriously, but the courts very rarely impose a fine that to the rest of us would seem commensurate with the actual offence? The fines are piffling.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, the whole issue around pollution is something that I do take seriously, and it does cause me concern. It has happened in rivers in my constituency, and I understand the impact that it has on the habitat and on those who use the rivers. Very often, as you say, it does not seem that the fine is commensurate with the crime that has been committed. I am happy to have further conversations about this and to pursue it, and I am open to conversations with Members as well.

Litter

2. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to reduce the amount of litter in urban and rural areas. (AQO 541/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Department introduced the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 to allow councils to issue fixed penalty notices of up to £80. The number of fixed penalties issued by councils for litter offences increased to 4,443 in 2014-15, up from 3,268 in 2011-12. Where the case is dealt with by the courts, a fine of up to £2,500 can be imposed. I will continue to keep the situation under review, taking appropriate action where necessary.

The Department also introduced the carrier bag levy in April 2013, which has reduced the number of bags dispensed in Northern Ireland by tens of millions every year, and thereby reduced the number of bags littering our public spaces. The levy is the most extensive of any of the carrier bag charging arrangements on these islands and has generated millions of pounds for local environmental projects, including anti-litter projects. A review of the charge, as Members are aware, is currently under way.

Education is a vital component in the fight against litter, and, to that end, DAERA works closely with councils and NGOs to develop and support educational and promotional campaigns aimed at achieving behavioural change. For example, my Department provides significant financial support, nearly £945,000 in the period 2014-15 and 2016-17, to Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, which runs a number of programmes, including Eco-Schools and Live Here Love Here. As of January 2015, Northern Ireland was the first country to have every school signed up to the Eco-Schools programme. Additionally, NIEA runs a fly-tipping partnership programme with councils to clean up fly-tipped wastes. My Department is using a combined approach of legislation, education, awareness and enforcement to tackle litter in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for her answer. I am very aware of how successful the challenge fund has been in south Antrim, in particular, especially around the eco-schools. I am thinking in particular of Ballycraigie in Antrim and Fairview in Ballyclare and the tremendous work they are doing and how that education goes home to the parents as well. I very much welcome that. Have you any plans to reopen this fund?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. I am delighted to announce today that an initial £400,000, sourced from the carrier bag levy, will be available for the challenge fund in the current financial year for not-for-profit organisations delivering projects that aim to improve the local environment and boost civic pride. This funding of £400,000, with potentially further support later in the year, will enable local communities, schools and voluntary organisations to undertake small-scale projects to improve the environment and deliver environmental education. Community groups, for example, can use the funding to enhance their local area through tidying a local beach or neglected beauty spot or by creating and enhancing areas where the public can enjoy the local environment.

I am pleased to be able to deliver further resources for the fund and ensure that this good work in our schools and communities can continue. This competitive fund will award moneys to organisations delivering projects on civic pride, access and recreation, education and awareness, and environmental management.

To date, more than £4.6 million has been awarded from the challenge fund, enabling almost 600 environmental

projects to be carried out. I am pleased to be able to deliver further resource to ensure that that good work continues.

Mr McPhillips: The Minister has touched on the subject of my question a number of times. Do you agree that the plastic bag tax has greatly contributed to a reduction in litter in urban and rural areas?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I do, indeed. The challenge fund has made a huge difference, particularly in getting schools and communities involved. That is why I am particularly keen that, in this new element of the fund, we include the theme of civic pride, because that is incredibly important. As elected representatives, we all engage with our local communities and village groups and understand the pride that they have in their local area, and this is just to help encourage them to do that. This is therefore an incentive as much as anything else, but it has made a tremendous difference.

Mr Smith: Minister, you mentioned in a previous answer fixed penalties for littering. As two councils seem to account for 67% of all fixed penalties and with the bill for street cleaning topping £40 million for the first time, what plans do you have to encourage other councils to use their fixed penalty powers more?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. There is a disparity there. An education programme needs to be carried out not only in our communities but alongside our local councils. I am aware, given the changes to local councils and changes in personnel, that there are probably a variety of policies still being looked at and addressed by each council. Therefore, following on from today, I will be content to have conversations with councils, particularly with my officials leading on that to ensure that their use is encouraged. In the first instance, however, we need to try to have an education programme to avoid littering.

Mr McAleer: Has the Minister given any consideration to working towards having a zero-waste policy?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. A zero-waste society does not necessarily mean that we produce no waste. It is about trying to reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfill. There is currently a policy of promoting reuse and recycling, which will hopefully lead to zero waste. The Department published 'The Road to Zero Waste' in September 2014, and it is something that we are working to achieve. There are a number of projects in each council area around the circular economy and encouraging business to get involved with that. In my constituency, I am aware of a large business that says that it has zero waste. It has invested a considerable amount of money in its plant to ensure that everything is recycled or reused. It is about trying to encourage that and about changing the mindset of people and their attitude to waste.

Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Society

3. **Mr E McCann** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, given that the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Society receives public funding, to outline the steps she will take to ensure that the society issues fishing licences democratically and accountably to shareholders and members of the co-operative. (AQO 542/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department is responsible for the conservation and protection of salmon and inland fish stocks on Lough Neagh and for the issuing of licences for commercial fishing of eels and scale fish. It also provides financial assistance to the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Society towards the eel restocking programme, which is a conservation measure outlined in the EU eel regulations. The Department is satisfied that the cooperative is complying with the conditions of funding contained in the letter of offer. That funding is not related to the issue of commercial permits.

The fishing rights for Lough Neagh are owned by the cooperative, and it is a matter for that organisation to manage its own interests, including the issuing of permits to allow fishermen to fish for eels and scale fish. The Department has no role to play in that process. The rules regarding the issuing of permits to fishermen are agreed by the cooperative, and any applications for permits are considered against the criteria. Although under no obligation to do so, the cooperative has provided my officials with clarification and supporting documentation on the processes for administering applications for permits, and, indeed, it has been the subject of two judicial reviews in the past.

The lough's fish stocks are a finite resource, and the cooperative must control fishing intensity to ensure the long-term sustainability of the fishery. The serious decline of eel stocks across Europe has intensified the need to manage stocks effectively.

2.15 pm

DAERA inland fisheries officials are currently finalising a fishery management plan for Lough Neagh, which aims to ensure the sustainable management of fish stocks on the lough and to maximise the socio-economic benefit of the fishery for communities around the lough shore, the local economy and the ecology of the lough. One of the recommendations in the draft plan, which was agreed by stakeholders, was the introduction of a scale fish permit system, and this has now been achieved.

Mr E McCann: I thank the Minister for that. I know that the Minister is aware of the very strong feelings that exist among some fishermen around Lough Neagh, particularly on the part of those fishermen who, although they are members of the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Society, find that they have not been able to and cannot get from the cooperative —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): We need a question, Mr McCann.

Mr E McCann: Given that background and given that the Department has, at the very least, because of the public money involved, an overall supervisory role, will she agree to meet a number of the fishermen who are aggrieved and discuss the matter with them further?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. He may be aware that, in the last mandate, I chaired the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure for a number of years, and, during that time, I met the fishermen on a number of occasions and went to Toome to meet the cooperative as well. I am more than happy to meet the fishermen to discuss their issue. Although I have met with them, I am happy to do that again with this particular hat on.

Mr Swann: The Minister is well aware of this issue. Minister, can you give us an update on what actions are being taken to tackle salmon poaching and illegal fishing on Lough Neagh and illegal fishing in full? I am also aware that her predecessor promised a full audit of all of the fish stock in Lough Neagh. Has that been completed yet?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I am happy to have those conversations in relation to the audit. I was not aware whether it had been completed or not. I do not have that information, but I am happy to provide it.

Mr Ford: The Minister indicated that officials had discussed the allocation of licences with representatives of the cooperative. Can we take it, therefore, that she has not yet had discussions with the members of the cooperative who are currently not allocated licences and are currently in dispute with the cooperative?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. The conversations that I had in the past were when I was wearing a different hat. My officials speak regularly with the cooperative, and, over the last number of years, they have spoken regularly with members of the cooperative who do not have permits. I was in attendance at those meetings as the Chair of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee. I have not met them in my current role, but I am happy to do so. My officials will accompany me at the meetings.

Mr Humphrey: Minister, what is the current position regarding commercial eel fishing in Lough Erne?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. In December 2008, the UK submitted 15 eel management plans, including the trans-boundary plan for the Erne system, for individual assessment to the European Commission, covering the river basin districts as defined under the water framework directive in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. These plans were approved by the Commission and the management committee for fisheries on 4 March 2010 and are being implemented in accordance with the regulation.

As the Member will know, the eel fishery was closed in 2010 as a condition of the EU approval of the north-west eel management plan, and some 17 Lough Erne fishermen who applied each year for licences and permits issued by the former DCAL to fish for brown eels could no longer do so. Following the closure, local eel fishermen were entitled to tender for participation in the trap-and-truck conservation fishery, which catches silver eels and moves them downstream off the two dams. This provided potential to an alternative source of income for the fishermen after the closure of the commercial eel fishery. A range of conditions and actions in the eel management plan are being kept under regular review, and progress on these is reported to the EU. To date, there has not been any variation or amendment to the conditions applied to the eel management plan.

Basic Payment Scheme: Young Farmers

4. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how she will ensure that farmers that received a young farmer payment as part of their 2015 basic payment scheme do not have their 2016 payments delayed. (AQO 543/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: In 2015, my Department provisionally approved applications to the regional reserve and the

young farmer payment from young farmers who had become head of holding and were not in a position to provide all the required evidence to support their applications. My Department has sought the necessary information in recent weeks in order to prevent any delays to the 2016 payments. I am pleased that many young farmers have provided the information required. My officials have assessed the information speedily and have issued advance payments to those who have satisfied the criteria. Where there are outstanding issues with an individual's young farmer payment and where possible, my Department has made an advance payment on the other elements of their claim. I strongly encourage all farmers yet to provide the required evidence to do so as soon as possible to ensure that full payment is issued to them in December.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for her answer. How many or what percentage of young farmers have received an advance payment?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Of the 1,780 successful applications in 2015, 593 have been paid an advance young farmer payment in October. Advance payments on the basic payment scheme and greening have been issued to 548 applicants with outstanding issues around the young farmer element of their payment. Therefore, 1,141 young farmer applicants from 2015 have received an advance payment for one or more elements of their claim in 2016. The majority of the remaining applications from 2015 have yet to provide the evidence necessary to make their young farmer payment in 2016. A small number with evidence supplied are yet to be assessed. Of the 746 new applications for the young farmer payment and/or young farmer regional reserve in 2016, 458 have been paid an advance payment. The remaining applications are being assessed or have been rejected.

Mr McMullan: Minister, the young farmer scheme has turned out to be very successful. Have you plans to put any new measures in place to encourage more young farmers to come forward? They are the future of the industry.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Each year, there is an opportunity for new entrants to apply if they meet the criteria. I want to ensure that our agrifood sector is growing and is sustainable in order to encourage young people to get involved in the agriculture sector. I want to see a future for them in the industry. You will be aware that the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster and the Ulster Farmers' Union have been doing a considerable amount of work on succession planning. I look forward to having a meeting with them in the near future to see how we can assist them with that project. You will also be aware that additional weighting is given and will be given to young farmers in the capital element of the farm business improvement scheme to encourage those young people to get involved in farming and invest in their business going forward. It is critical that all of us support the farming industry and that those young people see a future in it and are encouraged to become involved.

Mr McGlone: Will the Minister outline for us details of any discussions or otherwise with Westminster on a replacement for the basic payment scheme?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. He will be aware that my Department has been working alongside Westminster on what future support for farmers might look like. He will be aware that I met Andrea

Leadsom last week. I also hosted George Eustice in Northern Ireland. That visit allowed George Eustice to meet industry representatives and stakeholders and gave him an opportunity to look at the vision that he has for any potential support. It is about looking not at what we currently have but at what we could have. It is not about picking something off the shelf and applying it to Northern Ireland or the United Kingdom; it is about having a model that is bespoke to our needs here. There are ongoing conversations between me, my Department and Westminster on what a support system might look like.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister undertake to look at the departmental guidance on the young farmers' scheme, particularly with regard to the bizarre and seemingly unnecessary stipulations on partnership agreements? For some unknown reason, there is a stipulation that, although one is head of holding, one has to consent if a partner wishes to leave the partnership. That is unheard of in partnership law, yet it has become an obstacle to some young farmers who otherwise qualify for the payment.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I am aware that that is a particular issue for Mr Allister and one of his constituents. I am happy to meet him and officials to discuss the issue and will make arrangements with him to do so.

Mr Aiken: I thank the Minister for her remarks so far. Is she aware that there is a great deal of anger amongst many young farmers about their applications and what they see as unwarranted checks on paperwork? Will she explain why her Department waited so long and so close to the issuing of this year's payments before contacting young farmers and asking them for the appropriate documentation?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I am aware of the issue, which has been raised with me on a number of occasions. Very recently, I attended the Fermanagh group meeting of the Ulster Farmers' Union, and a number of young farmers raised the issue in the body of the meeting and spoke to me privately about it. I have raised with officials the issue of why the request was so late in the year. My understanding is that they wrote to relevant applicants in September, as they were unable to get the required evidence earlier to meet the deadline for receipt of the advance payments. I understand that a number of them have been able to get their information in on time and have been able to qualify for advance payments in October.

Agriculture Policy and Brexit

5. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline any discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in relation to the differences in the local agricultural sector as compared to the rest of the United Kingdom. (AQO 544/16-21)

6. **Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline any recent discussions she has had on a new agricultural policy framework following the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU. (AQO 545/16-21)

13. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on her

discussions with Her Majesty's Government regarding support for farmers when the United Kingdom leaves the European Union. (AQO 552/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 5, 6 and 13 together.

The agrifood sector is much more important to the local economy in Northern Ireland than is the case in the rest of the United Kingdom. The percentage of total employees is 5.5% in Northern Ireland compared with 2.4% in the United Kingdom as a whole. In 2014, the Northern Ireland food and drink sector generated sales of £4.5 billion and employed well over 20,000 people. Around 28% of Northern Ireland food and drink sector sales are exported compared with 10% for the United Kingdom as a whole. Therefore, future trade arrangements will be important.

Over the past weeks and months, I have met a number of Ministers to discuss the important issues that need to be resolved. Last week, I met Andrea Leadsom and hosted a visit by George Eustice to Northern Ireland. I impressed on them the unique position of our agrifood sector. We had meetings with a range of agrifood, environmental and fisheries stakeholders and departmental officials. Yesterday, the First Minister and deputy First Minister attended the first Joint Ministerial Committee meeting on exiting the European Union, where they emphasised the strategic importance of the local agrifood sector and sought assurances that we would be kept closely and directly involved in the agricultural, environmental and fisheries policy and trade agendas as they unfold.

Mr Frew: Despite the doom-and-gloom merchants and the "Remoaners" in the House, it was really encouraging to see the EFRA Minister here last week at your invitation. You have already mentioned this, but it seemed that George Eustice was thinking outside the box. Can you give us any more specific details about support after we leave the EU?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Minister to be brief in her reply.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. As I said to him earlier, George Eustice shared some of his early thoughts on what any support package might look like. He wants to be visionary. He is looking for fresh ideas and is not closing the door on anyone with ideas on what they might look like.

We do not necessarily have to look to what we had before; there is the opportunity for something different. He mentioned the Canadian and Australian models and various other examples that could be looked at. As I have said, we do not necessarily have to pick one of those and apply it. We can develop something bespoke for the United Kingdom. As a region, we would look for some type of flexibility within the framework offered.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): That ends the period for listed questions. We move to topical questions.

2.30 pm

Red Squirrel Population

T1. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the threat facing the red squirrel population in Northern Ireland. (AQT 396/16-21)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Minister, you were not waiting for that one, I tell you. [Laughter.]

Miss McIlveen: I very much appreciate the question from the Member. I am aware that, when he was Minister of the Environment, he had a particular interest in red squirrels, along with hedgehogs, I believe.

I do not have the exact figure for the red squirrel population in Northern Ireland, but there are around 120,000 red squirrels right across the United Kingdom, and 75% of them are in Scotland. There are red squirrel hotspots in Northern Ireland, particularly around the Ring of Gullion. A number of conservation groups are specifically set up to look at the red squirrel, one of which is in the Minister's — sorry, the former Minister's — constituency. He may now have time to join that conservation group and give it a hand in its monitoring of the red squirrel. I pay tribute to the volunteers who work very hard to monitor and try to retain the population in Northern Ireland. Anyone who follows, as I do, the Twitter feed of the Red Squirrels United in Northern Ireland will be aware that the squirrel pox virus, which comes from the grey squirrel, is an issue in the Mournes area.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for that very comprehensive answer. Will she expand on that by telling us what her Department is doing to protect not only our red squirrels but other species at risk here?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I am, of course, very conscious of the 'State of Nature' report that was published very recently and the number of species around Northern Ireland that are under threat, particularly the red squirrel and the hedgehog. Groups such as the Ulster Wildlife Trust work very closely on these matters and are leading the red squirrel campaign. The trust receives funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and has a four-year programme for that project, which is about monitoring and surveying the red squirrel. The Member will also be aware that the Grassroots Challenge project was launched just a couple of weeks ago in the Long Gallery, and I was privileged to be at that. The project, which works alongside the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and special schools, aims to encourage young people, over the next five years, to become involved in the environment and look out for our endangered species in particular. There is good work going on in those organisations, and it is important that my Department works alongside them in order to support them where it can.

Bengoa Report: Rural Communities

T2. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she and her departmental officials will work closely with Minister Michelle O'Neill and her departmental officials to discuss the implications of the Bengoa report, essentially for rural communities, not least isolated rural communities. (AQT 397/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. It was a fundamental piece of work that was announced today, and I will, of course, work alongside all my Executive colleagues on its implementation.

Mr McElduff: Will the Minister keep at the forefront of her mind the weighting that needs to be given to rural needs

and rural proofing in decision-making? Will she remind her Executive colleagues, when appropriate and necessary, that the definition of social deprivation includes the distance from essential health services?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. As he will be aware, I have responsibility for the implementation of the Rural Needs Act, and it falls to me to be the voice of rural needs around the Executive table. I will be a constant reminder to my colleagues, although I would like to think that they will be cognisant of rural needs and that that will come naturally to them as time goes on. Most of us in the Chamber represent rural constituencies, so it is incumbent on us all to be cognisant of that. I am very much aware of social isolation, particularly in relation to access to the health service. In my previous role, I was very supportive of community transport providers and the work that they do, and particularly the volunteers who help people in isolated situations to access hospital appointments and doctors' appointments. I will be very much involved with that.

Rural Support Mentoring Programme

T3. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to confirm that she is aware of the details of the Rural Support mentoring programme. (AQT 398/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. It is probably not unconnected to the question that his party colleague asked previously. I am very aware of the value that Rural Support gives to rural communities. It is a listening and signposting service for farmers and rural families, and the mentoring programme, which is an on-farm mentoring programme, has been very successful, particularly when financial problems occur. It is important to encourage people to use that service. I am very supportive of the work that it is doing.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for her answer thus far. Will she confirm whether she is moving to secure funding to assist Rural Support to increase its capacity to give support, particularly in light of the EU referendum result and welfare reform?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. He will be aware that Rural Support receives funding from a number of different agencies. My Department supports it with around £91,000 annually through our tackling rural poverty and social isolation (TRPSI) programme. I know that my officials have ongoing conversations with Rural Support about its funding. As I said, we are supportive of the work that it does, particularly with farming families and rural families, and we have been encouraging it to continue with that work. We will be working alongside Rural Support in order to ensure the delivery of that work.

Independent Environmental Protection Agency

T4. **Ms Bailey** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether, given the seemingly systemic failings in environmental protections in Northern Ireland, she has had any discussions with the Minister for Infrastructure on the obvious need for an independent environmental protection agency. (AQT 399/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. She will be aware from my previous responses to such questions that it is not my intention to bring forward an independent environment agency. However, I want to see the appointment — or the reappointment, now — of independent members to the NIEA board. They were previously taken off that board by a former Environment Minister, and I want to see that decision reversed, because I value the expertise and insight that independent external panel members would bring to the board. I am responsible for protecting our environment, and I take that responsibility very seriously. It is part of my remit, and I have no intention of abdicating that responsibility.

Ms Bailey: In that case, will the Minister give a solid confirmation that all investigations of the Annsborough event must include an examination of past incidences and equipment failures, including whether secondary pollution prevention measures by NI Water were, or should have been, in place?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. I will give that commitment, and I have sought a meeting with the chief executive of Northern Ireland Water in order to discuss not only the Annsborough incident but others. As I said, I take this very seriously, and I will continue to have dialogue with anyone who I feel could benefit from a discussion with me or the Department.

Basic Payment Scheme: Advance Payment

T5. **Mrs Little Pengelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, after welcoming her recent announcement that Northern Ireland would be the first region in the United Kingdom to make advance payments under the 2016 basic payment scheme, to state how many farmers have received advance payments at this stage. (AQT 400/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. I am pleased to be able to confirm that 90-72% of eligible farmers have received an advance payment, resulting in £158,474,453 reaching 21,111 farmers much earlier this year than it would have otherwise. I am delighted with that outcome, which exceeds the challenging target of 80% that I had set my officials.

I pay tribute to the staff in Orchard House, who have worked extremely hard to achieve this. We are the first region in the United Kingdom to make advance payments, and I am delighted that we have surpassed our target.

Mrs Little Pengelly: I thank the Minister for that answer. Has she or her Department carried out any comparative analysis on the demand here or the potential benefit to Northern Ireland compared with the rest of the United Kingdom?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. Northern Ireland is, as I said, the first region of the United Kingdom to issue advance CAP payments. This is a significant achievement, and one that the industry has been asking for. In Scotland, for example, payments for 2015 are still being made. Furthermore, the Scottish Government do not appear to be in a position to make any payments in 2016 and have had to introduce a nationally funded loan scheme, to which farmers can apply to receive a loan of 80% of their CAP payment.

This is an important move for my Department, and I am absolutely delighted with the results this year.

PAC: Tony O'Neill's Comments

T6. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she agrees with comments made by Tony O'Neill, Chair of the Agri-Food Strategy Board, at a recent Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee meeting, when he said, "Everybody prepares for the Public Accounts Committee before they do the project. They do two projects at once; one to implement it and the other at the same time preparing their defence. Our Public Accounts Committee, I think, has become our greatest weakness." (AQT 401/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I am very much aware of the comments that Mr O'Neill made to the Committee. Regarding the PAC, the Member will be aware that we all work within a framework of good governance and financial accountability for public money. Rules are in place, and we need to abide by those. Regardless of the rules, I suppose that we will be critical of officials and say they are risk-averse, but whether that is a fair criticism is debatable. I do not agree with the comments that he made.

Mr Swann: Thank you very much, Minister. I am glad to hear that. At the same Committee meeting, Mr O'Neill said there were too many farmers in Northern Ireland. I hope that the Minister does not agree with those comments either. Taking those two examples into consideration, does the Minister still have faith in Tony O'Neill as chair of the Agri-Food Strategy Board?

Miss McIlveen: I am very much aware of Mr O'Neill's comment about the number of farmers as well. Mr O'Neill has been challenged on that by the Ulster Farmers' Union. I have also been in his presence since he made those comments and have spoken to him about them.

I am very much focused on championing the position of all farmers in Northern Ireland and not being selective as to whom I support. I want to see the sector grow, be productive and be sustainable. As to whether I have confidence in Mr O'Neill, that is a very loaded question, but the Member will be aware that the tenure of the Agri-Food Strategy Board as a group will come to an end in February next year.

Basic Payment Scheme 2015: Appeals

T7. **Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the number of ongoing appeals for the 2015 payments. (AQT 402/16-21)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Minister to be brief in her reply.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. I do not have that information to hand, but I am happy to get it to the Member.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Thank you. Time is up.

2.45 pm

Economy

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Questions 4 and 8 have been withdrawn.

Fujitsu: Local Jobs

1. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline any discussions he has had with Fujitsu regarding the future of local jobs. (AQO 554/16-21)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker; I was just moving in there.

Fujitsu has been a significant employer in Northern Ireland for over 35 years. Given the company's strategic importance, the Executive, my Department and Invest NI have always maintained a close relationship with local and parent company management at the highest levels. Invest NI liaises and works regularly with the company at an operational level as well as at a higher strategic level to help ensure that Northern Ireland plays the fullest part in the delivery of Fujitsu's worldwide corporate strategy.

Following the announcement on Tuesday 11 October that Fujitsu would be undertaking a major review of its European, Middle Eastern, Indian and African operations, I spoke directly with Mr Duncan Tait, group director and corporate executive officer of Fujitsu Japan and Fujitsu's senior executive vice president and head of Europe, Middle East, India, Africa and the Americas, to reinforce Northern Ireland's long-established relationship with Fujitsu. I also emphasised the continuing contribution and excellence of the Northern Ireland workforce as well as the competitive opportunities that investing in Northern Ireland continues to present to Fujitsu as it shapes its business for the future.

Fujitsu is seeking to determine how best to re-equip its business to enable it to best compete in the digital economy. This process will be complex and challenging. It will likely affect several thousand individuals across all of Fujitsu's European, Middle Eastern, Indian and African operations, including all the company's sites in the United Kingdom. The review will also take several months to complete. While recognising that Fujitsu's Northern Ireland operations will not be exempt from this overall review, I have tasked officials from Invest NI to continue to maintain regular communication with the company. I and my Executive colleagues will continue to engage with Fujitsu management at the very highest levels to seek to ensure the best possible outcome for Northern Ireland.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answer and for his action thus far on the job threats at Fujitsu. He outlined to us the conversation that he had with a senior representative from Fujitsu. During that conversation, did he seek from that member of staff any comment about the quality and dedication of the Fujitsu workforce here?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. He will be familiar, from a constituency basis, with Fujitsu's operations in Northern Ireland. There are about 250 people working at Timber Quay in Londonderry, and I think that is actually the company's biggest individual site in Northern Ireland. It is a significant employer in the north-west. The Member mentions the high skill level of the workforce there and across Fujitsu's Northern

Ireland operations. Given that the review that the company announced earlier in the month is ostensibly about ensuring that it has the skills, as a business, to be equipped for the future challenges that the digital economy presents, the emphasis of my interventions and conversations will always be around the highly skilled workforce that Fujitsu has in Northern Ireland. Obviously, nobody knows that better than the company. When you are discussing skills and having a conversation about the skills of the workforce here, the company understands and appreciates it, and I think that my role as Minister is to underscore that and offer some assurance for the future.

There are opportunities from this announcement as the company looks to redistribute some employment from around Europe, the Middle East, India and Africa. There may be opportunities for Northern Ireland, and I think that, with the highly skilled workforce in Fujitsu in Northern Ireland and with the strong skills pipeline that we have, there could well be opportunities for Northern Ireland to seize, even though, at first glance, this looked like bad news.

Mr Aiken: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. Fujitsu is talked about, and he mentioned possible opportunity as well as challenge in its Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and UK operations. Will the Minister seek, along with Invest NI, to work closely with Fujitsu to grow specific sectors in Northern Ireland? I am thinking particularly about fintech and cybersecurity, which are areas that we have strength and resonance in.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. Another area that I would add to that list is agri-tech. I know that Fujitsu has been looking to get into that more, and, again, it is an area in which Northern Ireland has a standout reputation. These sorts of announcements are not good. You would rather not have them.

We needed to do, and I did, two things in the immediate aftermath of the announcement. First, I emphasised to the company at the highest possible level that Northern Ireland is a good place for it to do business, particularly, as I said to Mr Durkan, because of the skills mix that we have and the strong skills that Fujitsu has in its current workforce. Secondly, I said that Northern Ireland presents opportunities, as the company looks at adjusting and strengthening its business with an eye to the future. The Member mentioned fintech and cybersecurity; I mentioned agri-tech. We should concentrate not all but most of our efforts on the strong and emerging sectors in our economy to ensure that they take it forward into the future.

Mr Middleton: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. He outlined the fact that we have a long-standing relationship with Fujitsu. Will he assure the House that, or give any information on whether, this will stand us in good stead as the company goes through the evaluation process?

Mr Hamilton: I hope so. Northern Ireland workers have the reputation for being very loyal to companies, whether indigenous or inward investors. I know that companies have to take decisions in the light of the challenges they face but I hope that our long-standing relationship — Fujitsu has had some sort of presence in Northern Ireland for 35 years — stands us in good stead. As an Executive, we have a good relationship with the company. In a previous role, I, and the First Minister and deputy First Minister, met the chairman of Fujitsu and keep in regular contact with local management.

There is also a long-standing relationship with the public sector in Northern Ireland. Members may be familiar with the fact that Fujitsu runs the Civil Service HR Connect shared service. It also provides managed services for Libraries NI and has recently secured some work from the Education Authority. At the risk of repeating myself, the best aspect of our long-standing and productive relationship is the help and support that we have given Fujitsu to help plant and grow its business in Northern Ireland through Invest NI and through our universities and colleges. As the company considers its future direction, I hope that our long-standing relationship and knowledge of what Northern Ireland offers the business will stand us in good stead and are valued by the company moving forward.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Minister for his responses so far. What are he and his Department doing to support the local small and medium-sized manufacturing sector?

Mr Hamilton: What Fujitsu does in Northern Ireland is not manufacturing, it is more around contract services, managed services and digital services. Clearly, the manufacturing sector in Northern Ireland, in spite of what some commentators would have us believe, remains an integral and strong part of our economy. The sector has faced challenges over the last number of days, months and years and, unfortunately, some wish to characterise it as a sunset sector. I do not see it in that way at all; quite the opposite. In spite of some notable setbacks in recent times, employment in the sector has grown: there was a 4.1% growth in employment in the manufacturing sector as evidenced recently by the annual business register and employment survey.

Interestingly, the council with the biggest manufacturing sector is Mid Ulster. Sometimes there is a feeling that this is all very Belfast-centric, but that is not the case when it comes to manufacturing. Since 2011, Invest NI has given a significant volume of support to our manufacturing sector — £270 million. That has unlocked nearly £2 billion of investment by those companies and has secured or created 13,000 jobs across Northern Ireland. The sector is still integral and very important to our economy, and we will continue to support it in the fashion that we have done over the last five years.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the Minister's assurances that he will represent and protect the interests of hard-working, highly skilled and highly productive Fujitsu employees in Northern Ireland. Will he also do all he can to encourage Fujitsu to ensure clear communications and consultations with the employees throughout the evaluation period?

Mr Hamilton: Yes. As I mentioned, I have spoken to the company's local and corporate management. Obviously, like any business, particularly in that incredibly fast-moving sector, it faces a huge number of challenges. I think that they understand. Certainly, I know that local management understands, and senior management in Japan also appreciates the work that has been done in Northern Ireland. The fact that it has grown from such a small base in Northern Ireland to having 800 employees across a range of sites — some in the Member's constituency — is testimony to the skills of the workers here. It would not have invested or grown here if it had not been for the benefits that employing people from Northern Ireland brings to its business. I am sure that, like any good employer, it will ensure that its workers are kept abreast of developments in this uncertain time.

Universities: International Students

2. **Mr Stalford** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the support being given to universities to increase the number of international students enrolled. (AQO 555/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Higher education institutions in Northern Ireland are autonomous and responsible for increasing their international activity. Within that overall context, my Department's higher education strategy, Graduating to Success, committed to ensuring that the institutions reviewed their international strategies and set challenging targets to enhance their international standing. Each institution now has an international strategy in place to increase collaboration and the inward and outward mobility of students and staff. My Department, together with counterparts in other devolved Administrations, provides funding to Universities UK International, which supports universities in their international efforts.

As for attracting international students, universities can participate in international visits coordinated by Universities UK International and access relevant networks and research. Education, including higher education, has significant export potential. Invest NI now has a manager working with the education sector as a whole to increase international activity. Invest NI is working with local universities to explore ways in which it can assist them to increase the number of international students enrolled. Universities have participated in trade missions, utilising the in-market teams and consultants to research and set up meeting programmes with potential partner universities or student recruitment agents. In addition to trade missions, universities have access to Invest NI support, and funding is available to assist with flights and accommodation to visit potential new markets. In their international outreach efforts, the universities can also avail themselves of the support that is offered by the Northern Ireland bureaux in Washington and Beijing.

Mr Stalford: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. What potential does he feel that education has as an export industry for Northern Ireland? On the borders of my constituency, we have already seen developments such as John Bell House, which are designed to attract international students. Would the Minister care to comment on initiatives such as that and what potential targets he feels should be set?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. Our broad education sector, of which universities are a key part, has huge potential as an exporting sector. We do not automatically think of education as an export sector compared with health and life sciences, agri-foods or other parts of the manufacturing sector, but I believe that it is in several ways, not least because of the quality and high standard of the education system in Northern Ireland. As for attracting students, as I mentioned in my initial response, and attracting academic talent, we have a university system in which over 70% of university research activity is rated as internationally excellent or world-leading. That helps to attract students and academics here. The fact that 71% of graduates in Northern Ireland achieve a first-class degree or a 2:1 sends a good signal to potential students. We also have high-quality education and training in Northern Ireland, which can be sold — for want of a better word — outside Northern Ireland.

When I was in the Middle East recently, I had an opportunity to visit Dubai Healthcare City, which has a partnership between Queen's University and the Dubai Government. It is a fantastic opportunity for us to take our expertise there and work in partnership with the Government in the United Arab Emirates. There is huge potential for universities. I know that Ulster University is also engaged in similar aspects.

I think that there is also potential with boarding schools. There are some very high-quality boarding schools in Northern Ireland that are competitively positioned against their competition in, say, Great Britain.

There are several ways, including those that I mentioned, in which education can, with a bit of nurturing, help and support, become a really important export industry for Northern Ireland.

3.00 pm

Ms Hanna: I thank the Minister for his answers. Will he outline what mitigation plans his Department has in place to address the potential shortfall in funding if we lose the Horizon 2020 fund? We may be a less attractive destination to students, who, potentially, would not be able to get visas because of the uncertainty around Brexit. Might that shortfall and burden be placed on students?

Mr Hamilton: It is an aspect of the ongoing negotiations that will see the UK exit the European Union. The Department will have an interest in and feed into the overall negotiations to help to ensure that Northern Ireland gets the best possible outcome. Interestingly, the number of non-EU international students now slightly outweighs the number of EU students. That would not have been the case a number of years ago. The universities are, rightly, looking to not just their own neighbourhood but to Europe and the wider world.

The funding position has been assisted by the Chancellor's recent announcements on securing Horizon 2020 funding right up to and beyond leaving the European Union. It is another issue that will be sorted out in the negotiations. I point out to the Member, as I have to the House before, that Horizon 2020 is available to many states — I think that there are about 12 — outside the European Union. The state that benefited most per capita from FP7, which was the predecessor to Horizon 2020, was, I think, Israel. There are clear opportunities for states not in the EU to benefit from such funding arrangements, as well as from whatever Her Majesty's Government may put in place to replace, or perhaps as an additionality to, Horizon 2020.

Ms Archibald: I thank the Minister for his responses so far. Earlier this afternoon, I met a delegation from NUS-USI, and part of our discussion was about fees. When will the Minister bring forward his proposals for the future funding of further and higher education?

Mr Hamilton: The long-term sustainability of the university sector in Northern Ireland is incredibly important to get right. I have had discussions with Queen's University and Ulster University, and both put forward their own proposals for making the sector financially sustainable in the longer term. It is absolutely right that they contribute to the debate in that way because, after all, they want to remain world-class, world-leading universities. Of course, an important element of that is ensuring that they are financially sustainable. I have had conversations with them, and I will

have conversations with Executive colleagues as well. The Member will appreciate that it is an issue that will require wider support, no matter what my views or my party's views are. We need to consider it carefully and take a decision in the not too distant future.

Invest NI: First-time Exporters

3. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister for the Economy what support Invest NI is giving companies that are entering the export market for the first time. (AQO 556/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I am very aware of the importance of exporting to our economy and of the need to encourage more local businesses to sell outside Northern Ireland. To help to maximise our export potential, I launched the trade accelerator plan, which is still being delivered by Invest Northern Ireland, in September 2016. The initiative builds on the wide range of support and advice already available to first-time and experienced exporters. It provides enhanced support and financial assistance to target and enter an export market. Enhanced support includes a Great Britain market introduction programme, initially for the construction sector, and a Great Britain and Republic of Ireland retail market development programme for the food and drink sector. The trade accelerator plan also provides for additional market visits, more inward buyer visits and enhanced support to companies from Invest NI's trade advisers based in international markets across the globe. First-time exporters can also avail themselves of support towards their travel and accommodation costs when targeting the Great Britain market, and companies seeking to enter the Republic of Ireland market can avail themselves of support towards accommodation costs.

In addition, through Invest NI's existing programmes, companies seeking to enter an export market for the first time can participate in its long-established export skills workshop series, as well as in tailored programmes such as Going Dutch and Czech It Out. They can receive assistance towards market research carried out in the market by experienced trade advisers. There is also assistance with language translation and legal costs. I encourage all existing and potential exporters to work with Invest NI to expand their export operations or to take that first important step into exporting.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given the fact that Northern Ireland was the only UK region to increase its exports last year and the information that the Minister has given to us today about the help and assistance for companies to access new markets, does the Minister envisage that growth continuing? Obviously, he has launched the accelerator plan, but will he ensure that it is given the widest possible exposure to companies that could have an uptake of that particular programme?

Mr Hamilton: I concur with the Member that it is very good to see that Northern Ireland increased its exports, the only region in the UK to do so. We increased by a substantial amount — 9.5% of an increase — in our manufacturing exports over the last year. It is worth putting on record that it is nothing that we, as an Executive, do. We provide support, but, obviously, it is up to the companies themselves with the high-quality products that they have. We will give them all the support and assistance and will open doors for them, and that is our job, but it is the standout performance of, particularly, the likes of our life

and health sciences sector, which increased its export sales by over 50% in the last year.

I would be very brave and courageous if I were to say that this will absolutely continue, but there is already — I am sure that the Member will be aware of this from his constituency — anecdotal evidence amongst many exporters. Notwithstanding the issues that some importers will be facing, as a result of the current currency fluctuations, many exporting businesses are already reporting an increase, and that will have been recorded after the 9.5% increase figures were published.

The trade accelerator plan is also showing some early success. We have had seven companies participating in the GB market introduction programme, and they will meet potential customers at the end of October. All of those are new to the GB market, which is exactly what the intention of the plan was. There will also be nine new applications for our exhibition at trade shows support, which is called SOLEX, and four new applications for Great Britain market visits. That is something that we have started again, where companies that want to dip their toe into the water for exporting but are not sure about the market, can go and visit that market with some support from Invest NI. The signs are good. Obviously, it still requires a lot of effort from the companies, but I will ensure that that is supported at every opportunity by Invest NI.

Mr Smith: Has the Minister been able to identify any additional export opportunities during his discussions with Liam Fox? Will he seek to improve cooperation between Invest NI and UK Trade and Investment (UKTI), particularly in the aerospace and defence sectors?

Mr Hamilton: I had a very good discussion in the summer with Liam Fox, and it is something that we have been following up with his new Department at official level. I hope to be able to meet Dr Fox again before the year is out. He has had a fresh and interesting approach to this whole subject. Almost immediately on the UK vote to exit the European Union, he was charged to go out and sell the UK, as a whole, to the world and open up new markets. Instead of focusing almost exclusively, as has been encouraged in the last number of years, on a European market that has been struggling, it about looking at some of the emerging markets around the world where there is much greater growth and, therefore, much greater potential for the UK and Northern Ireland.

The Member mentioned the aerospace sector. Notwithstanding the troubling and worrying news from Bombardier at the tail end of last week, it is a sector that the Executive have sought to support through a dedicated strategy. That strategy was published in 2014 with a target to increase revenues from that sector from £1 billion to £2 billion, and we are making good progress on that. The revenues are now up to about £1.3 billion annually. It is a sector that, obviously, we are focused on, with not just Bombardier but the 60-odd companies that are operating in the aerospace, defence, security and space sector. It is an area where there are opportunities; one that is recognised at a UK level as well. As the UKTI, or Department for International Trade, starts to look at trade missions and visits around the world, I am sure that you will see Northern Ireland companies availing themselves of those opportunities. It is something that I want to encourage as well: not just that Northern Ireland companies are going on Invest NI-led trade missions but

that we are participating as fully as we possibly can on UK-wide trade missions.

Mr McGuigan: Given the uncertainty on international investment following the EU referendum result, has the Minister considered increasing support to local government to allow it to increase support to business start-ups?

Mr Hamilton: The Regional Start initiative, which is the programme for start-ups and growing new businesses, has already been devolved to local government. It has been carried out collectively on its behalf by Invest Northern Ireland, and I think that that is due to change before this year is out. Councils have what they have been asking for for a number of years, which is some autonomy and flexibility to deliver programmes that are tailored to the particular needs of their area. Although there is a lot of uniformity across Northern Ireland, there are parts — I mentioned mid-Ulster earlier, an area that has a concentration of manufacturing and engineering businesses — for which the initiative will give flexibility and autonomy to councils and allow them to tailor additional programmes and support to the needs of their area. Of course, we will continue to work with businesses through Invest NI directly but also through councils. As councils develop their development plans for their areas — some are already out there, while some are still in the works — it is incredibly important that Invest NI be plugged into that and are working with councils not just to ensure that we maximise the number of start-ups but to ensure that established businesses are looking at export and external opportunities.

Assured Skills

5. **Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the Assured Skills programme. (AQO 558/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Assured Skills programme is continuing to deliver for Northern Ireland. Alongside support provided by Invest Northern Ireland, Assured Skills support continues to be instrumental in securing new jobs for Northern Ireland, such as the 94 support engineering jobs and research and development jobs recently announced by Metaswitch.

The Assured Skills offer has many benefits for companies. They can find employees in what is commonly a new labour market, and any training developed is bespoke, helping to find people with the right skills and attributes for their company. Trainees are also more productive more quickly, with a consequent positive effect on the company's bottom line. Furthermore, networks are established with local further education colleges and universities, with the potential for ongoing links to mutual benefit.

To date, there have been 22 company projects through Assured Skills, and, when they are fully realised, some 5,704 jobs will be created. That will benefit the local economy by £144 million each year. In addition, Assured Skills supports short-term interventions to meet identified needs of existing employers in Northern Ireland and to help unemployed graduates find suitable employment. The Software Testers' Academy has been the most successful intervention to date. However, we have also used our academy model to meet needs in areas such as cloud computing, data analytics, financial services, 2D animation and computer numerical control machining. That has benefited companies such

as HighWire Press, Deloitte, PwC, EY, Alexander Mann Solutions, FinTrU, Magellan Aerospace and WhiteHat Security, to name but a few. Assured Skills is an innovative and responsive programme that has made a big impact in a short period. However, the programme is continuing to evolve, and it is my intention to keep Assured Skills at the leading edge of economic interventions.

Ms Lockhart: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. Skills is an area that I am very interested in. I think of my constituency of Upper Bann and the industries that we have. Can the Minister outline what consideration he is giving to future skills needs, particularly in agrifood and life sciences?

Mr Hamilton: I agree with the Member: skills is an incredibly important part — sometimes a differentiating part — of Northern Ireland's proposition to inward investors in particular. I mentioned one investment in my first answer in which it was a differentiator. It was the difference-maker, and it was what landed the investment in Northern Ireland rather than somewhere else. We have our skills barometer in place, and we have the work of the MATRIX panel, which has identified growth sectors in our economy, particularly where there are skills needs that will evolve when corporation tax is reduced. That will hopefully bring growth in existing sectors of our economy but also in some different ones.

There is a strong evidence base that we are following. We have a future skills programme coming into place that will, in the first instance, have 240 people going through six colleges. That is across Northern Ireland and not limited to, say, the greater Belfast area. The programme will be specifically in data analytics and cybersecurity in the first instance, which are both existing strong sectors but ones in which there is huge potential moving forward. We will consider other sectors, and other sectors are being considered, including life and health sciences, which are a huge part of the Member's Upper Bann constituency. As I said, skills are central to our attractiveness as a region to invest in, and I think that the Assured Skills programme and the future skills programme that we are developing will be key to achieving success.

3.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move on to topical questions.

York Street Interchange: Industry Discussions

T1. **Mrs Palmer** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the discussions he has had with Northern Ireland industry on the economic impact of the long-term delay to the York Street interchange. (AQT 406/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: That issue has come up in discussions. I have met the CBI, for example, and the chamber. It certainly came up in discussions with the CBI; it was one of the infrastructure programmes that it emphasised as important to the economy moving forward. I think it came up in conversations with the chamber. If it did not, I am sure it will in future conversations, as I am sure it will with other organisations and individual businesses as I move around the country and meet them on a regular basis.

Mrs Palmer: Thank you for the response, Minister. In view of the significant economic impact that has

been highlighted by all stakeholders, including many manufacturing and logistics companies in my constituency, will the Minister seek to engage with the Minister of Finance to look at alternative funding mechanisms directly with the Chancellor, thereby bypassing the extremely short-sighted perspective of the Infrastructure Minister?

Mr Hamilton: The Member will know that I served as Finance Minister for a time, and one of the things I learnt, especially with capital investment, is that there are always many, many more deserving capital projects than the capital budget will permit you to develop in any one budget year or period. I understand the circumstances the Infrastructure Minister finds himself in with the issue. He was hoping to avail himself of some European funding, but the call for that will come in and around the time the UK exits the European Union and, therefore, there is some uncertainty about future commitments on that. I understand the issue he finds himself with, and, whilst I agree with the Member that the York Street interchange is an incredibly important development not just for that small part of north Belfast but for the whole of Northern Ireland and its economy, it is wrong to create the impression that there are no other major infrastructure projects going on. Obviously, the A5 and the A6 are moving forward. Both are of importance to the economy, particularly to those strong manufacturing businesses located in the middle of Northern Ireland, as are the transport hubs in Belfast and Londonderry that are going forward. So there are major capital projects that I am sure the Department for Infrastructure will take forward.

I have always been open to alternative financing, but that is principally a matter for the Department for Infrastructure in conjunction with the Department of Finance to take forward. If there is anything I can do to help with that, of course, I will not be found wanting. I served as Sammy Wilson's apprentice for some time and learnt a lot from him and forgot a lot. *[Interruption.]* Some of it I have already forgotten. One thing I did not forget him saying — he repeated this recently — is that, given that the very profitable and very successful harbour estate will benefit greatly from the work at the York Street interchange, it is perhaps time once again to look at the option of it making a significant contribution to the work at York Street.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I remind the Minister that the two-minute rule still applies.

Brexit: Minister's Vote/Impact on NI

T2. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for the Economy why he has been so reluctant to tell the people of Northern Ireland how he voted in the EU referendum and whether his Department has modelled what impact leaving the European single market will have on the economy of Northern Ireland. (AQT 407/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: There are some who wish to go over the referendum campaign again and again. I have made it perfectly clear that my job now, irrespective of how people voted, is to focus on getting the best deal for Northern Ireland. I encourage the Member and his party and, indeed, all sides of the House to get the head down, get on with the work and get the best deal for Northern Ireland.

Mr Lyttle: I note the Economy Minister has failed again to answer either of the two questions I attempted to ask on the single market. We heard today how a planned £100 million

investment fund has been downgraded and repackaged, however skilfully, by Finance Minister Ó Muilleoir to a £30 million First Step Stimulus package because the European Investment Bank is no longer willing to take an active role in the fund. Why is the European Investment Bank no longer willing to take an active role, and is that in any way connected to the Brexit vote?

Mr Hamilton: I think the Member is at cross purposes; it is not my job to answer for the Finance Minister. The stimulus package has no relation to the investment fund, which, of course, I am very familiar with, having come up with the idea while I was Minister of Finance. The Member should put those issues to the Minister of Finance and seek answers from him.

I am sorry for the Member that the predictions of doom and gloom that he, his party and others on all sides of the House engaged in, have not come to pass. To borrow a phrase from one Member, we have not been plunged into recession. The UK is doing well, the Northern Ireland economy continues to do well and the predictions of doom and gloom of everybody from international banking, the IMF, the World Bank and all the great authorities — and I would not count the Member in that category, of course — have not come to pass. We have to get the best deal that we possibly can from this. We need to get our heads down, get on with the work that my Department is engaged in and feeding into the Executive Office — the First Minister and deputy First Minister were obviously engaged directly with the Prime Minister yesterday — and do our very best to get the best possible deal for Northern Ireland.

Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme

T3. **Mr Butler** asked the Minister for the Economy, in view of the scandal around the renewable heat debacle, to outline the procedures he has implemented to prevent a similar occurrence. (AQT 408/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I know that the Member is new to the House and will be unfamiliar with the convention that whenever issues are being examined and scrutinised by the PAC and the Audit Office, it is inappropriate for Ministers and Members to pass comment on them. It is an issue that I take seriously; there are lessons to be learned and we must learn lessons from the RHI issue, but as well as learning those lessons, I am focused on trying to deal with, and control, the issue as best I possibly can.

Mr Butler: Thank you, Minister, for your graciousness in saying that I am new to the House — *[Laughter.]* That can only happen once or twice. Can the Minister assure us, with the rush to install wind energy before the renewables obligation certificate (ROC) expiry in March 2017, that he has personally ensured that all appropriate measures have been taken so that nobody receives a subsidy for electricity that is not delivered to the grid by that date?

Mr Hamilton: Obviously, closure was brought to the Northern Ireland renewables obligation, but there are grace periods for certain circumstances. It is imperative that the Department, the regulator and others involved ensure that strict hard stops in respect of it all are kept in place and that nobody is benefiting from it who should not be doing so.

Heathrow Airport: Third Runway

T4. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for the Economy for his opinion of today's announcement about Heathrow Airport. (AQT 409/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I warmly welcome the decision by Her Majesty's Government to support extension at Heathrow. The decision to favour the option of the third runway has been taken by the Government and will be subject to various planning and environmental impact assessments, but it is a decision that I welcome. I think that the business community in Northern Ireland will welcome it and that everybody in Northern Ireland should praise the Government for their decision, because our connectivity, as we know — particularly as a peripheral region in the United Kingdom — is incredibly important. We need more direct routes from Belfast and I am glad that we are increasing them. London is a key business route in and of itself, for Northern Ireland, and Heathrow is a crucial hub airport that is a gateway to the world. I welcome, and I am sure the business community in Northern Ireland will also welcome, the long-awaited decision by Her Majesty's Government to give the go-ahead for a new runway at Heathrow.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for his answer and, in his usual fullness, he managed to answer my supplementary on connectivity. With the answer he has given, I am satisfied that he has answered my question on connectivity for Northern Ireland.

Mr Hamilton: I re-emphasise the fact that connectivity is incredibly important. We have had challenges in Northern Ireland in ensuring that we have good connectivity through direct flights, but there is a particular interest on ensuring that Belfast has direct connectivity. That is not always possible and can be challenging, but, through hub airports like Heathrow and Amsterdam, into which we have a direct route, and Brussels, that can be just as vital not only for inbound tourism but for business and trade.

HMS Caroline

T5. **Mr McCausland** asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the significance of HMS Caroline, particularly in this year when we mark the centenary of the Battle of Jutland, given that it is a very important historic vessel that is docked in Belfast and has received five-star recognition as a tourist attraction. (AQT 410/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I had the privilege of attending the official opening of the new HMS Caroline attraction in June. There was a fantastic investment of around £10 million, which was supported by the Executive. I am really pleased that Tourism NI recently awarded it a five-star visitor attraction rating, which means that it is of an outstanding level. Anybody in the House or outside who has visited HMS Caroline will agree that it is an outstanding tourist attraction that will benefit the whole of Belfast, and particularly the maritime area in Titanic Quarter.

Mr McCausland: I thank the Minister for his answer. Are there any plans to make the facility at HMS Caroline even more attractive for visitors? There is potential to improve the product and connectivity, which he mentioned, with the wider maritime history of the area.

Mr Hamilton: It is a great facility, but it is not in the best of locations at the moment. It needs to be kept in that area

so there can be connectivity to Titanic Belfast and the Nomadic.

I recently agreed a process that will allow HMS Caroline to be moved from its current location. It is a little further out, beside the Pump-House, which is a much better and more accessible location for the vessel. It will also allow for an onshore visitor centre and for other parts of the attraction to be added to it, which will enhance it even further.

Bombardier: Jobs

T6. **Ms Bunting** asked the Minister for the Economy, given that he will be aware of the worrying news about Bombardier in the East Belfast constituency, what discussions he has had with Bombardier and the unions that represent its workers. (AQT 411/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I share the Member's concerns about the news that emanated from Bombardier at the tail end of the week. That is on top of the announcement in February, and it is another blow to the dedicated workforce in Bombardier's Belfast and Northern Ireland operations.

As soon as the news broke, I was in contact with Michael Ryan, who is the head of Bombardier's Belfast operation, to discuss the details and to offer my full support to him and the Northern Ireland operations. I made it clear that I will do all that I can to fight to save as many jobs as possible in Northern Ireland.

Some detail has been revealed. Around two thirds of the 7,500 jobs will go in the transportation sector of the business, which will not affect Northern Ireland. There were encouraging comments in the Bombardier statement about ramping up employment with the CSeries and the Global 7000 project, which are two key projects in Belfast. Even though this is troubling news, there are potential opportunities — a bit like Fujitsu — for Northern Ireland.

Yesterday morning, I met the Unite union to discuss the issue in detail. I will stand and fight alongside the union to preserve as many of the jobs as possible in Northern Ireland. We all know that the work that is done in Bombardier in Belfast is of the highest quality. Whilst the company faces huge challenges now and moving forward, I firmly believe that Bombardier in Northern Ireland has a strong enough operation, with a good strong skills base, which can help the company to get out of its current difficulties.

Ms Bunting: Minister, in an earlier answer, you mentioned the Executive's dedicated strategy to double revenue from aerospace, defence, security and the space sector. In light of last week's announcement, and given East Belfast's strong history and skilled labour force in this area, might there be opportunities for redeployment in or expansion of those other companies in East Belfast?

3.30 pm

Mr Hamilton: In spite of the news from Bombardier last week, I think that there are still huge opportunities for the aerospace, defence, security and space sector here in Northern Ireland. I mentioned the CSeries and the Global 7000 project. It is testament to the strong skills and dedication of the staff in Belfast and across Northern Ireland who work in Bombardier that they are involved in every major Bombardier project. I think that there are opportunities, and, last week, before the Bombardier news,

we launched a new space strategy for Northern Ireland. I did not think that I would ever be in a position or a job where I would announce a space strategy in Northern Ireland. However, Thales, which is located in the Member's constituency — I had the pleasure of visiting it with her in the summer — is doing some fantastic work and is a real pioneer in the space sector. The new space propulsion centre that it recently opened offers huge opportunities for us to create more jobs and to do a lot more research and development in that sector here in Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Time is up.

Assembly Business

Mr Ford: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The first question to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs came from Mr McKee and was about pollution in the Annsborough river. Trevor Lunn mentioned a number of other pollution incidents, and you gently reprimanded him for extending the question. However, under question 3, in which Mr Eamonn McCann queried the governance of the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative, a question was allowed from Mr William Humphrey about fish stocks on the Erne. Will you agree to raise this issue with the Speaker, with a view to his issuing written guidance on the relevance of supplementary questions, since there is clearly a lacuna in Standing Orders?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I thank the Member for his point of order. I will ask the Speaker to review Question Time and the questions that you referred to. I remind you that question 1 was specifically a constituency-based question.

Mr Ford: — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order, Mr Ford. I have said that I will refer the matter to the Speaker for his impartial review.

Mr Ford: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I think that you will find that question 3 was at least as specific as question 1 and was on a specific issue of governance, not on fish stocks.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Your point is noted and will be referred to the Speaker. Lough Neagh seems to be a very big place that impacts on a lot of constituencies. Whether you know that is a matter for you.

We will move on. I ask Members to take their ease while we make changes at the top Table.

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

Ministerial Statements

October Monitoring

Business resumed.

Mr McPhillips: I thank the Minister for his statement today. Last week, in the company of colleagues, I met the chief executive of Translink, who raised concerns over the impact that Brexit would have on the capital and resource budget, especially in relation to the purchase of new buses. The Minister's statement notes that £10 million is to be allocated for the purchase of new buses. Will the Minister outline how much of that will be spent on upgrading the rural bus fleet?

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leis an Chomhalta as an cheist. I thank Mr McPhillips for his question. He could have caught the chief executive of Translink at lunchtime. He was outside the Building with buses that did not look terribly new to me, and he was there for a photocall in the wake of the news that I gave today, which is that we have put money aside from our stimulus package to buy buses. Some of those buses will be bought locally, which will give a boost to the local economy. I do not have the exact details of how the money will be spent. I think that the Member will be pleased that it will lead to an enhancement of the fleet, and it will mean that we truly have a 21st-century fleet to serve our people. Like him, I hope that Translink goes from strength to strength and that rural services are not diminished in the time ahead but in fact are strengthened. This injection of funds into the fleet will be helpful towards that objective.

Mr Beggs: The social change fund was established to enable the Executive to quickly respond to more urgent ways to address social need, yet, surprisingly, in the Minister's statement, he has announced that £7.1 million has been returned unspent and yet another programme is being developed to distribute funding. With only five months remaining in this financial year, can the Minister advise how the community regeneration fund will run in a transparent manner and how it will be applied for? How can we be assured that it will neatly knit with the emerging community planning process that councils have been developing to get maximum value for the buck?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. He and I are on the same page when we say that we are disappointed that it took a long time to get social investment fund money out the door. Whatever the misgivings and discussions in the Chamber, I think that he will be pleased that, in recent months, we have started to see letters of offer issued, whatever the questions around some of those, and we are seeing that injection of funds that was envisaged from day 1. He can take it from me that the £5 million that we have set aside for community regeneration projects will be spent between now and April. It is different from the funds that he referenced in one key respect, which is that it is for capital expenditure only. I am confident because, when I meet Ministers, they always have key projects that are in a queue waiting. If Ministers had all the money that they requested from me, many more projects would be triggered and would be going ahead

to start to receive the investment that they require. I am confident that we have projects ready and waiting.

The Member is exactly correct. If these projects cannot be delivered in a five-month period, they will not be delivered before the end of the financial year. That, therefore, precludes any project that would have to start from ground zero, as it were. We are talking about oven-ready projects, and I think that you will find in your constituency and certainly across Departments that Ministers have projects ready and waiting to come forward. However, I want to stress that this is a small intervention of peace-building projects, and I hope that, next year, if the Executive agree, we can bring forward a much larger stimulus package that would make a real impact in many more constituencies and be much greater in scale than what is envisaged here today.

Mr Allister: I want to return to the renewable heat debacle. It appears that the Minister has had to find £20 million from central resource DEL that he does not really have because he is now substantially overcommitted by the need to bail out part of the £30 million deficit this year. Since this was a 20-year scheme, does that mean that the longevity of that for that period will affect a similar level of shortfall going forward?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank Mr Allister for his question. I am confident that it will not be repeated. I did not find money in this monitoring round, if you recall. I found it in June, when we placed £20 million in the centre as a sort of contingency because we did believe that that pressure would come this year. We estimated that perhaps there would be another £30 million. I am not sure, Mr Allister, whether you were in and caught the questions earlier. The Minister for the Economy, who has responsibility for this area, managed to make internal reallocations so that, thus far, at least we have not faced an additional £10 million pressure. I will repeat this because perhaps you were not in. He can be sure that it is my intention not to have this particular issue rolling on for 19 more years. In fact, I think that there is an imperative on us to make sure that that does not happen because every pound that we spend in dealing with the overspend on RHI is a pound that we take away from vital front-line services.

I said earlier, and I repeat, that I am pleased with the focus that the Economy Minister has brought to the issue. I am pleased with the strategies that his officials are working on. I look forward to the Economy Minister being in a position in the near future to come forward and give him, me and the House some comfort over how we are going to get to grips with the issue.

Ms Mallon: I thank the Minister for his statement. I ask him to clarify what appears to be a confusion, if not a contradiction, in his statement. In his opening remarks, he said:

"The approach now adopted by the Executive to the monitoring round process no longer requires the submission of bids by Departments."

Flip one page over, under "Internal Reallocations". There he stated:

"It is good practice that Departments seek to manage any emerging pressures internally before bringing forward bids for additional allocations."

Which is it? Are there bids or are there not? If there are bids, as is stated on page 3 of his statement, why do he

and his ministerial colleagues refuse to share them with the relevant Committees and the House?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member. I am going to bring a little bit of illumination into your life. You are absolutely right: the system has changed. The system that you and your colleagues would have been used to was a system in which people immediately drew up bids, usually as long as their arm and usually chancing their arm, and every Department said that it really could not do without moneys to meet these pressures. What we have come up with is an entirely different system. It is an Executive united in common purpose, where, every day, there are engagements with other Departments. In fact, in some of those Departments, we now have working groups that are trying to look into the future and predict problems coming down the tracks so that we can budget efficiently and effectively. We tell every Department to try to make allocations, as the Economy Minister did for the renewable heat incentive (RHI), in their own Department and that, if it is going to come forward with a bid, it has to be really serious, thought-out and value for money. The key point is that we do not want shopping lists or wish lists. If a Minister comes to me with a real pressure, we can discuss in concert with other Executive colleagues how that is met.

The system that we have today is evidence of that working. We now have a situation in which the key pressures facing the Executive in toto — the Executive across the board and not just one silo of education, agriculture or health — have been dealt with in an efficient and timely manner that exhibits value for money. I know that the Opposition fret about the process and how the process has changed, but the most important issue of all is that this system delivers for ordinary people, as it has today. As I said, Chris Conway of Translink is outside the door, because it has delivered for him. It has also delivered for roads maintenance, which I know will bring cheer to many of those who are still concerned that we do not budget adequately for roads maintenance at the start of the year. I know that that is a point that you have brought up, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It will bring some succour and comfort to those people that we are delivering. I am happy to focus on the minutiae and on process, but, ultimately, I want my focus to be on delivery, and that is what we are doing today.

Mr McNulty: May I ask the same question, please?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I refer the Member to Hansard to read the same answer. *[Laughter.]*

Ms Gildernew: You do not want me taking a fit of the giggles in the middle of this, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I thank the Minister for his statement and for answering the questions with his usual honesty, clarity and a few other things. How important has the input been of the Welsh and Scottish Secretaries and the Basque Finance Department — I know that he has had discussions with them recently — on the work that he is doing?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for controlling her giggles and for that question. The support that we have received from the Scottish Finance Secretary, Derek Mackay, and the Welsh Finance Secretary, Mark Drakeford, has been very refreshing. As I have said previously, when we speak with one voice, we represent 10 million people. More than that, it is true that when we speak together, the Treasury listens.

3.45 pm

I have no doubt that yesterday in London we got a more sympathetic hearing to requests that we made around our individual Budgets and the need to call a halt to austerity and have a fiscal stimulus. We received a more receptive ear to that message because we spoke together, so I thank the Ministers for forming a coalition — a Celtic coalition — on that matter.

It is also important to thank the chair of Newry, Mourne and Down Council, Councillor Fitzpatrick, because her council hosted the pre-meeting of the three Finance Ministers in Newry, in the heart of the area that will be affected most by a Brexit, if it happens. That shows that councils are working with the Executive to deliver.

In terms of the Basque autonomous region, we saw today the fruits of that work. All parties here have supported Professor Bengoa's work in trying to make sure that we manage change in the health service rather than manage crisis. Three officials came from the Basque Country, including the deputy Finance Minister, who, for what it is worth, ended up singing with the Belfast Community Gospel Choir and the former Minister of Justice on Friday night. They bring a really fresh perspective to matters fiscal, because the Basques raise all their finances and then pay Madrid. As you know, we have a different system, whereby the block grant comes here. In the Basque Country, that system engenders and nurtures a very entrepreneurial society. We have a memorandum of understanding with the Basques in other areas, including health. We have started a discussion with them, which will be of benefit to all of us.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Sin é mar dheireadh leis na ceisteanna ar an ráiteas. That concludes the questions on the statement.

Rationalisation of the Court Estate

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I have received notice from the Minister of Justice that she wishes to make a statement on the rationalisation of the court estate.

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): I am grateful for the opportunity to come before the Assembly to make a statement on the proposals for the rationalisation of the court estate.

The Assembly will be aware that, following a public consultation exercise, my predecessor announced on 8 February 2016 his decision to close courthouses at Armagh, Ballymena, Lisburn and Strabane and reaffirmed his earlier decision to close the court buildings in Limavady and Magherafelt.

As Members know, in early May 2016, judicial review proceedings were commenced, challenging the decision to close Ballymena, Lisburn and Strabane courthouses. In view of that, when appointed as Justice Minister, I indicated that none of the six courthouses would close pending the outcome of the judicial review proceedings. Since taking that decision, I have had time to listen to a range of views on the issue and reflect on what will be a changing justice landscape during the Assembly mandate and beyond.

In determining the future shape of the court estate, it is important that I do so in the context of the Programme for Government. This represents a real opportunity for us to adopt new and innovative approaches to problems that have often seemed intractable, and I am determined that we should look for more radical solutions based on the concept of problem-solving justice.

My Department is already working on a pathfinder project that will lead to the establishment of a pilot substance misuse court and, in due course, a family, drug and alcohol court. Plans are also in place to further build on the success of the domestic violence court that has been operating successfully in Derry/Londonderry. Those are just some examples of how a problem-solving approach to justice has the potential to make a real difference in people's lives.

Separately, it will be important to consider carefully the emerging recommendations of the review of civil and family justice, which is being led by Lord Justice Gillen. The preliminary reports from that review recommend greater use of mediation and alternative dispute-resolution procedures, the digitalisation of court processes and the establishment of civil and family justice centres.

As we look to these and other opportunities to improve the way we deliver justice in Northern Ireland, I have concluded that now is not the time to proceed with court closures of the scale envisaged. Consequently, I have decided to reverse the decision taken in the previous mandate, and I have instructed my officials to advise the High Court accordingly. I have not taken that decision lightly, and I am, of course, aware that the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service will have to find savings in other areas of its budget if it is to deliver the efficiencies that are expected of it. However, given the changing justice landscape, I have concluded that we should retain maximum flexibility within the court estate for the time being.

At the same time, I have asked the chief executive of the Courts and Tribunals Service to establish a review of what the future of court services should look like in 2020

and beyond. This Courts 2020 review, together with the decision I am announcing this afternoon, will ensure that we plan for a modern courts service that delivers access to justice for the people of Northern Ireland.

I commend this decision to the House.

Mr Beattie: I thank the Minister for her very welcome statement that these six named courthouses have received a reprieve. That is welcome for access to justice. She will know that my party has been calling for this all along; so, of course, it is a positive move, and I thank her for it. The question might be this: with the Courts 2020 review, what guarantees can she give that we will not be back in a position of uncertainty in the very near future?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his questions and kind wishes. There is an opportunity with this decision to look at our court system and see how we can better utilise court services. I have very much followed a policy of problem-solving justice, and I referred to the domestic court in Derry/Londonderry. We are also looking at a substance misuse court. In my tenure as Justice Minister, I would like to try to tackle some of these issues upstream and stop people getting to court in the first place. There are opportunities in the community to enable that to happen. We could perhaps use the courts estate to facilitate that type of approach. I think that this is a very positive decision. I have listened to the House and to local government. This is not something that was wanted, and that is why I have come to my decision.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for this statement and her action. This is a strong decision: to reverse the previous Minister's decision on courthouse closures. The wrong decision was taken then; the right decision is being taken now. Although justice was devolved to us a number of years ago, maybe we are only now starting to see the spirit of devolution entering the officialdom of the DOJ. It is a very good day for democracy, as opposed to the courts.

The Minister mentioned innovation in the courtroom, a problem-solving approach and the establishment of civil and family justice centres, which were, of course, mentioned in Lord Justice Gillen's report. Will the Minister detail the work she has done on that aspect and whether Ballymena courthouse could be used for one of those centres or pilot schemes?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his kind wishes and comments on how we could better utilise the courts system. At this stage, I cannot confirm how we might use the courts. We are very much in the early stages as to how we can better utilise facilities in the courts estate. However, we will be looking at all the aspects of how we might utilise them. It will not be done just on a cost-cutting basis. I can confirm that the previous proposals would have realised a saving of about £800,000, and that is something that we will have to find. However, I am confident that, with the new approach that I am taking within the Department, we will be able to find those savings. I will want to have conversations with local government, councils and elected reps so that they have some way of determining the services in their constituencies. At the end of the day, that is what we are here for.

Ms Boyle: I, too, welcome the statement. It is a good news story, particularly for my area, Strabane. I take the opportunity to congratulate the many local solicitors, myself and a party colleague who lobbied your

predecessor on this matter. Had closure proceeded, it would have significantly impacted on the people of Strabane in public service delivery, jobs and the local economy.

Minister, given the heavily fortified exterior of Strabane courthouse, can you confirm whether a move away from that militarised fortification will form part of the 2020 review of courthouses?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her comments. I am quite happy to look at it as part of the review. This provides a fresh opportunity to see how we can move forward with the courts estate. It is something that the Member has raised with me in several questions and in conversations. Therefore, as part of this review, let us see how we can look forward for the Courts Service in 2020.

Mr Attwood: My question is not about the decision but about how you came to it. This time yesterday, you said in the Chamber:

"I cannot comment on any aspect of the courts estate, pending the judicial review. When that has come to a conclusion, I am happy to have a conversation". — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 119, p129, col 2].

Will you explain to the House how you had that position yesterday and a different position today? Will you explain to the House whether you received any legal advice that might have led you to that conclusion? Will you explain to the House how, overnight, you have come to a different decision from yesterday?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. I am sure that he will be happy to know that I take the views of the House quite seriously. Mrs Barton asked me a question yesterday about the courts estate, and these things came to my mind when I considered this decision. The judicial review was expected to start this week, but it had not begun. From my perspective, I was taking all these things into account when I made this decision today. It is perfectly reasonable that I would want to consider the views of people in the House and then come to a decision like this. I am sure that the Member would expect that of me.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. She said that she hoped that the various initiatives that she has put in train would lead to less demand on the Courts Service, but less demand equals less requirement for courthouses. Is this not a review of a review? A perfectly good review was done under the previous Minister, which made firm recommendations and produced potential savings. While this review of a review goes on, how much will it cost the Courts Service?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. One of my concerns about how my predecessor came to his conclusion is that a full impact assessment was not done of the implications of the courthouse closures. We have to be quite mindful that, whilst we are in government, of course we need to look at saving money, but we also have to assess how our decisions will have a wider impact on society. I have considered that in taking this decision forward. By all means, we need to look at our budgets and understand how we can make savings; that is the right thing to do. Equally, however, we need to look at how our decisions affect public services because, essentially, that is what we are here for: to provide good public services for the people of Northern Ireland.

I am fully aware of the challenges around the money that we need to save, but there is a better way to do this. This is a new mandate, I am a new Minister, and I have new priorities. I want to move justice forward in an innovative and radical way, and I will not just try to cut the fat from the system, of which there is very little left.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for her statement and her comments so far. I am delighted with this announcement, which is not about protecting buildings but protecting services and looking at a new and better way of working our courts system, and I welcome that. Is she considering using the courthouses for things other than court business?

Ms Sugden: Yes, indeed. We need to look at this from internal and external perspectives. That is why, further to my announcement today, I have instructed my officials to do that assessment and chat to the stakeholders involved in order to understand how we could better use these buildings throughout the estate. I want local communities to have ownership of the courthouses. We are considering all options; I am quite happy for Members to share their views on how we can best do that, and I know that a number of Members have already done that in the past six months. There is an opportunity now to see how we can move forward with our court buildings.

Mr Kearney: Tréaslaim leat, a Aire, as an scéal dearfach seo. Scéal iontach atá ann. Thank you, Minister. This is good news: well done. I thank you for your consideration and the manner in which you have brought the news to the Assembly. Will you confirm that the terms of reference that are set for the chief executive of the Courts Service will be premised on access to justice and problem-solving justice and will have due regard for ensuring that the most marginalised in our society will have access to the courts estate? Will you undertake to share the proposed approach with the Justice Committee when you are in a position to do so?

4.00 pm

Ms Sugden: Yes is the answer to all your questions. We have to be mindful of providing access to justice to the most vulnerable. When we look at the estate, that will be one of the considerations. I am happy to share that with the Justice Committee so that it, too, can have an input into how we can do this in the right way.

Mr Douglas: I, too, welcome the decision by the Minister. It is a very brave decision. As a member of the Justice Committee, I know that the Committee was lobbied by a lot of people, including a lot of families with children. The changes would have had a really negative impact on their lives, with some having to travel for 10 or 20 miles to get justice.

Your statement says that you will:

"adopt new and innovative approaches to problems that have often seemed intractable".

It continues:

"My Department is already working on a pathfinder project that will lead to the establishment of a pilot Substance Misuse Court and in due course a Family Drug and Alcohol Court."

They seem very interesting projects. Will you outline some of the ideas behind that thinking?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. The problem-solving justice approach is, in its basic form, a common-sense approach to justice and one that is mindful of the hurdles that get in people's way and can lead them into the criminal justice system. I have reiterated time and again in the House that I do not believe that anyone is born bad; I believe that it is a product of the circumstances that they find themselves in. We often find that people with mental health issues and people who misuse drugs and alcohol or perhaps have other social and economic issues are led by those circumstances into the criminal justice system. We have seen in other parts of the world, namely America and Scotland, how taking this approach has almost given offenders the opportunity to realise that it was down to their circumstances and to take a different approach to justice. It serves no one to put people in custody. If we can do it in a better way, it will have positive repercussions not only for wider society but, on a pragmatic level, for reducing the heavy resources currently in place.

The problem-solving justice approach is innovative and new. It will take time to work through, but we are keen to move forward with it. In the new Programme for Government, it will be the overarching theme that threads its way through my priorities in the next five years.

Mr Beggs: I, too, welcome the statement by the Minister reversing the decision to close the courts. Her statement highlights a range of alternative court systems: a substance misuse court, a family drug and alcohol court and a domestic violence court. These are different models, and she may well need homes for those alternatives. Her statement says that in order to allow the "Courts 2020 Review" to take place:

"now is not the time to proceed with court closures of the scale envisaged"

When does she envisage the review will be completed, and might some of the reprieves be temporary?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. The Criminal Justice Inspection report that led to my predecessor's decision to close a number of courthouses across Northern Ireland demonstrated that the service that we were providing was underutilised. However, the approach of just closing those courthouses was the wrong one, in the sense that we have to have an understanding of the wider impact of courthouse closures on access to justice, which some Members talked about. I will take the widest possible view of this. It would be remiss of me as Justice Minister not to consider the wider implications, whether they fall within my remit or not.

The Northern Ireland Executive are in a new space, and we are trying to work together on these issues. It is quite a message to the House that the majority have welcomed my statement. We are at the beginning of the process, and I welcome all Members playing a part in that. Up to now, you have been very good at sharing with me your views on this area. Now that I have made the decision, I will be happy, moving forward, to hear those views.

Mr McCartney: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for her decision. I have to say that I was a bit surprised that a wider impact assessment was

not carried out on the previous decision. That aside, one of the features of the review was the underuse of courthouses, so a strategy has to be put in place so that they are used more in the future. What are the Minister's views of what that might entail? As part of the previous process, the decision to close Strabane would have meant more business in Omagh. It was obvious that there were disability access issues in Omagh that the previous Minister said would be addressed. I hope that addressing disability access will still be on your agenda.

Ms Sugden: I am happy to look at all these things moving forward. That is the right approach to take. Yes, the last review showed that there was an underutilisation of the court estate, but, again, we need to be more creative in how we can use our court estate. That might not be for court proceedings; perhaps we can use them as mediation centres or advice centres. One of my overarching and key messages as Minister of Justice is that, if we can tackle these things upstream, hopefully they will not get downstream. That is when we have our problems and when we have already lost. An approach that stops these issues going to court is not just good for budgets and resources but good for the people of Northern Ireland because it means they do not have to go through that system. We need to be creative in how we do this. Just because we have never done it that way before does not mean that we cannot do that moving forward, and Northern Ireland is now in a position where we can start to satisfy these new ways of thinking.

Mr Robinson: After the extensive lobbying by my DUP colleagues and me, I warmly welcome and thank the Minister for her statement on reversing the decision on courthouse closure. Does the Minister agree that access to the justice system is essential in modern society, especially in rural areas like Limavady in her constituency?

Ms Sugden: Absolutely. Everybody has an entitlement to access justice, and, as a representative of a rural constituency, I am mindful of the particular challenges around access to justice in rural areas. Yes, I welcome his comments. All these things made me come to this decision. I think that it is a positive decision, and, if anything, it demonstrates that I have listened to the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Ford: The Minister has made it fairly clear today that this decision is her personal decision; indeed, she rather suggested to Mr Attwood that it was one that she had taken in the last 24 hours. The decision is to reverse my decision of last February, which was based on a consultation and based on solid evidence produced by the staff of the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service, including an impact assessment that, it appears, has not been seen by members of the Justice Committee or, indeed, by the Minister herself. Given that it is the Minister's personal decision, could she tell us how she plans to fund the £1.1 million that will now be spent on keeping half-empty courthouses in operation, not to mention the ongoing costs for the Police Service and Prison Service, both of which would have seen reductions in expenditure? Since it is her decision, she clearly has a plan for how to fund it.

Ms Sugden: The Member is absolutely right: it is a personal decision because I am now the Minister of Justice. In coming to the decision, I have had a wider review of the issues that have been brought to me. In

anticipating what might have happened around the court estate, I have listened to Members. I have received numerous bits of correspondence from local government to ask me to reconsider the decision, and I think that it is only responsible that I do that.

The Minister — the former Minister; I beg your pardon — refers to the wider impact assessment. I think that we need to do more, and I will certainly not do that in isolation as the Department of Justice. I will do that along with my Executive colleagues, other Members of the House, agencies and constituents across Northern Ireland. Yes, he rightly alludes to the fact that this was an exercise in cost-cutting, but I want to take a more strategic approach. It is not just about cost-cutting; it is about how we can best service the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Kennedy: I warmly welcome the Minister's statement, in particular her decision to retain the historic courthouse in Armagh city. That will be warmly welcomed by my constituents. I hope that it will not be a temporary reprieve pending the outcome of the Courts 2020 review announced by the Minister. Will she take the opportunity to pursue with her officials the possibility of using Armagh courthouse as a venue for problem-solving courts to help maximise its use?

Ms Sugden: Yes, I am happy to look at the entire court system to see how best it can be utilised, now that we are in this new space of policy development and are taking a more strategic, holistic approach to justice. I am happy to consider all venues for my new policy.

Mr Dickson: I have to say that I regret your decision and announcement today, Minister. You indicated that this is a personal decision. How many other personal decisions have you made as Justice Minister? Do you not make decisions based on facts, figures and information? Surely that is how to make a decision, not on a personal whim.

Ms Sugden: It would be quite difficult to remove myself from the role of Justice Minister. I stood here six months ago to the day and accepted the role. The comments that the Member makes are weak. I am a balanced person. I am independent and do not have party political baggage on any issues that come to the House. I take a balanced perspective on any issues that are brought to me. Perhaps I am the most balanced person in the House, because everything brought to me for a decision will be dealt with as and when it comes. The fact that the only people against this are Members from the Alliance Party, who happen to be the former Justice Minister's colleagues, suggests that it is they who have more personal issues here than me.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr E McCann: If the Minister is not already embarrassed by the praise that has been heaped on her, I will say fair play to her for the decision that she has taken.

Still on the subject of access to courts and to justice, does she welcome the suggestion that the High Court ought occasionally to meet somewhere other than in Belfast? In Scotland, the High Court meets in three separate locations; in Wales, it is 15; and in England, it is 28. Here, it is Belfast, Belfast, Belfast. If the High Court were to meet occasionally in Derry, that would improve access to the courts for people in Derry, Fermanagh and Tyrone and would also be greatly welcomed by lawyers and other

court workers in Derry. As a final point, Derry people who have to travel to Belfast and back again for court arrive exhausted —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Question.

Mr E McCann: — and are therefore under a disadvantage compared with others. I speak from some experience in the matter.

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his comments. They are well noted, and I am happy to look at the issues that he has addressed in conversations with the Lord Chief Justice, who has ultimate responsibility in that area.

Mr Allister: I greatly welcome the decision, particularly the reprieve for the very historic courthouse in Ballymena, a place I spent many happy, challenging and, I suppose, rewarding hours. *[Laughter.]* It is patently obvious that this right decision was made in anticipation of defeat in the upcoming judicial review. What lessons have been learnt or will be learned by officials in her Department who thought that, with the aid of the previous, compliant Minister, they could railroad through such ill-judged decisions?

Ms Sugden: Since becoming Justice Minister six months ago to the day, I have learnt an awful lot of lessons, but perhaps the biggest is that, as the Government, we have to listen to the people of Northern Ireland. We can do that through the Assembly or by going out and chatting to people, and I believe that that is what happened on this issue. We can truly reflect the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland by giving them the services they want.

4.15 pm

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for her statement to the House and welcome it. I want to ask her about staff. On the previous Minister's announcement, the PPS had already made a decision and had taken the opportunity to either relocate staff or ask them to go under the voluntary exit scheme (VES). Is there any understanding as to what will happen to those staff? Will they be offered the opportunity to come back to their facilities?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, I will be meeting the Director of Public Prosecutions this afternoon. It is certainly something about which we will have a discussion, particularly further to this decision. I realise that it is a departure from the previous Minister's decision on this. We are mindful of all those things as we move forward. I am quite happy to have that conversation when I meet him shortly.

Executive Committee Business

Rates (Increased Reduction for Recreational Hereditaments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): I beg to move

That the Rates (Increased Reduction for Recreational Hereditaments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 be affirmed.

Gabhaim buíochas leat as an deis seo a thabhairt dom an rún seo a chur os comhair an Tionóil inniu.

The regulations that are before you are the Rates (Increased Reduction for Recreational Hereditaments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016. Before turning to the content of the regulations, I think that it is important to provide Members with some brief background and context to the statutory rule.

The rule is made under a new enabling power that is provided by the Rates (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. That Act came before the House in the previous mandate at the beginning of this year. It amended existing rating legislation in order to provide a power to enhance rate relief subject to criteria prescribed in subordinate legislation. It was the intention at that time to use the new power to enhance support to unlicensed community amateur sports clubs, subject to final consultation.

An eight-week targeted consultation took place earlier this year, which aimed to strike the correct balance between the views and interests of sporting organisations and the wider business and hospitality sector. These regulations now implement those consultation proposals, and I am happy to say that they will secure an increase to 100% rate relief for community amateur sports clubs without a licensed bar area on their premises.

I feel that my Department has struck the correct balance between the range of interests at play at this particular time in ensuring that the extra relief is targeted towards sports clubs that meet the criteria that are laid out in the regulations that are before you.

Looking to the future, I know that my officials are looking at other possible adjustments in this area; for example, the wider treatment of golf clubs — raised repeatedly by Mr Wells at the last Committee — which is an area that is not without its inconsistencies and was discussed as part of the Committee's policy consideration. Those other areas are not, however, the subject of the debate. The scope of the subordinate legislation is, as Members know, fairly limited and largely dictated by the primary legislative provision.

I will now turn to the technical detail of the draft regulations. Regulation 1 contains the citation, commencement and interpretation provisions. The rule will come into operation the day after it is affirmed by the Assembly. Regulation 2 provides that the reduction in the normal rate in accordance with article 31(3) and (4) of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 shall be 100% for a hereditament that is occupied by a community amateur sports club and is not a hereditament on which a person may under licence, other than an occasional licence, or a protection order sell intoxicating liquor by retail, or in respect of which a club is registered under the Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1996.

An interpretation provision is also provided in regulation 3 to ensure that the use of the terms "occasional licence" and "protection order" are consistent with their meaning in the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996.

Now that the technical overview has been provided, I very much look forward to hearing Members' comments. I commend the regulations to the Assembly.

Mrs Little Pengelly (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance): The Minister has outlined that this statutory rule is being made under powers conferred by the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.

I will speak first in my role as Chairperson of the Finance Committee. At the end, I will make some remarks, although they are not particularly controversial, in my role as a DUP member of that Committee.

The purpose of the statutory rule is to enable the Department to provide that the current relief may, in cases prescribed in the regulations, be increased from 80% to 100% of normal rates under article 31. As outlined, the changes are as a result of the Rates (Amendment) Act, which received Royal Assent shortly before the end of the last mandate. If I recall correctly — those who were Members in the last mandate will also recall this — there was some controversy around the private Member's Bill and some concern that the measures would not be taken forward. I am glad that the Minister has continued the work of the previous DUP Finance Ministers in examining and bringing forward this very welcome relief for amateur sports clubs.

At its meeting on 14 September, the Committee considered the policy proposals and questioned the departmental official on certain aspects of the proposed rule. One of the issues of interest was the occasional licence. Members were particularly concerned to make sure that the purpose of the relief, which is to help amateur sports clubs, would not have the indirect or unintended consequence of supporting what were, effectively, commercial hospitality businesses. We were satisfied, after listening to the official's evidence, that that would not be the case. In response, the departmental official highlighted that the proposal under the rule was to strike a balance. He highlighted that, as clarified during the Department's consultation, the policy would align with the treatment of community halls and that any further reduction under article 31 would be conditional on a community amateur sports club not being a licensed premises and on it being registered within the meaning of section 658(6) of the Corporation Tax Act. Members welcomed that clarification and were content on that basis. Following consideration of the policy proposals and the statutory rule, the Committee recommended, at its meeting on 28 September, that, subject to the report by the Examiner of Statutory Rules, the rule be affirmed by the Assembly.

The rating system here in Northern Ireland requires reform. We have had some discussions already with the Department and the Minister in that regard. I know that all members of the Committee have a determination to do what we can to listen to the concerns of businesses in relation to business rates and make sensible recommendations on a system that is fair and equitable and which encourages business growth. The Committee will look forward to considering the wider review of

the non-domestic rating system, which the Minister is considering at this time.

Today is a good news day for amateur sports clubs. I know that they will welcome this much-needed relief. Many amateur sports clubs are very small, so it can be very difficult in terms of fundraising. I know that it will also be welcomed by the many thousands of volunteers who help out at those amateur sports clubs and donate their time to the local community for the benefit of it. In relation to the rules being considered today, I am pleased to say that the Committee for Finance and I support the motion.

Mr Smith: I welcome the rates reduction. Thank you, Minister, for taking it forward. When it came in front of the Finance Committee, as the Chair commented, it was universally supported. The only concern, and the Chair mentioned this, was the issue around the growing list of reliefs. I know that you are taking that forward now in terms of looking at the non-domestic rate in the round. That will be an opportunity to look at all reliefs and make a judgement on them in terms of what we need to bring in to fund government services here.

I think that there is universal support for this issue. I add my support to it.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Minister. I support the proposal before us today. It is very welcome news for amateur sports clubs. I will err on the side of caution; without putting words into Mr Smith's mouth, we had a statement this morning from the Health Minister outlining her vision for our health service over the next 10 years, in which she quite rightly pointed out the severe financial pressures that our health service is currently under and will continue to be under in future.

It is always welcome to be able to stand up as an elected representative and cut a tax policy, but it is also important that we remind ourselves that we have to bring in tax revenue — in this case, rates — to pay for our public services. On this occasion, considering that we are giving a tax exemption to sports clubs, which, in turn, promote health and well-being, this is a useful exercise today.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for his announcement. Will he clarify — I am sure that he knows what I am going to ask next — that this will apply 100% rate relief to pigeon clubs? It was a very welcome introduction when he brought it about in October, and his predecessor had gotten into quite a flap about it. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Ó Muilleoir: It would be cuckoo not to include our friends in the pigeon-racing fraternity. *[Laughter.]* I thank Mr Swann for bringing me down to Cullybackey and introducing me to people who are involved in a community amateur sports club. They show the positive benefits that community amateur sports have on the community for health, well-being and community solidarity.

I thank all Members who contributed to the debate. I take on board very seriously the point raised by the Chairwoman of the Committee and Philip Smith that we need to make sure that we are not in any way creating a situation that will make it more difficult for businesses in the hospitality sector to do well. Mr Wells mentioned golf clubs, and we may return to that in the future. I think that we have struck the correct balance. We are giving help to community amateur sports clubs that do not have bars, and they will get 100% relief. I think that that is right.

I will finish with a point that John O'Dowd made. This will cost us and our community £750,000, and it is the right decision. Given the positive impact that community amateur sports clubs have on community and society, the benefits are boundless. At the same time, someone has to take up that slack. We are transferring that over to all ratepayers. With regard to what Mr Smith and Mr O'Dowd said, we need to find a way to bring in more money in the time ahead. It is wonderful to be popular and to relieve clubs or other bodies of a rate burden — in this case, I am pleased that we can introduce 100% rate relief for community amateur sports clubs — but we will have to knuckle down and find ways to bring in more money. I hope that people are as positive when I come to the House suggesting ways to bring in more money to provide services to our community as they are today.

I agree with the Chairwoman that this is a good news day, from the First Step Stimulus package this morning to sorting out and giving additional support to our community amateur sports clubs.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Rates (Increased Reduction for Recreational Hereditaments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 be affirmed.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I think that I was supposed to say, "I ask Members to support the measure, and I commend the regulations to the Assembly".

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): We have it on record now.

Private Members' Business

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

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

Mr Storey: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises to the economy of Northern Ireland; recognises their resilience in the face of many challenges; believes that many small and medium-sized enterprises are not realising their growth and development potential; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to ensure that the economic strategy supports small and medium-sized enterprises that want to grow.

There can be no doubt that small and medium-sized enterprises make an invaluable contribution to the economic prosperity of Northern Ireland. SMEs, as they have become known — I include the self-employed in their number — provide 75% of employment and 75% of turnover through the way in which they operate in Northern Ireland. They also contribute 81% of gross value added (GVA) in Northern Ireland's private sector. They employ more people than Northern Ireland's large companies and the public sector combined. What we are discussing here this evening is, therefore, a very significant sector of employment in Northern Ireland. "The Times' business supplement recently said that the importance of SME business to the UK economy could not be overstated. They account for over 99% of private sector business in the UK and employ over 15 million people.

4.30 pm

The results and findings of research carried out by the Ulster University SME centre and the business school on behalf of the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) make for interesting reading. Before I delve a little more into those figures, I want to place on record our appreciation and thanks for the work that the FSB carries out on our behalf and that of its members in Northern Ireland. We are pleased that representatives from the FSB have joined us in the Public Gallery today. For their work and representations on behalf of 6,000 local members — there are 170,000 across the UK — we owe them a debt of gratitude. We thank them for what they do, and we join them in their mission of supporting smaller businesses to achieve their ambitions, which is desirable.

I am glad that the House will not divide on the motion, which is welcome because it is important that we do not. We have often seen parties — we can be as guilty of it as any other party; we are not puerile about these things — take the opportunity to play politics. Today, however, we are talking about people's livelihoods, about businesses and about organisations that, day and daily, make a contribution to the society that we all value.

You might ask why the motion focuses specifically and exclusively on SMEs. The answer, in many ways, is simple yet challenging. Northern Ireland is a small-business

economy, yet it is huge in its achievement and success. We have only to look at some of our successes as a small region of the United Kingdom. Earlier, the Minister was able to confirm a 9.5% growth in exports — the largest in the United Kingdom. That says something about the resilience, tenacity and expertise of our business community.

The research that I mentioned, carried out by Ulster University on behalf of FSB, indicates that over 120,000 businesses in the SME sector currently operate in Northern Ireland. As I have already stated, they account for 75% of the turnover and employment in our private sector. That is significantly more than is the case for the UK as a whole, where the turnover share is less than 50% and the employment share is in the region of 60%. It was also interesting to note from the research that SMEs buy more of their labour and materials from the local economy than larger firms. That is another example of the way in which they make an invaluable contribution to our communities. The SME sector provides 81% of the private sector non-financial GVA or nearly half of the total GVA of Northern Ireland.

Not only are SMEs economically important but it has been stated in some of the FSB documentation that, socially, they play an important role. They make a substantial contribution to the sociocultural fabric of our communities. As Members, we can all think of companies in our constituencies, and where would we be if we did not have those companies or the impact they have not only economically but socially through the employment of local staff and engaging with schools, engaging with colleges and engaging with community organisations?

Obviously, the economic climate that our SMEs operate in is important. There have been encouraging elements, such as the improvement in the labour market, with over 41,000 net additional jobs created since 2012. There are now almost 30,000 fewer people claiming unemployment benefit compared with the previous peak in February 2013. The latest Northern Ireland composite economic index, which was released a few days ago on 13 October, shows that economic activity increased by 1% over the quarter to June 2016 and by 1.6% over the year. The top three SME industries by numbers of businesses in Northern Ireland were construction at 21%, agriculture at 15% and wholesale and retail at 10%.

Before I deal with the challenges — there are challenges — I take the opportunity to mention two companies in my constituency, which, given that they started with very small enterprise, deserve to be mentioned. I am referring to, as I have done previously in the House, Christies Direct in Ballymoney, which is now a global player in the dog-grooming industry. A statistic that blew my mind when we visited the company a few weeks ago was that the company, which is based in Ballymoney, was started by Colin Christie and his wife and now employs some 50 people, has the second most visited website in the world for those products. It is second only to Walmart. For a company based in Ballymoney that started out of a grooming business that looked after cattle going to the Balmoral show, it is something to see that business operate today.

Of course, we have McAuley Engineering as well. It started with a loan to Jonathan McAuley from his father of £1,800. His late father, whom I knew well, Albert McAuley, a man of huge integrity, said to Jonathan, "Now, see what you

can do with that". Last year, Jonathan's company recorded a turnover in excess of £10 million. That is within a very short time, somewhere in the region of seven or eight years. That is an indication of the calibre of what we have in Northern Ireland and what we can do despite all the challenges. I put it on record for those companies — there are many others — that they are valued and that we appreciate them.

While there has been much said about small businesses, we need to put it on record that help has been given. Sometimes we say we need more and more, and, yes, we could always do with more. However, help is being given to the sector by Invest NI, the Department, the new councils through the enterprise awareness that they are taking up, social entrepreneurship, Invest NI overseas events, the trade links the Minister for the Economy mentioned and the accelerator plan for trade and investment. All those things are important.

In the couple of minutes I have left, I want to say that there are also challenges. What are those challenges? Those challenges were clearly set out by the FSB when, over a period of time, it published a number of documents. Those documents gave us a concise view of the challenges, which include regulation, access to finance and planning. It is shameful that a large construction industry, a homebuilding organisation —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Storey: — in Northern Ireland, told us recently at an event in the House that it has 700 homes in the planning process, with some having been in that process for between seven and nine years. I think, Mr Deputy Speaker —

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

Mr Storey: — that has to come to an end. I commend the motion to the House, and I trust that Members will support small business.

Ms Archibald: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion, which, of course, I am supporting. The contribution of SMEs to the economy of the North is well recognised. To underpin economic growth, we need to grow our private sector, and, with more than 99% of our private sector businesses being SMEs, enabling the growth and development of the SME sector will be vital. SMEs, as Mr Storey pointed out, account for some 75% of private sector turnover and 75% of employment and will be responsible for 89% of new job creation in the private sector up to 2018. All of that highlights the importance of the sector to our economy.

The SME sector, like every other, has faced difficulties over the past number of years. As well as an annual decline in the number of businesses registered here since 2009, there has been a marginal decline in the percentage of total turnover to the SME sector. Political and economic uncertainties, skills shortages and access to finance and marketing have been highlighted as barriers to growth for local companies. Mr Storey also outlined some other challenges. There is a direct correlation between innovation, exports and skills and productivity, growth and sustainable job creation. Many of those can be tackled with strategic measures aimed at the SME sector.

A couple of weeks ago, we discussed the importance of exports, but enabling businesses to grow also means investing in support for R&D and innovation. Improvements in protocols and new product development are important steps in enabling business development, and those can be addressed through financial support measures and access to expertise or consultants. There are programmes already in place in this regard. It is important, however, that those are continued and expanded on and that businesses and individuals are made aware of the opportunities available to them.

Skills cut across many sectors, from hospitality to retail and from engineering to trades such as construction. We need to ensure that the curriculum offered addresses the skills need and, more importantly, that our young people are encouraged to pursue the types of career pathways that will provide a skilled workforce into the future. That may mean an attitudinal change on behalf of parents and teachers alike to enlighten young people about the variety of opportunities available to them.

PwC client experience of small local companies indicates that businesses that have experienced growth are more likely and willing to engage in upscaling. Some 73% of businesses here are sole traders, so even taking on one employee is growing their business. Scaling up of businesses is something that we will need to focus on. Mr Storey said that we will need to help businesses realise their ambitions. It is important that businesses be empowered to be ambitious, that they have access to finance opportunities and that the policy framework for, for example, business rates is conducive to expansion. We need to encourage more businesses to want to grow. Encouraging an entrepreneurial spirit is one thing, but putting in place the practical measures and support to make it happen is key. It includes a need to have adequate infrastructure in place right across the North, with road networks, broadband, mobile phone networks and access to energy supply.

We are facing uncertain times as a result of the EU referendum, so it is even more important that SMEs and other businesses be offered reassurance in ways in which that can be offered. Obviously, global economic factors are outside our control, but we must do all that we can to ensure that our SMEs are as efficient and competitive as possible.

Prior to being elected, I was a research scientist working in horticultural research, specifically in applied mushroom research. I had the privilege of working with mushroom growers the length of the country. As you may know, the Irish mushroom industry is being decimated as a result of the plummet in the value of sterling. The Irish mushroom industry, North and South, had become very much streamlined over the past 20 years or so, and those who remained in it are hard-working, dedicated professionals who have embraced new technologies and innovation. They are the epitome of the type of entrepreneur that we need to be encouraging. However, they work in an industry of very tight margins, and it is an industry that is strongly interdependent, North and South. Businesses are under pressure right across the country. The current economic climate is such that it is making some of their businesses unviable, and that is deeply concerning. It serves as a reminder for us of the need to work towards political and economic stability where possible, and also of the need for us to ensure fairness throughout our supply chains.

It also shows the challenges that we may face over the next months and years as the outworkings of the EU referendum unfold, and we will need to be champions of our businesses —

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

Ms Archibald: — and work to create a climate that embraces and supports economic development.

4.45 pm

Mr Aiken: I rise, as every Member of this Assembly should, to support this motion. Northern Ireland is, above all, an economy built on our small and medium-sized companies, farms, independent traders and the self-employed. The SME sector, as has already been pointed out, employs more people than all the large firms and the public sector combined. SMEs comprise over three quarters of all public-sector turnover. The sector, above all, is innovative, is ambitious and has vision. According to a recent Federation of Small Business survey, 80% of SMEs are looking to grow.

So how can we help them to grow further? There are three key areas that we can put forward to help this vital sector. First, taking a leaf out of the Economy Minister's Germany visit, let us listen to the sector, the unions, the key business groups and, indeed, the DUP's Conservative partners. Let us create an all-embracing manufacturing strategy that addresses the impediments to all businesses. Businesses that need a proper, cross-cutting government approach that cuts out red tape. Let us reduce the cost of doing business. Let us do things like protecting small business rates relief, and let us sort out, as Mr Storey said, once and for all, our sclerotic planning process. Our best should not be 54 weeks but, rather, the 11 to 12 weeks that the leading council areas in England have.

We also urgently need to investigate the cost of logistics in Northern Ireland; the cost of sea freight, which is some of the most expensive in Europe; the cost of air travel and the state of our roads. I, along with the FSB, chambers of commerce, NIIRTA, the CBI and virtually everybody else, with the exception of the Infrastructure Minister, would like to see some of that £77.5 million that the Finance Minister identified today going towards the York Street interchange.

Secondly, we need to encourage our banks to pass on the quantitative easing that they have received and make bank lending affordable and accessible again to our SMEs. The Government must have a role in encouraging improved access to responsible borrowing, but they should also ensure that the SME sector is not penalised and disincentivised by some of the many predatory debt-recovery actions that are state subsidised and that largely state-owned banks have in the past followed.

Finally, it should be a matter of great regret for us to say this, but we should also take the lead in making sure that we encourage prompt payment to all our small and medium-sized businesses. It should be a matter of shame that some of the worst payers are our own Departments and councils. Indeed, whilst many companies have to build in 90-day payment receipts to large multinationals, it is ridiculous that we, including, I dare say, many of the Executive Departments, are taking more than 90 days to pay. I call on the Minister to publish all the payment guidelines for all our Departments and shame those that

pay beyond the 30-day mark, and he should let us know how many of our companies are still waiting on payment 30, 60 and 90 days beyond.

I believe that, if we, in supporting this motion, were to follow the above three key points, we would be able to offer practical support for all our SMEs.

Ms S Bradley: As the economy spokesperson for the SDLP, I, like others, am pleased to support this motion. Like the mover of the motion, I pay tribute to the FSB, which has been very helpful, not just in presenting information to us but in Committee. It certainly has its finger on the pulse when it comes to small and medium-sized enterprises in Northern Ireland.

Rather than regurgitate the points that have been well made about how significant SMEs are in Northern Ireland, and in the interest of moving the debate on, I will look at the barriers to growth that have been expressed to us and that I have heard about through my work when speaking with businesses — views that have been reinforced by the presentations from the FSB. Some of those are, as we have already outlined, planning, the rating system, access to finance, access to broadband, corporation tax, VAT, labour, bureaucracy and red tape etc. It goes on.

Another statistic that jumped out at me was that smaller businesses with fewer than 10 employees are not really offered the level of support that is given to larger businesses, and that is because they are not considered to be high-growth firms.

In many of those small businesses, the owner is the senior management team, the HR team, the finance department, the IT department, and they answer the phone before sweeping the floor on their way out. Those businesses also need our support. There is an opportunity here for us to really reach out to them and accommodate and recognise the difficulty that they have with their time. So, it is about looking at growth but making a very real package that will deliver and resonate with such small businesses. If any strategy is serious about encouraging growth, it would reach out and be cognisant of that fact.

We have to then look at the wider context. I will visit my constituency in South Down, as other Members have done in their constituencies. When we look at the potential for growth we see that there is a very obvious need as the tourism sector in South Down has yet to be fully tapped into. We need to encourage the Executive to come out of silos because it takes that economic ambition and vision to recognise where the potential growth is in particular areas. It would be difficult then to brush aside such significant projects as the Narrow Water bridge, which, no doubt, would bring tourism opportunities to South Down. In the construction of the bridge, we would be looking at the building sector as well. So, we must commit and we must show that the breadth of our vision goes wider than simply looking at a document that does not resonate and does not reflect what is happening on the ground.

The SDLP had put forward an amendment to the motion, and I think that it was simply to frame it in the context of the possibility of Brexit. We must consider that for any growth. We will very quickly look at the topic of sending our goods elsewhere and at exporting our goods, and, difficult as it may be for some, we must embrace the fact that Brexit has its problems. There are potential problems not just for growth; businesses at this moment in time may

be considering exporting but may put that decision on hold. Many have told us that they are reluctant to make decisions because there are so many question marks and so many unanswered questions. Based on this, it is difficult, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises, to make the decision to go ahead and embrace the export market. It is something that we should all encourage them to do and try to set out that pathway in a way that they can embrace it fully and confidently consider the way forward. That said, I welcome the motion as it is presented, but I think that we missed an opportunity to widen it.

In summary, the Executive expressed their concerns earlier today that the Opposition tended to fret a little. I can assure the Minister that as a member of the Opposition, I never believed that he would bring forward an economic strategy —

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

Ms S Bradley: — that did not support small businesses and medium-sized enterprises. So, perhaps, he could reassure his own party colleagues not to fret.

Mr Lunn: As somebody who ran a small business for over 25 years, I am very pleased to contribute to the debate. I agree with Mervyn Storey and others straight away that the contribution of small businesses and the FSB in this country has been enormous and always will be, because Northern Ireland is an entrepreneurial place where people like to set up a business. That is why we have so many small businesses.

The motion refers to the economic strategy and the necessity for that strategy to support SMEs that want to grow. I do not know any that want to shrink, frankly, or stay the same size, but if they do, they will not last long, because growth is everything these days. The FSB reckons that 80% of its members are committed to growth, which is the way that it should be.

The current economic strategy dates from 2012. It was published by Arlene Foster as Enterprise Minister. It has a vision that effectively encourages private sector companies to compete in global markets. It is very export orientated, which, frankly, brings in Brexit again because the situation around exporting may or may not become more difficult in years to come. The strategy notes the key drivers of innovation; research and development; skills; growth; exports; and infrastructure. It also notes the key sectors: business services; financial services; creative industries; tourism; social economy; and rural economy. I cannot help but smile when it notes that reform of the common agricultural policy will generate further opportunities for the agri-food sector — oh dear, oh dear. All those sectors offer opportunities for SMEs to prosper, and many have done so. Indeed, as Mr Storey pointed out, some of our best businesses started off as one-man bands, including Almac, Norbrook, Wrightbus, which I am surprised that he did not mention, and FG Wilson. I cannot really mention Norbrook without a shudder because we turned down insurance business from it when it was a one-man band; I cannot believe it. McAleer and Rushe is another one. I will move on.

SMEs can grow in various ways, whether through finding a good product, securing good contracts or innovation. More often than not, they prosper as part of the supply chain for bigger companies. Therefore, the more major contracts

that come out of Departments or elsewhere, the better for SMEs. There are Executive delays such as with water infrastructure, Desertcreat, the Maze, John Lewis and, looming now, the York Street interchange. Let us see what happens with that. There are planning difficulties; Mr Storey mentioned one. We in Lisburn council have just completed a planning application for a golf course and a luxury hotel. It is a £60 million investment into that area, and it has taken 14 years — 14 years — to get it through the planning process. It is not quite there yet because the Planning Appeals Commission may yet have something to say about it.

I hope that I do not sound too much like a Brexiteer, but bureaucracy and regulation also eat up time and resources. It is a problem that, to my mind, is far more onerous on small businesses than on bigger ones, which have the capacity to deal with European and UK regulations. Somebody said that Invest NI currently seems to have a focus on high-growth companies with more than 10 employees. That excludes 95% of all Northern Ireland businesses, which is the percentage with fewer than 10 employees. I appreciate that there have been set-up schemes and encouragement schemes such as Go For It, Horizon 2020 and all the rest of it. If the new economic strategy is to improve on the old one, a greater emphasis on the needs of the vast majority of companies in Northern Ireland, which are small and medium-sized enterprises, would be appreciated. We need to change the focus slightly to an emphasis on supporting smaller firms that show promise and give them every encouragement because it is the best sector that we have. We will support the motion.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion. There is no doubt that small and medium-sized businesses are the backbone of our economy: 98% of all firms here are seen as SMEs. Our SMEs have the ability to create the employment and wealth that is required to transform and rebalance the Northern Ireland economy. As I think has been said, it is estimated that 95% of firms here have fewer than nine employees, so it is crucial that we do what we can to encourage and support growth. Small business owners are at the centre of our communities, where they live, work and invest funding and their time. Exports provide a real opportunity for small businesses to grow and be more competitive, and that reinforces the need for businesses to be ambitious and work in partnership with bodies like Invest NI in order to grow their export base and potential new markets. There is evidence that small businesses that export are more likely to survive, grow, prosper and innovate.

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

Great opportunities exist for our SMEs through online sales, which gives them a platform to compete globally. One of our local SMEs is Chain Reaction, a cycle supplier. In fact, I used to buy parts for my son's mountain bike from that company. It has now expanded its business and been very successful throughout the world selling cycles and cycle parts.

5.00 pm

Banks also need to play a role in supporting our businesses by having in place the right conditions for loans and business support programmes for ambitious businesses seeking to grow and expand. Challenges exist in growing

and developing our local businesses. One of the major challenges is rates, and I am sure that every MLA is aware of it. We really need to address the issue of business rates, which continue to restrict business growth and cause real challenges for businesses across Northern Ireland, including those in our town centres. I look forward to hearing more from the Finance Minister about the ongoing review of the non-domestic rating system. I welcome his recent positive comments in the Chamber that he is listening to small business owners and will take into account the need for realistic rating valuations on SMEs.

On the previous Enterprise Committee and through the life of the current Economy Committee, we have regularly visited SMEs across Northern Ireland. Time and time again, they talk about how energy costs are one of the biggest challenges for them. I know that the Minister will continue to work with suppliers, the Utility Regulator and other key players to ensure that we do all that we can to reduce energy costs for our businesses. Red tape and over-regulation are also regularly cited as challenges for our SMEs. Invest NI must support our SMEs by reducing and not adding to the complex regulations that exist.

It is worth pointing out that 70% of our manufacturing is carried out outside Belfast, much of it by our SMEs. That shows that a regional spread exists. It also highlights the need for the right infrastructure of good road networks, rail links, ports and telecommunications. It is crucial that our economic strategy supports our SMEs and encourages innovation and research and development to increase the confidence and skills of entrepreneurs and business start-ups. Our 11 councils, with their increased economic development role, must continue to boost business as they work with Invest NI to develop strategic plans. The Signal Centre, based in Ards and North Down, deserves recognition for the work that it has done over many years in supporting our local businesses. There is also a key role for our schools, colleges and universities in encouraging STEM subjects and developing sustainable apprenticeship programmes for our young people. That can benefit not only our businesses but, most importantly, our valuable young people.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: There is a mobile phone going off in the Chamber, so I ask Members to check their mobiles.

Mr Maskey: I support the motion. The tenor of the debate has been almost a love-in, especially compared with previous Assembly debates. I almost feel the need to throw in a discordant note to bring us back on track, but, thankfully, I will not have to. It is a very important message for the local business community, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, that there will be no Division in the House today. That shows that all the parties and Members are very much at one not only in recognising local small and medium-sized businesses but in understanding the need to give them whatever support we can, especially in times of uncertainty. It is important that we speak with one voice in the House today, and the local business community will very much welcome that.

As Gordon Dunne referred to, small businesses are often the heartbeat of our communities. They usually offer not only a very important service but a smiling face. Some are even the local font of all knowledge as they seem to be able to pass a lot of information back and forth within the community and their customer base. They are a very

important aspect of our communities and are at the heart of many.

Mervyn Storey, when moving the motion, outlined the various statistics, which we must all take on board when developing our strategies, and Sinéad mentioned that in relation to the economic development strategy. It is important that we recognise the importance of the statistics and that they tell us that local small and medium-sized businesses are the mainstay of our economy and, as such, need our support.

My colleague Caoimhe Archibald and others referred to some of the challenges and difficulties that our businesses suffer. We all know the challenges that many of our local businesses face, including rates, digital connectivity costs, staff costs, pension contributions and, more recently, training costs and all the other overheads in running a business in uncertain times. It is fair to say that there are supports that we can give other than money, as we all know from our constituencies.

I urge all the Departments and the statutory bodies to consider the local business community in particular when they carry out public works. Again and again, we see works being carried out that cause disruption. Obviously, for the most part, when that disruption is finished, there is a much better product left for the local community to benefit from. However, while the works are going on, if they are not coordinated between the various bodies, people can suffer unnecessarily. We see that time and again. I use this afternoon's debate as an opportunity to ask the various government bodies to continue looking at their work schedules so that they can coordinate them with each other to minimise the disruption in communities.

In my constituency, on the greater Andersonstown Road, we have all seen in the last couple of days that the project for Casement Park has been relaunched. Hopefully, that will take a successful course in the time ahead. In that locality, you have the works planned for Casement Park, the new leisure centre to be built by the City Council next door and the public works associated with the rapid transit initiative. That adds up to over £100 million of public money being spent in that area, so it is important that the work is coordinated in a way that minimises the disruption to the local business community and the wider local community and allows the business community in particular to pick up the benefit of all of that work when it is completed. It is a massive amount of public investment, and it needs to have a wider and greater benefit in the long run.

There are also important opportunities for local businesses, and I refer to the business improvement districts (BIDS) legislation, which was passed in the last mandate. It is interesting that people in a lot of local businesses I have spoken to recently have not even heard of that legislation. Just for the record, it is legislation that allows a local business community to come together to plan for new initiatives to draw more people to local businesses. That includes everything from clean-ups to traffic management to shopfront uplifts and all the rest. Again, I appeal to the business community to examine the BIDS legislation as an opportunity.

I want to make my last comments on the social enterprise sector, which is a very important and growing sector that provides a public service, job opportunities and social benefits.

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

Mr Maskey: I urge the local business community and the local community and voluntary sector, for example, to look at the social enterprise sector, a sector that I look forward to working with in the coming mandate to develop business opportunities.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr T Buchanan: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. Having, for many years, been in the construction industry and run my own small business, I find that it lies close to my heart. It is important that the Assembly takes the time today to recognise the value of SMEs to our economy.

It is a well-established fact that the Northern Ireland economy relies heavily on the small business sector; indeed, it has been mentioned that it is the bedrock of our economy. I think that we all agree with that. In rural constituencies, they are better known as "home-grown businesses". In my constituency of West Tyrone, that sector has been the lifeblood of the rural communities. We have seen, especially in the engineering and construction industries, that such businesses have been responsible for the employment of many people in rural areas from the time they leave school until retirement age. We have seen family businesses and how they have sprung up. That seed has flourished, and many of those businesses have grown into substantial enterprises.

As we come to this debate, we do well to look at the important role that SMEs play in the growth of our economy. I know that this has been mentioned before, but a wee bit of repetition on the issue will do no harm.

Northern Ireland, although a small region, has the highest number of SMEs of all the regions throughout the UK. Although 98% of those employ fewer than 20 people, they nevertheless provide essential employment in our communities. It is worth noting that our SMEs provide 75% of all the private sector jobs and employ more people than the large businesses and the entire public sector combined. The SMEs have proven, without a shadow of a doubt, that they have the ability to create the employment and wealth required to transform and rebalance the Northern Ireland economy.

However, there are also challenges faced by the small business sector. I will mention some of them, because, sometimes, these are the issues that we do not want to face up to: the challenges that are facing businesses. If we want to help small businesses to grow, we need to do what we can in our power to break down the barriers that are a hindrance to their growth. Owing to the circumstances of the past few years, although SMEs were resilient to the many challenges that they faced, a number of them went to the wall, unfortunately. Those that were able to sail on through or hold on, now that we are out the other side, are beginning to rebuild. We must endeavour to remove, where possible, any barriers that are a hindrance to our SMEs going forward.

The business school of the University of Ulster, in a recent study, identified a number of barriers to the growth of our SMEs, including bureaucracy and the regulatory burden. The impact assessments for SMEs tend to be inconsistent, and regulation is not properly targeted, with the result that

it is an added cost to and financial burden on our small businesses.

Again, as my colleague mentioned, business rates is another issue. When we go to meetings with small businesses, business rates is one of the issues at the top of their agenda. My colleague Sammy Wilson introduced the small business rate relief scheme when he was Finance Minister. That has been of benefit to many small businesses throughout the sector over the years. That is perhaps something that needs to be looked at, in order to see whether something more can be done.

Another barrier to the growth of small businesses is the cash-flow problems that they face. A lot of that is down to public bodies not releasing payments within the 30-day period. Again, that might be something that we can look at and do something about.

Another issue that was mentioned is planning.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr T Buchanan: Planning is a serious issue that is holding back the growth of our SMEs, and it is something that we need to look at. I support the motion.

Mr Chambers: I am one of the few Members to speak on the motion who has earned a living from running a small business that has, for over 40 years, provided gainful employment for many others. It is opportune for me to confirm my already-declared interest.

My business has grown over the years owing to personal and family investments and sacrifices that have improved business capacity, with staff enjoying the benefits and job security that that growth has created. That type of personal investment and commitment is replicated every day right across the SME sector by operators remortgaging their home or using retirement savings or borrowings to improve or sustain their operation. The growth of our SMEs has been achieved despite the ever-increasing bureaucratic demands from statutory agencies that take more and more time and resources to deal with. Those demands can be a distraction from using innovation and business experience to grow sales, profit and, more importantly, employment opportunities. Oppressive red tape and a lack of official support for SMEs in surmounting the obstacles sometimes presented, for instance, by complicated planning regulations, which have already been referred to, can prove demotivating for new and existing entrepreneurs.

Some years ago, I was part of a local government fact-finding visit to Prince William County in the state of Virginia in the USA. Indeed, Dr Farry was part of that same visit. We called at a business park, under the auspices of their economic development team. It informed us that it could deliver all permissions, including planning authority, within 28 days of a formal approach by a new business. Business investors in Northern Ireland would drool at that prospect. Why can we not be as slick?

5.15 pm

Another initiative that we witnessed in the USA was in Virginia Beach, which was twinned with North Down Borough Council through Sister Cities International. It had its own version of Invest Northern Ireland, working with huge success in attracting large international investors. However, it also concentrated on what it called economic

gardening, whereby it successfully encouraged and nurtured the growth of its existing small and medium-sized businesses. Volunteers with a deep sense of civic obligation and skills in accountancy, product development and other varied management areas were recruited. Small companies with issues or which might be in short-term difficulty or which lacked the know-how to grow were allocated a suitable mentor. This process actually worked and is an idea that our colleagues in local government here might explore or develop.

My party will support the motion, as we fully recognise and appreciate the range and number of jobs created by SMEs across many sectors of our economy. They generate export income, contribute taxes and collect PAYE on behalf of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. In the retail sector, they act as tax collectors of VAT, which is an additional unpaid burden. We must also acknowledge the contribution of the hospitality trade and the many arms of our tourism industry. The commitment of the farming community, with all the physical risks involved in its industry, is something that needs to be placed on record.

However, I am slightly disappointed with the rather weak wording of the DUP motion. It talks about the challenges, with little in the way of practical encouragement or solutions for struggling small businesses. It does not mention the biggest challenge faced by our SMEs in recent years that Brexit is presenting to us.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Chambers: Yes.

Mr Storey: We tried to avoid the situation where this became a debate about Brexit. Does the Member not also recognise that, if we want to dismantle the regulatory burden on our businesses, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do it in a way that would benefit them? One of the biggest problems we have had has been the imposition of European red tape?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr Chambers: I await the outcome of all that with interest, but it is a fact that Brexit is, and is going to be, a challenge.

In calling for the Minister to ensure that the economic strategy supports SMEs that want to grow, I would expect, as Ms Bradley said, that he is already doing so. In conclusion, I would have liked the motion to have put a bit more meat on the bones, but I have no difficulty in supporting it.

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): I welcome this debate and the opportunity to respond to the motion. Before I begin, I want to put on record once again how immensely proud I am of so many of our local businesses here in Northern Ireland. Across Northern Ireland, we have almost 125,000 businesses, the vast majority of which employ fewer than 250 employees. In fact, 70% of our private sector workforce is employed in small and medium-sized businesses, and 99.9% of Northern Ireland's business base is SMEs. As clichéd as it perhaps sounds, it is fair to say that SMEs form the backbone of our economy.

As part of my plan to make Northern Ireland more competitive, I am determined that we should continue to place a strong emphasis on encouraging local firms to grow. I am encouraged by statistics that show one in five

businesses in Northern Ireland having experienced high growth in the period between 2012 and 2015. This is great news but no real surprise. In Northern Ireland, we have numerous examples of small local companies that have grown to become world leaders — companies such as Randox, Almac and Kainos.

Randox, formed back in 1982 by its current managing director, Dr Peter FitzGerald, is exactly the sort of success story that we should hold up as an example to SMEs across Northern Ireland. Beginning with a team of six employees, the company started out in a henhouse, before relocating to larger premises in an apple store, which has since been converted to house the business's international headquarters. Now, Randox is a global leader in healthcare diagnostics, employing more than 1,400 employees across 145 countries and producing one in 10 of all cholesterol tests used worldwide.

I want to see more businesses follow the excellent example of Randox.

Part of my role involves travelling to other regions of the world in an attempt to attract inward investment as well as tourists. Northern Ireland needs to be outward looking and not afraid to learn from what others are doing well, understanding why they succeed and learning lessons for Northern Ireland.

As Mr Aiken mentioned, I recently visited the North Rhine-Westphalia region of Germany to look at their Mittelstand. The Mittelstand is the name given to the large group of small and medium-sized enterprises that drive the success of the German economy and are characterised by innovation, exports and growth. Our impression of the German economy is, perhaps, dominated by big-brand names like BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Bosch, but recent analysis by the German Savings Banks Association shows that it is the SMEs of the Mittelstand that are outperforming the country's largest companies in profitability. Mid-sized manufacturing firms like those that I visited make a huge, almost disproportionate contribution to the German economy. They account for an estimated 52% of Germany's economic output, employ 60% of all employees, and generate approximately €3 trillion in turnover annually. The Mittelstand is also incredibly innovative and plays a central role in the education and training system. Its success is something that we should seek to emulate here in Northern Ireland.

Although it is clear that the German economy is very different to ours in many ways, I firmly believe that there are similarities between our SMEs and the Mittelstand that we can learn from. One that stands out is that 95% of German businesses are family owned, with many Mittelstand companies under their fourth, fifth or sixth generation of family ownership and control. There is clear evidence from Germany that businesses can remain in family hands — a common characteristic in Northern Ireland — and still grow and make a greater contribution to the local economy.

We can learn much from the German model. SMEs have always played an important role in our economy and we should be proud that more small firms in Northern Ireland generate £1 million in revenues within their first three years in business than anywhere else in the UK. That is why I want to encourage even more businesses to start up in the years ahead, and why the Executive are investing in the

skills and infrastructure that enable small and medium-sized enterprises to prosper.

A key challenge for SMEs is ensuring that they can reach their full potential. Large firms matter in small, advanced economies like ours. They provide critical mass, scale and specialisation that might be difficult to generate otherwise. Growing our businesses is, therefore, a priority. The profile of businesses in Northern Ireland shows that the vast majority, 89.2%, have fewer than nine employees, and only 2% have more than 50. Encouraging more companies in Northern Ireland to scale up and achieve high growth is, therefore, a key element in creating more employment opportunities.

Critical Power Systems Ltd is a wonderful illustration of exactly this. This Newry-based business recently announced that it was to invest £2 million and create 47 jobs with £345,000 worth of support from Invest Northern Ireland. It is a great example of an ambitious start-up company taking advantage of the manufacturing and engineering skills available locally to support its growth. Another great example is local firm Dunbia. With Dunbia, the Dobson brothers have grown their business from a small butcher's shop near Dungannon in 1979 to one of the biggest meat processors in the United Kingdom, exporting to over 30 markets and employing around 4,000 people.

In order to help more firms to grow, Invest NI is working on an ambitious new business growth initiative to help to support the scaling up of high-growth-potential Northern Ireland businesses. In the weeks ahead, I intend to outline how we hope to scale up more of our small and medium-sized enterprises in their turnover, employment levels and exports. Invest NI's growth and scaling division already focuses on providing intensive and bespoke support for SMEs with the greatest growth potential. A key characteristic of such businesses is the high ambition of the entrepreneur and a long-term commitment to invest and resource the business to drive growth. Invest NI support for scaling and pre-scaling businesses involves assistance with innovation, skills and trade development, and is tailored to address specific barriers to growth faced by each business. It is this type of intensive, wraparound support for our highest-growth-potential businesses that I want to see us amplify and accelerate in our new business growth initiative.

The ability to access finance, an issue raised by many Members during the debate, remains an important issue for business. Accessing appropriate and timely finance can be critical to business growth. In recognition of this, my Department, in conjunction with Invest NI, continues to take forward a number of initiatives to address this issue for businesses. This includes making available £170 million across a suite of funds to help to support businesses. In addition, we have engaged with the British Business Bank to ensure that its range of funding instruments are operating effectively and being promoted widely in Northern Ireland.

Transforming Northern Ireland into a globally competitive economy will require considerable effort on many fronts. My Department is working hard at refreshing and renewing our economic strategy. In essence, it will be the road map that will, I hope, lead us to a time when Northern Ireland is once again punching above its weight on the international economic stage. It is my intention that the new economic strategy will be bold and ambitious, and outline a vision of

how our economy will look in 2030 and beyond. We have come through the downturn and made significant strides forward in rebalancing our economy, so we now have the opportunity to push ahead and put in place a plan that will transform our economy for the better.

I want to ensure that we have the best possible business environment for start-up companies. I want more women starting up on their own. I want to ensure that we provide the appropriate help, support and advice to allow small companies to expand their businesses. This is a priority for me, my Department, Invest NI and the Executive. Indeed, in the last five years, up to 2015-16, Invest NI offered support of over £260 million to local small and medium-sized enterprises. That support helped to promote approximately 21,500 new jobs and resulted in total investment of approximately £1.25 billion.

I want an economy where an increasing number of businesses realise their high growth potential and scale up from small to medium-sized businesses, employing more people in the process; an economy where entrepreneurship and enterprise is endemic and reflected in a growing status as a start-up nation; an economy where innovation is embedded in the DNA of every company, irrespective of its size; an economy where our people possess the skills that they need to improve their lives; an economy where more of our companies have an international outlook and export goods, products and services outside our region; an economy where government works tirelessly to put in place the financial, infrastructural and policy support to ensure that our economy thrives; an economy where we build industries on the back of where we are genuinely world-class in academic research; and, above all, an economy that works for everyone.

I believe that a real opportunity now exists to transform our economy. We have come through one of the worst recessions on record and are now on the path of constant improvement, growing in size and rebalancing from public-sector-led growth to private sector-led growth. Some, perhaps, have the impression that my Department is focused more on attracting inward investment than on growing our indigenous businesses. That is not the case, and it never was. Both are incredibly important to the future growth of our economy. That is why our new economic strategy will focus strongly on making Northern Ireland the top United Kingdom region for attracting foreign direct investment, and it will also include a suite of supports, policies and interventions aimed at helping our SMEs and, most importantly, aiding them to fulfil their potential.

I have found today's debate to be useful and informative, and I have no hesitation at all in supporting the motion.

Mr Lyons: For some people, 2016 has been a very strange year with a lot of strange things happening. Here we have it yet again. The House is united and, not only that, it is because of Mervyn Storey. It is probably the first time that that has happened in a long time.

I welcome the very positive tone of the debate, and I thank Members for their contributions. We have brought this debate and others to the Floor because we want to have a positive debate and a positive influence on the economic strategy. First, we had a general debate on the economic strategy, and we have since had a debate on exports. We specifically wanted to bring this debate to the Floor so that we could impress on the Minister the importance of

growing our small companies and expanding our small and medium-sized enterprises into larger ones. We also want to identify the challenges and make sure that we are making the most of the opportunities. This has been an important debate, and it is important that we contribute to it.

5.30 pm

I want to put it on the record that there have been a lot of complaints from the smaller parties in the House about their speaking time and how they are not able to contribute to debates. The TUV, the Green Party and the socialists are not here. We probably have room for four or five more Back-Bench contributions, but they have not turned up. It is important to put it on the record that those who ask for more speaking time should turn up when they have the opportunity to do so. I do not know whether they do not care or simply do not work after 5.00 pm. We will leave that to them to answer. This is an important debate, and I do not want to repeat —

Mr Attwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyons: I am happy to give way to the Member.

Mr Attwood: If the Member now supports the principle that smaller parties should have the opportunity to contribute, even if they do not take it up, will his party at the next meeting of the Business Committee therefore support a proposal from the SDLP, Alliance and Ulster Unionists to build into the structures of debates more opportunity for smaller parties to participate?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call the Member, I ask you to come back to the debate in question. The debate is about small and medium-sized enterprises.

Mr Lyons: Absolutely. What I will say is that they should take up the speaking time available to them now rather than asking for more. However, I will come straight back to the debate before I incur the wrath of the Principal Deputy Speaker.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask Gordon Lyons to come back to the debate. You have an extra minute because you took an intervention.

Mr Lyons: Thank you very much. A number of issues have been raised, and I do not want to repeat them. I thank the FSB for the work that it has done. I do not run a small business, but I am sure that those who do will be able to say how important the FSB is to them. Certainly, it has been helpful to us as elected representatives — I think that others will agree — in bringing the issues to our attention and helping us with briefings. We thank the FSB for the contribution that it has made.

The same issues come up time and time again, and I do not want to rehash them. However, as the Minister knows, I have raised the broadband issue with him frequently. Broadband is essential to growing our smaller enterprises. There are some real challenges with broadband, and it is important that we address them. That is especially true for smaller businesses in rural areas that are even more dependent on the Internet for communication, placing orders and all the other things that are necessary if a business is not only to be sustainable but to grow. We impress on the Minister the need for improved broadband, and we know that he is dealing with that. Other infrastructure issues need to be highlighted, such as

energy and problems with the grid. I know that the Minister is taking action to address them.

There is one other thing that has not been mentioned during the debate that I very much want to welcome, and that is the Government's decision today to proceed with a third runway at Heathrow. That is critical not just for London and the south-east but for all parts of the UK. In Northern Ireland, in particular, we need to make sure that we are properly connected, and that connectivity can help all our businesses and our economy as a whole.

We discussed exports more fully in a previous debate, and it is important that we help businesses to export.

The whole business of rates has been touched on. It is important to note the success — Members will know of this — of the small business rate relief scheme. We all know of many individual companies and businesses in our constituencies that have been saved by that relief and have been able to keep going only because of the relief that is available. We want to make sure that it continues to be there for them.

The issue of planning was raised frequently. It is important that we have a planning system that is responsive to the needs of the local economy. I hope that other Members will join me in impressing on councils the importance of speeding up the planning process. On that point, I give way to Mr Storey.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. I would like to add that there are issues with procurement. The current Minister, who is, like me, a former Finance Minister, will recognise the challenges in the procurement process, which has become very bureaucratic and burdensome to small business in particular. There are serious issues with the procurement process, and it needs considerable work to make it fit for purpose.

Mr Lyons: I agree with the Member and not only in terms of Departments but in terms of councils. In fact, just this past weekend, someone from the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council part of my constituency came to me wanting to know what the procedure was in that council because they were looking to tender for work and did not have the opportunity to do that. It is important that local companies know the policies that are in place and how they can avail themselves of them.

Mr Attwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyons: I will give way to Mr Attwood.

Mr Attwood: Just to interrogate that last point a bit further, is it not curious to criticise the procurement provisions in Northern Ireland — I agree with the criticism — when actually, for the last 10 years, the Finance brief was held by the DUP, which was responsible for CPD? Do not take the prompt from the Minister; answer yourself. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Lyons: I can answer it. First of all, I am not in charge of the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, which was the one that I was referring to, but, as the Minister has pointed out, a lot of the procurement and regulation issues have come from the European Union. I know that the Members in that corner of the House do not like any criticism of Europe, so I will move on.

I will say just a few things about other Members' comments. I thank Mervyn Storey for being the great uniter of the House this afternoon. He mentioned some of

the good news stories in his constituency, dog grooming in particular. We are glad to hear about that. Caoimhe Archibald mentioned the need to be ambitious. That is a very important point. We are ambitious in Northern Ireland, and we realise the potential that we have. Steve Aiken mentioned our Conservative partners. That was an attempt to forget the past. We will work with this Government and any Government: it does not mean that we will be in an electoral pact with the Conservative Party. He did make important points on planning and prompt payments.

Sinead Bradley was able to wait three minutes and 16 seconds into her speech before she mentioned Brexit. I congratulate her for the self-restraint that she showed on that. I am also glad that she has such confidence in the Minister for the Economy, as she said that she knew that he would be doing absolutely all that he could to help small businesses. Trevor Lunn mentioned some of the poor decisions that he has made when he has been involved in business in the past. I agree with what he said on planning. I do not know all the ins and outs of the planning application that he mentioned, but it is important that things are not left in the system for years and years on end. Gordon Dunne mentioned the importance of exports and, of course, mentioned local companies. It is important that we help small businesses to export in that way because exporting helps them to grow.

Alex Maskey talked about a love-in. I do not think that that is the word that I would use about the debate. He mentioned the important opportunities that can come, especially from the BIDs legislation. That is something that we want everyone to be aware of. Tom Buchanan mentioned the need for us to face the challenges that come, the importance of helping business and, in particular, cash flow. Alan Chambers told us a little of his biography and, indeed, of some of the junkets that he was on while he was on North Down council. I am sure — *[Interruption.]* A junket is any trip that I am not on. It is important to build relationships with other people.

I know that my time is running out. Finally, I want to commend the Minister on what he said about the need to target specific —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Can the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Lyons: — companies and areas of growth. It is important that we do that. We should not have a scattergun approach. Let us help SMEs to grow so that we can build a stronger —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Lyons: — economy for all.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises to the economy of Northern Ireland; recognises their resilience in the face of many challenges; believes that many small and medium-sized enterprises are not realising their growth and development potential; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to ensure that the economic strategy supports small and medium-sized enterprises that want to grow.

Education Services: Partnership Working

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

Ms J McCann: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the value of partnership working between schools and community services, including the role that this can play in increasing educational achievement for pupils; and calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that adequate resources are invested in developing and expanding such services.

It almost feels as though we have been here before. We had an Adjournment debate recently on a similar topic, but this is a wider debate that, hopefully, other Members will get the chance to come in on. It is a very important area of work. There were a lot of good contributions from other Members in the Adjournment debate about education services in West Belfast several weeks ago. I hope that it will be the same tonight.

There is nothing more precious than our children and young people. Their health and education are probably two of the most important services that we, as parents and wider society, want the best from for them. Whatever life choices our children make or whatever career paths they choose to follow, it is essential that we give them access to the best educational opportunities that we can and provide them with the skills to equip them for whatever they face during their lifetime. Education and our experience of it, from nursery school right through to higher education, can present us with positive experiences and, unfortunately, some very negative ones. It offers us opportunities that we might not ordinarily have access to. Those very formative years are crucial to unlocking the potential in every child. We as policymakers, along with parents, teachers and all other stakeholders, have to ensure that all our children have equal access to educational opportunities and that they are all treated the same.

In the Adjournment debate that I mentioned earlier, I talked about a recent piece of research titled 'School Inspection in a Polycentric Context', which was launched in the Long Gallery. I apologise to the Members who were there for that debate, but I am going to make some points that I feel are very important to make. It was commissioned by the West Belfast Partnership Board and carried out by a group of academics from Dublin City University (DCU). The main message in the report was that schools on their own can reach only a certain level of attainment but that results can increase substantially when they work in partnership with other schools, teachers, local community-based services and parents. It had a particular focus on members of the area learning community of West Belfast, but there were four case studies, some of which happened in Europe, including in Bulgaria. I will repeat those achievements, because, as I say, they are very important. There was an increase of 11.4% in pupils in West Belfast achieving five GCSE grades from A* to C from 2011 to 2015. There was a 12.3% increase in pupils achieving five GCSEs, including maths and English, from 2013 to 2015. That differential was even greater for those pupils achieving seven GCSE

grades from A* to C, including maths and English, with an increase of 12.7% over the past four years.

When we look at pupils eligible for free school meals, increases in GCSE attainment levels were even better. In 2015, there was a 15% increase in students eligible for free school meals achieving seven or more GCSEs, including maths and English, at grades A* to C in 2015 compared with 2013. I am sure that Members will agree that those are really outstanding achievements for the young people of an area of social and economic deprivation. It is the worst constituency across the North. When we look at those results and the better outcomes for children and young people, we see that intervention and support programmes delivered in a partnership approach work.

It is also worth remembering that schools are only part of a child's education. We need to educate our children for life. It is not just about what they learn in school, it is also the influences of family and the wider community that are very important.

5.45 pm

I want to emphasise the importance of involving parents in children's education. For early years development in particular, the importance of family and parental engagement that looks at developing increased aspirations for the child is also very important. As parents, it is very important that we instil that type of aspiration in our children and young people.

We need to recognise the importance of community-based services such as extended-schools programmes and Sure Start. I do not want to leave anyone out, but I want to mention homework clubs, breakfast clubs and those types of full-service community schools, where support can be accessed either in the school setting or outside, in wider community-based provision. That is also very important. You have heard me speak about community-based education before in other debates, and I have also heard other Members support it. It is very important that we give the choice to people to have that community-based education.

There are also huge benefits when a school partners up with a local community in the sharing of provision. Again, we see that working with sporting facilities in schools when school halls are made available to local community providers, including many of the youth organisations. Unfortunately, I still believe that we see far too many schools closed in the evenings and at weekends. I want to commend St Mary's University College, in my constituency, which opens its doors for all sorts of events for community organisations and, in particular, the West Belfast Partnership Board's programmes. They have an Easter school and a summer school, where young people can have extra tuition for their GCSEs. I think that is another part of why we are seeing the attainment levels going up.

The rise in educational achievement of our children and young people is, of course, only one part of the story. The entitlement framework was introduced to give a better choice of subjects to young people, especially those who want to go down the vocational route. All Members will be aware that all children are different and all children want to take different career paths. Some might want to choose an academic path, some might want to choose a different path. It is important that, no matter what journey they travel on or road they take, we have that opportunity open to

them and they have the choice to take whatever path they choose.

That brings me to alternative education projects; they are very important. Not all our children and young people are suited to education in schools. We need to look at how we develop and grow alternative education projects. From my own experience of knowing young people who have gone through some of those projects, in some cases, it has taken those young people away from alcohol abuse, drug abuse and even suicidal thoughts. I want to commend the people who run some of those alternative education projects that are based in the community.

Earlier today, we heard the Health Minister give a very positive statement to the Assembly on what she wants to see as the direction of travel for health and social care. I welcome her statement. In particular, I welcome her and her Department's commitment to programmes such as the early intervention transformation programme, which sees the Department of Health, the Department of Education and the Department for Communities all working together to find ways of intervening early in the lives of children to improve their educational outcomes. This is key to making the difference and giving all our children and young people the best start in life, not just for their educational outcomes but their health outcomes and all those other best outcomes that we want for our children.

Tackling health inequalities, poverty and deprivation are key areas that we need to focus on if we are to remove the barriers to equality of opportunity in education that our children face. Supporting families outside of school and providing support inside the school, through the nurture units provision that are there, and hopefully will be developed, is crucial.

To conclude, I hope that Members will support the motion and that the Minister will ensure that adequate resources are put into developing the services. We have had some very positive engagement already, and the Minister has seen at first hand some of the working in partnership with the community-based services in schools with teachers and parents. I hope that we all come together and support this motion tonight.

Lord Morrow: I do not think there is anyone in the House today who will oppose the motion, although we will wait and see. It seems to be a day of unity, with us all singing and dancing from the same hymn sheet. I think this follows on in that mode. I do not think anyone would oppose any steps or procedures that help our children and young people achieve their full potential, so we will certainly not divide the House on the motion.

I have no doubt that the Minister is committed to developing and expanding services. He said that in a previous debate, and it is on record, so I think we come to that position today with the Minister's blessing. I look forward to him responding to this when it is his turn to speak. It should, of course, be noted that he is on record as stating that his priority in education is to ensure that all children and young people, whatever their circumstances or background, achieve their full potential. However, I sometimes feel that not enough emphasis is placed on the parental role. That role cannot be overemphasised, and young people and children could, in some cases, even get more support from parents. After all, children are only under the influence of educators and schools for part of

the day. Parents and guardians perhaps could and should be encouraged in every way possible to do even more for their offspring.

A mainstream school, of course, is the best place for the vast majority of children and young people to achieve, but I recognise that some pupils and young people arrive with unusual circumstances and complex needs. There are many reasons why that may be the case — family circumstances, often; emotional and mental well-being; and trauma, to name but a few. It is cases such as these that require professional expertise from education authorities and other support, as stated in the motion. However, closer attention should be paid to continuing the ethos of learning in the family home or unit. I am a strong believer in that. It cannot be a matter for education services alone. Children and young people need the support, guidance and encouragement of their parents and guardians. It is essential to the overall development of the child or young person.

Many of us in the House are parents and are fully aware of the pressures, requirements, demands and commitments that that brings. Others will have known additional pressures with children and young people who have particular issues and challenges, requiring even more devotion and determined nurturing to ensure that the very best potential was achieved. That was our role, and we did it because we wanted to ensure the best outcomes for our children and young people.

The Minister is investing significant sums in partnership with other agencies — he is on record as saying that — including Sure Start, nurture provision and the Delivering Social Change early intervention programme, as well as the childcare and support programme. That is the right thing to do, as many of us are aware of the work that many of those groups do. When I was in Social Development early this year, I had the opportunity of directing £800,000 to women's centres across the Province that provide valuable childcare provision. I acknowledged that there was a gap in funding and was determined to address it, and I did.

Prior to this year, the per pupil funding rate for external alternative education provision (AEP) in Belfast has been static at £9,000 per pupil for some time. Again, I am looking at Hansard and quoting from the Minister in the past:

“The EA has advised that the AEPs have never questioned this amount or requested higher levels of funding, since they were historically very successful in accessing funding from other sources. However, in the current financial climate, of course, this is no longer the case, as the Education Authority is aware that several previously reliable funding sources for the sector will not be able to assist them in this financial year.”

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

Lord Morrow: I heard what you said, Principal Deputy Speaker, and I suspect that you are asking me to stop. There is much more I would like to and could say, but we will support the motion in principle.

Mrs Overend: As the Ulster Unionist education spokesperson, I am pleased to participate in the debate. I thank the Member for West Belfast for raising the issue.

All our children and young people deserve an education system that is tailored to their needs, abilities and potential. Our teachers and other education providers work very hard within the parameters and boundaries they are given to provide the best education they can for the children in their classroom, their school and the local area. However, 18 years after responsibility for education was devolved to Stormont, report after report has highlighted the problem of educational underachievement in Northern Ireland. Put simply, far too many of our young people enter the world of work without the basic skills in reading and writing needed to succeed in life. In addition, the data available on educational underachievement point, year after year, to the same socio-economic groups suffering the most, yet Minister after Minister has failed to come up with the goods to deal with that situation effectively. The Minister might say, “Until now”, but we will hear what he has to say.

Catholic girls continue to outperform Protestant boys consistently and significantly, and there is wide variation in the performance of students by school type, with just over 5% of grammar school leavers failing to achieve at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and maths; that compares with almost 60% of their non-grammar counterparts. That means that four out of every 10 pupils attending our secondary schools leave education without what are seen as key employability qualifications. Most worrying of all is the gap in attainment for those entitled to free school meals — a proxy for poverty — with a significantly higher proportion of students with entitlement to free school meals leaving school without achieving any GCSEs at all. It is for those reasons, along with countless others, that partnership between schools and community services is fundamental to ensuring that the needs of all our young people are met.

One of the first visits I made after I was elected to this place was to a school in Belfast — it may have been in west Belfast — that had families graduating from a Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme, a programme initiated by Save the Children that brought parents into schools to help them to engage in their children's education, value its true worth and overcome any fears or problems they might have experienced in education. That, in turn, helped each child to work better at school and dedicate themselves to their education. I was totally impressed by that programme, and I know that it is duplicated by others in areas across Northern Ireland. It is certainly something that the Minister should support.

Given the parameters within which our schools are forced to operate, community services are often best placed to provide help and support to schools aimed at raising educational achievement; targeted health and support services for children, young people and families; family and parenting support; and community access to school facilities. The list goes on.

I support the motion, which calls on the Minister to:

“ensure adequate resources are invested in developing and expanding such services.”

However, it is also extremely important that schools can commit to working more in partnership with each other to share best practice, reduce the duplication of services and ensure that the needs of the entire community are met. That can often be extremely difficult for schools to achieve. In Northern Ireland, much like the rest of the UK, schools

are encouraged to be in competition, in the sense that they are measured against each other for the purposes of assessing quality and setting standards. Schools are forced to compete with each other to put children into seats, as that is how funding is allocated. In that context, there is a difficulty in asking schools to move from competition to cooperation.

We often hear the terms "competitive collaboration" and "collaborative competition" being thrown around, but, ultimately, it is very difficult for schools truly to collaborate when they operate in that way. Perhaps we could look at having a wider conversation in the future, and I am interested in hearing the Minister's thoughts on that.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring her remarks to a close?

6.00 pm

Mrs Overend: Unless the Minister is able or, more importantly, willing to tackle the high level of division and segregation in our education system, I fear that we will be unable to tackle any of these issues in a concrete way. I support the motion.

Mr Mullan: I begin by unashamedly suggesting that partnership working between schools and community services is invaluable in our children's education. Such links create immeasurable benefits for schoolchildren right across Northern Ireland, and I applaud the work of teachers and youth workers in creating and growing these links. The benefits to children that automatically flow from such endeavours are twofold: there is the obvious educational benefit, with services and programmes offered by community services that enhance learning in the classroom; and there are the social benefits to children who are involved in youth services from socialising with other children, often in a cross-community environment, and from learning key life skills through those services.

Jennifer McCann mentioned the wonderful work being carried out by the West Belfast Partnership Board, so I will not say anything further on that. It would, however, be very remiss of me not to mention a multimillion pound project currently in the pipeline in my East Derry constituency. I am sure that the Minister is aware of it. Limavady High School and St Mary's High School have taken the very brave step of joining together becoming connected by means of a unity bridge. I have no doubt that it will prove to be one of the finest examples of shared education in this country.

There can and will be progress and improvement in these networks of educational organisations and institutions across a whole range of areas, which it is impossible even to imagine any single organisation achieving on its own. The link between extracurricular involvement and academic success is heavily apparent. I encourage putting any resources that we can into growing and improving these links, particularly those that ensure that all of our children have equal opportunity and equal access to these services. It is vital that youth services across the North are expanded to increase the opportunity for children in all our schools.

Research shows that there can be many barriers to pupils realising their full potential and achieving what they deserve educationally: their gender; community background; whether they are in care; whether they are a member of the Travelling community; or even changing school mid-year can have a detrimental effect

on education and put children a step behind their peers before they even enter the classroom. The opportunities afforded to these children through community-based partnerships can be literally life-changing. They can mean the difference in students achieving GCSEs and whether or not a pupil reaches university, if they so desire. We have a duty and responsibility to ensure that all our children can avail themselves of these opportunities, so it is incredibly important that the Minister adequately resources and funds these programmes.

With such vital resources, it is imperative that proper measures and transparent protocols are in place to ensure that all bids for resources and investment opportunities are open and available to all community services in order to ensure that adequate and appropriate funding is awarded fairly and equally across Northern Ireland.

I welcome the motion and look forward to the delivery and enhancement of community services. It is important that we diversify the educational experience of our children. We must realise that learning is about more than the lessons learned in the classroom; it includes the social interactions, life skills and practical learnings that our community services can offer. With the increased integration of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) into mainstream schools, large proportions of children receiving free school meals and a substantial regional imbalance in educational outcomes and percentage of school-leavers achieving GCSEs, investment in community partnerships and educational programmes could transform our educational sector. We owe it to the current pupils in schools, and future generations, to protect and enhance the educational opportunities available to them.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this motion, to join colleagues in recognising the value of partnership working between schools and the community sector and the role that this plays in increasing educational achievement, and to support the calls that are being made on the Education Minister to adequately resource and develop expansion for these services.

I pay tribute to our schools and the community sector involved in education across Northern Ireland. They are playing a vital role in the development of our children and young people, at times within extremely constrained resources. I am sure they will welcome the additional £13 million that has been allocated today for minor works and the provision of equipment in their settings.

Nelson Mandela said that education is the most powerful weapon to change the world and that it is an engine room of personal development. I wholeheartedly agree with those sentiments and, indeed, with the well-known sentiment that it takes a village to raise a child. That goes to the heart of what is in the motion, and Alliance would have a vision of a fully integrated, world-class education system that supports equal opportunity for every person to fulfil their full potential.

We believe that it is fundamentally flawed to separate our education system on the basis of religion and, indeed, to have two unregulated tests to transfer young people in year 7 from a common curriculum to a common curriculum in years 8, 9 and 10. I welcome the inquiry that the Education Committee will undertake into educational achievement and post-primary transfer.

We believe that early years investment is vital to improve our education system. It is vital to have high-quality, accessible childcare and family support services that will be provided by our community and voluntary sector, at times in cooperation with local schools. We also believe that children with disabilities deserve equal opportunity in the provision of education.

It is vital that the curriculum is provided in partnership between schools and the community sector to ensure that our children and young people have as wide a range of academic and vocational options as possible and that there is linkage into further and higher education to ensure wide-ranging career pathways. Indeed, former Minister for Employment and Learning Stephen Farry set as a priority that there is parity of esteem for vocational pathways such as apprenticeships. I welcome the recent development of the engineering apprenticeship that sees young people, as early as 16, being able to enter into that engineering pathway as a result of good work done by the Institution of Civil Engineers. It is also vital that there are partnership approaches to ensure entrepreneurship and business skills education in our schools and, indeed, that computer programming skills are developed.

There is sound evidence for positive outcomes being achieved by the partnerships approach, and I welcome the comments that have been made about the West Belfast Partnership Board and the increase in attainment that it has achieved as a result of the partnership work in that area. That has indeed been recognised by DCU and the Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection.

There is increasing agreement that strong links between schools and communities will serve to improve educational outcomes in their area. Therefore, I am delighted to be involved in work with the EastSide Partnership, established to provide a strategic direction for cooperation between schools, the community and the business sector in east Belfast.

We have produced the EastSide Learning framework to run from 2015 to 2025, with five priority areas, which are raising aspiration; encouraging working in partnership, looking at whole-school and full-service models; early years development; valuing all —

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

Mr Lyttle: — educational pathways; and supporting sound area-based planning in our constituency.

Ms Lockhart: I support the motion. Schools very much remain a focal point in our community, and there is no doubt that they continue to be the heartbeat of our towns and villages. Traditionally, schools and educational establishments have been about one thing, and that has been educational achievement. Obviously, that is an important part of their overall objective. However, I believe that there is much more to schools and the role that they can play in the communities that they service. Community use of schools and community services connectivity is an area that I feel very passionate about, and there is no doubt that there is a further need to weave that type of connectivity into our overall educational policies and improve our linkages with the Department for Communities, as Lord Morrow said earlier.

We all know that there is a need to move away from duplication of services. I am therefore very supportive of

partnership working with councils, sports clubs, health services, youth initiatives and one of the fundamental link-ups that we have heard about in the Chamber, which is the business community. For too long, government has had silo working, and I am very much of the belief that the reshaping of our government gives us a real opportunity to rethink how we do things and how we get the best out of our schools. The quotation that jumps out at me is:

"If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got".

I feel that in this mandate there is a real desire to deliver. I therefore welcome the spirit of the motion today.

There is no doubt that we need real-world learning. The way in which to deliver that is to further integrate our schools into the community services that exist around them. That means making schools very much hubs not just for learning but for social interaction and lifelong learning. For example, in my constituency of Upper Bann, I speak to local businesses. I had a meeting with Moy Park recently at which I was told, "We cannot get the skills". There needs to be greater connectivity, and I know that the Education Minister, along with the Economy Minister, is very sympathetic to having a greater link-up between educational establishments, careers advisers and the business community, because, ultimately, we need to shape young people to suit the needs of our business community in the coming years.

There also needs to be better link-up around sports activities and sports clubs using our school facilities so as to avoid duplication. Again in my constituency, a great initiative has started where Glenavon Football Club is using the local Lurgan Junior High School as part of the training ground for its academy. That is a really practical way of opening up our schools to the community.

I have no doubt that school links in the community will improve educational achievement. I spoke to an educationalist recently, and he said that 30% of children's education is academic, while the rest is learning from their parents and from the community and businesses around them. I am therefore very supportive of that need for greater links.

Community service will allow for real-life application of learning. It will increase self-esteem, self-awareness and civic awareness for the children involved. The children and young people involved in community work can often obtain skills such as problem-solving. It can also better equip students for the world of work and make them more attractive to employers. It provides great networking options, and I have no doubt that it will bring learning beyond the classroom.

In summary, I am very supportive of schools entering into their community. I look at my own area, and I think that it is absolutely vital that the connectivity and the link up between schools and the community happens so that educational achievement can be enhanced through learning in the real world.

6.15 pm

Mr McElduff (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): Principal Deputy Speaker, I know that this debate has been on a subject close to your heart as a former Education Minister who initiated many community school partnership-type programmes under your

stewardship. In my role as Committee Chair, I want to say at the outset that the Committee does not yet have a formal position on the issues covered by the motion, but the debate has rightly focused, to some degree, on the achievements of existing partnership arrangements in a number of constituencies.

It is very positive to hear Members speak in such positive terms about initiatives and programmes in their constituencies. Jennifer McCann tabled the motion and spoke first, and I commend Jennifer for her commitment and her passion as a constituency MLA for West Belfast. Evidently, she is very proud of the achievements in her constituency, understandably and justifiably so, because, in an area of social deprivation, attainment levels are being raised in a very organised fashion and in a fashion that is very well supported by the local community. These achievements have attracted international attention. I know that Catherine Seeley intends to make that point.

Some weeks ago, the transferor representatives were present at the Education Committee. I thought that it was very positive that Chris Lyttle made reference to the EastSide Learning partnership and that there was a great appetite on the part of the transferors to look at the best-practice model coming out of west Belfast and support its application. In fairness to the Minister, in his time as a member of the Committee and as its Chair, he also showed a strong interest in the positive messages coming out of the West Belfast Partnership model.

Projects like extended schools and full-service schools have focused on key issues such as improving attendance. Attendance is a significant problem for non-selective schools, and all post-primaries with 90% or worse attendance are non-selective schools, often serving deprived areas. I think that that is why partnership working is absolutely essential. If it is achieving results in one area, it is right and proper for other areas to borrow and learn from this type of best practice.

A key Department of Education message in the last mandate and in the current mandate was and is the importance of family engagement in learning and education. The Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone Maurice Morrow made reference to the key role of parents, and he always emphasises that.

The Achieving Derry programme is a long-term sustained intervention to improve standards in schools by improved partnership between schools and voluntary and statutory bodies, including, for example, health bodies. Last week, I visited Sacred Heart College in Omagh informally, and I was very pleased to learn of the excellent work that is taking place there by staff who are domiciled or resident inside Sacred Heart College and who go out and about, interacting with the Sure Start programme and also working in neighbourhood renewal areas where the Sure Start programme does not reach. I think that really good work is taking place in Sacred Heart College in Omagh, and people like Mrs Marion Bradley and Mr Paddy McMahan, the youth tutors and mentors, are doing great work in a partnership way, out and about in the community. I want to emphasise that the Strule shared education campus in my constituency offers a unique and iconic opportunity to test out some of these projects. I will leave it at that.

Mrs Barton: The purpose of developing partnerships between schools and any organisation or service is always to improve outcomes for our young people through the synergic planning of our education services. The motion is one that I support wholeheartedly. I ask that the Minister pays particular attention to partnerships between schools and allied professionals in the health and social care sector. No longer can our education and health services work in silos. Young people must be given the joint support and opportunities that they need to achieve their educational goals and reach their full potential. Without good health and well-being, it is impossible for anyone, including our children and young people, to achieve their potential educationally. Whether it is eyesight tests being carried out by community nurses, dental services being made available in schools or the assessment of a child's psychological or social needs, the earlier that issues can be identified and worked on, the better it is for the child. Addressing health and social care needs equips children to make the most of their opportunities.

It is vital that educational psychologists, whether associated with education services or health services, are allowed to facilitate support for a child at as early an age as possible. In many cases, pupils are not referred for this kind of help until the end of Key Stage 1, even though they have presented earlier, whether for behavioural reasons or for other special educational needs. At that stage, it is often too late to minimise the impact on their education. I know that parents and teachers would welcome assessment earlier because, the earlier that support mechanisms can be put in place, the more pupils will enjoy and engage in their education. Teachers are dedicated, trained and committed professionals. However, they are not healthcare experts, particularly in mental health issues. While teachers can sometimes identify concerns in relation to a pupil's mental welfare, they must be supported in finding help for the pupils under their care to ensure that every child's needs are met. Working in partnership with an organisation such as the NSPCC would provide support in relation to teachers' concerns and could be available through a school counselling service one or more days per week.

It is our duty to make sure that, through partnership, we do everything to help our children achieve optimum results. Working in partnerships brings to bear the expertise of all kinds of professions in ensuring that our children have the best possible start in life. A school environment is a great one in which to compare a child's health and development, neither of which can be taken in isolation. Developing and expanding those partnerships will help contribute to the delivery of top-quality services. It would also give great comfort to parents and guardians who will know that their children have the support and guidance of people in a system who can look after their education and health needs from a number of perspectives.

In addition to partnerships with health and social care services that directly affect the health and well-being of our young people, there are partnerships that can have similar benefits such as sports and recreational and other extracurricular activities. By partnering with community services that specialise in those areas, schools and communities can ensure that all our young people, from preschool to sixth form, have a well-rounded educational experience and an opportunity to excel. While it is essential that adequate resources are put in place to

develop and expand partnerships and services, adequate resources must also be in place.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring her remarks to a close?

Mrs Barton: Yes. Partnerships must be analysed and assessed by specialists.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mrs Barton: I have great pleasure in supporting the motion.

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): I thank the Members who tabled the motion and all those who spoke in the debate. In case there is any doubt, I am happy to support the motion.

There has been a broad level of consensus. It has been a fairly wide-ranging debate, as is sometimes the case in education. The broad tone is to be welcomed, and we have had consensus around the Chamber. To take Mr Mullan's point, we almost have a bridge between the parties and maybe even between Government and Opposition. The only brief nightmare moment was when the Chair of the Committee indicated that he had "informally" got into school. I have nightmare visions of Barry McElduff disappearing into Sacred Heart College in a school uniform. He is maybe about the right size if not the right age for the post. That is about as acrimonious as it got.

The last contributor, Rosemary Barton, made a valid point on partnerships when she talked about outcomes. There is a wide range of partnerships, and I will try to touch on some of them. However, we all need to focus on the end point, which is the outcomes that are produced for children. In many ways, therefore, partnerships are very valuable, but, in and of themselves, they are a means to an end. As the proposer of the motion said, it is about ensuring that all our young children, regardless of where they come from or what their background is, unlock their full potential. That is important.

For the vast majority of young people, the essential involvement is in a mainstream school learning with their peers because there is a need for socialisation, where they have access to the full curriculum and personal development opportunities that all our schools can provide. As with other things, schools do not and cannot act in isolation. At times, pupils come with a range of needs because of their backgrounds. Some of those needs will be physical, and some will be emotional and mental health problems due to issues that they face. Community support can be extremely useful in all circumstances, but, for young people who have challenges in their life, it can be of particular importance.

Many schools have recognised the benefits of collaboration, whether that is between schools, within a sector, between sectors, between the community and business or between other groups. That is vital. When you get that cooperation, it can contribute to pupils leading happier, healthier and more productive lives.

Education other than at school (EOTAS) services, which support students with more complex needs, was not touched on. Older children can be involved in EOTAS placements. That can be a valuable bridge because it can also involve community-based EOTAS, which providers

can use to increase capacity and the overall flexibility of the services provided.

Crucially, a range of interventions can be made, and there is a key role for the community in that. Mention was made, particularly by the proposer, of nurture groups. The pilot programme was evaluated recently by Queen's University. I am committed to continuing to fund the 32 nurture groups, and, hopefully, that can be widened. Those groups have played a vital role, but it is not just about the impact that they have on individuals; they can have a strong impact on the whole school. Again, with nurture groups, it is not simply about what happens in a school; it is about wider community involvement.

Indeed, a number of Members who spoke, including the Chair and Lord Morrow, mentioned that there is also a key role for parents in nurture groups, insofar as they can help with some of the strategies. Nurture groups have also been able to build better links between families and community and voluntary groups. We also know that, when a community becomes involved with and supports local preschool, school and youth organisations, that can have a huge impact on the outcomes of the children in that community. Therefore, I encourage all communities to support their education and youth providers, and I encourage parents to become involved in their children's education. As the proposer, Lord Morrow and others said, that degree of parental involvement creates a culture of learning and a culture that values education, which is critical to have in the facilities and extends into lifelong learning.

6.30 pm

The Department will foster collaboration between schools through area learning communities, and it will encourage parental involvement. A wide range of support is given, be it through preschool education, the entitlement framework, extended-schools money, the full-service partner programmes that were mentioned, youth programmes, or guidance. When looking at underachievement, a lot of the focus is also on early intervention: Sure Start, nurture provision, the early intervention programme through Delivering Social Change; childcare; and other targeted support. This year, for example, about £10 million has been made available through the extended-schools programme to service some of our most disadvantaged communities, and two full-service programmes are being piloted in north and west Belfast. The evaluation of those programmes has highlighted a wide range of benefits.

This follows on from our debate on the community contribution and, indeed, the wider contribution in west Belfast. Two of the organisations mentioned in that debate, the West Belfast Partnership Board and the Greater Shankill Partnership Board, provide wraparound services that have had considerable success. Such interventions are wide-ranging. Yesterday, I had the opportunity to visit St Paul's Primary School, which is off the Falls Road. I saw a number of aspects, but one of the key things was seeing where there had been work between local business and the school to provide additional facilities. The school has an interactive wall, which takes interactive whiteboards to the next level. As somebody who is a little bit of a technophobe, I had to get the pupils to show me how it worked, but it was a very good example of the level of cooperation that is happening in our schools.

Mrs Overend referred to the collaboration between schools. In my experience, schools will, to a certain extent, compete for children, and some schools are more aggressive than others. However, it is very heartening to find that there is some shared responsibility. We have seen good sharing between schools, and that is developing and moving to a further level. That needs to continue not simply between schools in a particular area or schools in a particular sector but between schools in different sectors. That will be critical.

I want to turn to a few other points. Rosemary Barton made a very valuable point about allied health professionals. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act that went through in the latter stages of the last mandate will be backed up by regulations, and there is also the Children's Services Co-operation Act. It is vital, and I think that this is accepted, that all statutory assessments are done as quickly as possible and that there is more collaboration. Work between the Department of Education and the Department of Health is ongoing. That has been happening for some time, but it has been a little bit piecemeal until now, and it is an important driver.

I will touch on a few other aspects that came up in the debate. The proposer and Ms Lockhart mentioned sporting facilities. It struck me, and I think that this is very important, that, if you embed a school in a community, the opportunity for the school's sporting facilities to be used in the evenings is vital.

Another thing struck me during my travels around schools. Look at the school enhancement programmes (SEPs), particularly those that focus on sports facilities or have led to new developments within schools. If you go back a number of years, there was a mindset that schools — it was apparent even in their design — were like some sort of castles with their drawbridges up. That mentality has changed, and when I see new builds or school enhancement programmes, it is very noticeable that thought is given — it runs as a constant — to how facilities can be developed so that they are not used solely by the school but can have a wider community usage. It might be a case of having different gates, different access points or whatever, but a wide range of things are being done. When it comes to delivery, I would praise the work of the women's centres; Lord Morrow mentioned that. They have delivered on a range of activities, and I welcome the decision that he took in relation to that.

Carla Lockhart and Chris Lyttle mentioned the critical importance of vocational routes as we move ahead in tackling underachievement, and that is undoubtedly the case. There will be an opportunity during this Assembly mandate to look at the curriculum. It is vital that, while protecting people's academic chances, we focus on how we can increase vocational pathways.

Mrs Overend referred to the FAST programme, and I highlight again that that is something that is made available through extended-schools funding. It operates in Twinbrook in Holy Evangelists' Primary School, and it is a good example of that funding.

I see that time is marching on. Carla Lockhart highlighted very clearly that there is also a need to ensure that there are strong linkages between schools and the business community. I know that there is an appetite in the business community for that.

As partners, much has been done, but there is much more to be done. The motion mentions support for expanding services, and I am very happy to give as much support as I can. When it comes to the Budget for 2017-18, I hope that the Members opposite can have some influence on the Finance Minister. I know that he is always very keen to be as accommodating as possible. The Budget is yet to be agreed, and I anticipate that we are still going to have a challenging Budget. I will always be arguing for additional funds for education, but this is where there are opportunities as well as challenges. At times when we are facing a level of austerity, it is important that with whatever investment is there, whether it is in education or any other area, we get the maximum return for our investment and help turn the curve, as the saying goes, for so many children, families and communities.

While the constraints of budget, particularly in terms of extension, can be a major challenge and there will be a certain level of restraint, partnership working affords us with an opportunity to have new ways of looking at things. Sometimes, that is not simply about better delivery but about more efficient delivery.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for giving way. Does he agree that it is important that partnerships with communities and community groups can only truly be successful if there is complete transparency with regard to funding and safeguarding our children?

Mr Weir: Obviously, safeguarding is a sine qua non in that regard, and it permeates everything. In community development, particularly if we are looking to tackle educational underachievement, there are schemes that are brought from the grass roots up, such as those in west Belfast and on the Shankill. At times, there were attempts at government intervention years ago, which, because they were imposed down, did not take root in the community. However, where there is community buy-in, that is particularly important.

I am particularly committed to ensuring that we get that investment in early intervention, and a number of schemes have been put in place. The evidence that is being drawn from that will be critical as we move ahead. If we are looking to turn the curve and trying to make that particular intervention for many families, the status quo is not an option. Going forward, we need to look at things differently and use the data and evidence more effectively to prioritise investment.

I am committed to doing as much as I can, and I will also take on board all that has been said in this debate. All of us have a role to play in enhancing educational achievement, whether it is those of us in the Chamber or those of us in schools or community partnerships.

There can be positive links and this can be a win-win for everyone, so I am very happy to support the motion.

Ms Seeley: I welcome the positive comments from right across the Chamber and the cross-party support that the motion has received. I thank my party colleague for tabling it. I thank the Minister for being here with us this evening. I have to concur with his remarks about the height of my party colleague Barry McEluff.

On a more serious note, it is great to hear not only his support but a number of positive comments that inspire confidence, in particular those about the ongoing work on

assessments, and the cross-departmental work with the Department of Health on that.

I commend the efforts of the West Belfast Partnership Board, which is one of the reasons why we are debating this motion. My colleague Jennifer McCann is immensely proud of what has been achieved, and rightly so, when she was quoting figures such as 11.4% and 12.7% in GCSE A* to C attainment, including English and maths. She noted, and I concur, that schools are only part of a child's education. We need to educate our children for life, and I do not think that we can do that within the confines of the formal school setting.

I, too, have been impressed by what has been achieved in West Belfast, so much so that I recently tabled a question to the Education Minister to ask that he consider funding a similar project in my constituency of Upper Bann. I look forward to his response. I am sure that it will be very positive, as all his responses have been.

The face of education has transformed in recent years. I commend my party colleague John O'Dowd for responding to societal changes and how that has impacted on how we deliver education. Differentiation, the entitlement framework, increased access to vocational subjects, and the extended-schools programme are all a testament to that. I am confident that the current Education Minister will continue in that vein.

In spite of all of that and the sterling efforts of our dedicated and committed teachers, increased class sizes in an era of Tory austerity, red tape and admin demands have undoubtedly impacted most on those children from socially deprived backgrounds. They are the very children who need education the most in order to break out of the cycle of poverty and deprivation, particularly children on free school meals, as the Member from Mid Ulster mentioned.

Active learning has played a pivotal role in transforming the classroom environment. However, a classroom environment is not conducive to all. Children have different learning styles. Although many of those can be catered for within the school day, some children require additional and targeted support to reach their potential. We owe it to those children to explore opportunities for them outside the formal classroom setting.

To further that, as was stated by my party colleague, the 'School Inspection in a Polycentric Context' report in our packs — I thank the Research and Information Service for those packs — notes that some educationalists have concluded that, alone, our education system can do only so much to tackle underachievement. That has influenced the notion that schools may not be able to improve further when working in isolation. As such, the idea of linking schools with other stakeholders and networks has become more prevalent, further signalling that we need to move towards having a more joined-up approach if we are to support and motivate children and young people to achieve their full potential.

It is therefore vital that we come together to ensure that those children requiring extra support and encouragement to achieve receive it and that students at risk of low attainment or underachievement secure intervention in a timely and appropriate manner. An example of that working is in the report published by the Minister of Health today: partnership in education and health helping to raise attainment for looked-after children by achieving in Key

Stage 1 at level 2 or above a 7.5% increase in English and a 7% increase in maths.

Intervention, as mentioned by Rosemary Barton, a past teacher who has first-hand experience of the classroom, works best when it is done early and when a multi-agency approach takes place outside the formal classroom setting. I, too, have witnessed this as a teacher.

6.45 pm

The West Belfast Partnership has demonstrated what can be achieved when there is a coming together of minds. Any failure to replicate such a high level of success would be unforgivable. However, I am aware that the Minister has targeted resource and investment to advance this, though, at this stage, only in the Belfast area. I will do all in my power to persuade the Minister to deliver programmes similar to this across the North, particularly to my constituency of Upper Bann, where I believe they would be hugely impactful.

Many local authorities and schools are already exploring partnerships. Often, school principals and their staff are well ahead of the game, but we need to create the framework for strong and secure partnerships with a range of organisations in order to deliver a personalised learning experience for every child and young person. This must include, as has been stated, further education colleges, youth and social workers, health professionals, voluntary sector providers and training providers, including employers, as my Upper Bann colleague noted. Indeed, the Member from Fermanagh and South Tyrone mentioned parents. I have noted the positive impact that parental engagement can have on a young person. In fact, if a parent has engaged, the child's experience of education can be totally transformed.

I am glad that the Minister specifically mentioned education other than at school (EOTAS) and the sterling work that is going on there for our children with additional needs, including behavioural problems. This kind of joined-up approach will offer children the opportunity to grow, learn and develop into fully rounded individuals, moving focus beyond academia to incorporate spiritual, physical and mental development.

As Chris Lyttle said, it takes a village to educate a child, and I am also impressed that he was the Member today who quoted Nelson Mandela. Schools should open their doors to communities and parents. Schools alone should not have to shoulder the huge responsibility for tackling underachievement. The resource in our communities is too significant to ignore, but any embracement of this notion must receive endorsement from our Education Minister. It seems that we have achieved that endorsement today, and I encourage him therefore to replicate best practice in west Belfast and mirror it in schools across the North.

In addition, it is vital that our schools move from an era of competition to one of cooperation. Efforts around the achievement of the entitlement framework have demonstrated what can be achieved when we open our school doors to others. Sadly, this is not consistent across the North. Schools should not simply choose whether or not to open their doors to others; they should be obliged to do so.

I attended an event last week in which the Bulgarian inspectorate visited west Belfast as a result of a study

commissioned by Dublin City University. They were here to learn from us. It made me feel an immense sense of pride to have educational professionals from other countries visiting the North to learn from us, though I have to say that I was not surprised. Our education system is to be envied. It has evolved over time and adapted to the modern world, and we must continue in this vein. We have huge resource in our local communities, and it would be foolish to ignore that.

I want to mention my constituency of Upper Bann. Local community organisations, businesses and activists have played a valuable role. In our primary sector, the healthy kids initiative is developing young people physically, addressing obesity and improving mental well-being in partnership with local schools right across the borough. In the secondary sector, Spark Youth Club, which received a council award in its first year and is based in Lismore Comprehensive School, offers an opportunity for children and young people aged between 11 and 18 with additional educational needs to socialise and engage in an array of extracurricular activities. Their parents are also invited to the youth club, and that gives them an opportunity to engage with other parents in similar circumstances.

In many instances, it is already happening, but it must happen in all schools and all educational providers. So that they are fully developed and impactful, we must invest in and resource these partnerships.

I thank Members for remaining this evening for the debate. I thank Members from all parties for their support. I thank the Minister for his support. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the value of partnership working between schools and community services, including the role that this can play in increasing educational achievement for pupils; and calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that adequate resources are invested in developing and expanding such services.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Madam Principal Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

The Future of Movilla High School

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: In conjunction with the Business Committee, we have given leave to Mr Mike Nesbitt to raise the matter of the future of Movilla High School. The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes.

Mr Nesbitt: I rise in an exceptionally positive mood to move the Adjournment debate. I welcome colleagues from the Strangford constituency and our near neighbour and now Education Minister, Mr Peter Weir. I look forward to what he will have to say at the conclusion of the debate, as indeed will Movilla's stakeholders as they seek certainty on the school's future. I also want to make an early declaration of interest: I have the honour and pleasure of serving as a member of the board of governors at Movilla High. I believe that there is nothing more important to our society than accepting the challenge of providing good and appropriate education for our children. Let me declare at the outset my motivation in calling for the debate. It is entirely uncontroversial. It is more a plea for information and certainty than anything else.

By happy coincidence, the debate takes place on the night Movilla High stages its annual achievement awards event, but this will be no ordinary achievement night. This year has something exceptional to celebrate: the best set of GCSE results in Movilla's history. The previous best was in 2007, when 37% of pupils in the school achieved five GCSEs at grades A* to C. This year, however, Movilla came within an inch of 50%, and that success has echoed down the school corridors, adjusting attitudes and ambitions upwards and for the better. I hope that my Strangford MLA colleagues will join me in congratulating the pupils, the parents and wider family support groups, the school staff, teaching and non-teaching, and the governors. In particular, I applaud the staff and parent governors for their unstinting commitment and dedication.

The GCSE results merited a full-page spread in the 'Newtownards Chronicle', and I would like to read a couple of quotations into Hansard. Under the headline, "Best GCSE Results Ever at Movilla High", the reporter began with these words:

"A once struggling Newtownards secondary school on the turn-around has proved critics wrong with its best GCSE results ever".

Then, the head boy, Jack Hawthorne, who aspires to a career as an army officer, was quoted as saying:

"Movilla has been put down quite a lot in the papers, so it makes me really proud to show people what we can do. I believe that if it keeps going the way it has been, it will become a great school."

I invite Members to reflect on those words:

"a once struggling ... school on the turn-around".

The head boy, an ambitious man with a life plan, celebrating personal success yet focusing not on himself

but on the school, its achievements and its potential, and there is potential. After what nobody denies was a period that did not represent Movilla's finest hour, the school is improving. Movilla is indeed on the turn. There is new leadership, and I put on record my appreciation for Ian Bell, the new head teacher; the vice-principal, Simon Lemon; and indeed the entire staff, both teaching and support.

When I reported for my first board of governors meeting, what struck me was the passion being articulated for the school by the cleaning staff, who stopped me to tell me what was wrong with the school and how to fix it. People care about Movilla and are committed to its future. But you only fix with great leadership, so, again, I identify the work of Mr Bell, who has transformed Movilla in a manner I find reminiscent of how Ken Perry has transformed Dundonald High less than five miles away. Like Ken, Ian has his school's interests running through his veins.

There have been big changes at Movilla since the school was put into intervention by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Massive strides have been taken to address key areas of weakness. It is characteristic of all involved in Movilla that there is no attempt to turn a blind eye to the problems. Issues are acknowledged and analysed, and strategies are developed to fix the problem. The ETI has endorsed the direction of travel, as witnessed by its feedback from its interim visit earlier this month. Movilla's results from August now show that the school is close to hitting Department of Education benchmarking with targets that are appropriate for our free school meal band, which stands at 53.4%.

Those standards and achievements have been accompanied by a much better community profile. Again, nobody hides the fact that the school's standing within the community had dipped significantly for a number of historical reasons. That is also being addressed actively and vigorously, with the result that the school has seen an additional 15 pupils transfer into Movilla since 18 August. There are strong indications that Movilla is becoming a much more attractive proposition for prospective parents. That is the good news.

It is not all good news. The challenges were highlighted starkly in black and white with last week's publication of 'Providing Pathways: Draft Strategic Area Plan for School Provision 2017-2020'. The draft strategy states that the core purpose of area planning is to ensure a network of sustainable schools that are the right type, the right size and are located in the right place. The six criteria are quality educational experience; stable enrolment trends; sound financial position; strong leadership and management by the board of governors and principal; accessibility; and strong links with community.

I return to praise my colleagues on the board of governors of Movilla High School because, within a couple of days of the publication of the Minister's document, the board met to analyse the implications for the school. With no hint of sentimentality or special pleading, the senior staff and governors discussed a RAG assessment of the six criteria to determine which were red, amber or green. While we believe that we have some green indicators, we also have some amber, and there is no avoiding the fact that a sensible, realistic assessment of our financial position is red. That cannot be ignored. Indeed, it is not ignored by the school, nor, we realise, can it be ignored by the Minister, not when the pathways document makes clear

the number of post-primary schools that are operating in deficit and not when we also read that, by the financial year 2018-19, 97 of the current 197 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland will be in deficit. That is 49% of all post-primary schools, and that is not a picture of a sustainable future. What we seek for Newtownards is a sustainable post-primary non-selective school.

Here is the dilemma or, to look at it another way, the challenge. We cannot ask the Minister to sustain the deficit at Movilla, but we must accept that a town the size of Newtownards must offer citizens a non-selective post-primary option within walking distance. The school has been diligent in consulting its stakeholders on options that were provided by the Education Authority, but it also consulted on an option designed by Movilla itself. That is because the board sensed that none of the options articulated by the Education Authority represented the best fit. Movilla engaged stakeholders. Of the 119 responses received by 10 May, only 4% supported any of the options provided by the EA. The remaining 96% — 114 people — proposed a variation to the EA's option 4 — now commonly referred to by us as "4B" — whereby Movilla High School would close as an entity, but the school campus would continue under the management of Bangor Academy. Pupils applying to the academy whose addresses were closer to the Newtownards site would be educated there, with the exception of those with siblings already attending the Bangor campus. A common uniform would be designed, one on which the name of the campus could be recognised; for example, the name of the whole identity could be "The Academy", with the two sites identified as the Bangor and Newtownards campuses.

Respondents expressed concern regarding the original EA option 4, which would have condemned all Newtownards children and young people who did not attend Regent House School to be bussed out of town for their education. That clearly conflicts with the pathways document's stated purpose of sustainable schools of the right type and size in the right place.

All respondents felt that the loss of non-selective post-primary education to GCSE level from the town of Newtownards was unacceptable. Movilla believes that retaining a non-selective option in Newtownards while operating as part of the current Bangor Academy would quickly make a significant positive impact on enrolment.

7.00 pm

Other measures offer the prospect of making the Movilla campus more attractive. I have been working for some time with Ards Football Club to find a solution that will bring the club home to Newtownards. After a number of false starts that left the club still stranded in Bangor, we have identified that the old gravel playing fields at Movilla are a potential new home. It would be good not only for the football club and its supporters but for the school and the community. I have sensed in my soundings broad support for the proposal, which would give the pupils easy access to a 3G pitch and a smaller practice area. However, I recognise that the proposal is now in the planning process, that there may be a number of objections and that there are issues that the planners must satisfy themselves about, such as parking, noise and light pollution. I am confident that the football club has the answers, but that is for another day and another forum. In any case,

while sporting facilities may help, they are not the whole answer. Those who want the best education provision for the children of Newtownards seek answers and certainty this evening about Movilla's future. On that basis, I look forward to the Minister's comments.

There is uncertainty over the future of staff. I understand that the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE) does not apply to teaching staff. However, I also believe that it would be wrong to suggest that there is a major issue, given that the children will still need to be taught and encouraged to learn and the current staff are best placed and motivated to do that. The bigger concern is what might happen if the school came under the management and control of Bangor Academy without long-term guarantees. Could it make radical decisions and reverse the direction of travel so heavily endorsed in the consultation? Specifically, can the school and the town be assured that the post-primary non-selective offer in Newtownards will continue to cover Key Stages 3 and 4 for the next 10 years at least? There is real concern that there may be an underlying ambition to turn Movilla into a junior high for 11- to 14-year-olds. The clear will of the people is for provision from 11 to 16.

In summary, the school is, rightly, celebrating its best ever GCSE results tonight, but nobody is wearing blinkers about the future. The Minister's pathway document makes clear the challenges ahead. Among them is the financial position, which is not one that Movilla can address and fix on its own. We stand ready and willing to secure imaginative and sustainable solutions. We have identified the fix: an academy with a campus in Bangor and a smaller one in Ards that allows Newtownards schoolchildren aged 11 to 16 to walk to school, where they will find a campus staffed and resourced to offer excellence in education.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Simon Hamilton, who will have up to eight minutes.

Mr Hamilton: My constituency colleague Miss McIlveen and I first entered public service in, I think, 2005, when we were elected to Ards Borough Council. The future and sustainability of Movilla High School has been widely debated and discussed in the intervening years. In many respects, whilst I acknowledge and thank Mr Nesbitt for securing the debate, it is a great disappointment that we have to have it at all. If we were to step back and address the House not as Members wishing to defend public service provision in our constituency, the notion that any town anywhere in Northern Ireland with a population of around 30,000 would not have a non-selective secondary school would be laughed at or thought of as ridiculous. However, here we are, as we have been for 10-plus years, debating, discussing and considering what a viable future for Movilla High School might be. A town the size of Newtownards should be able, and it is well able, to sustain a non-selective secondary school.

In many ways, when we see the investment that there has been in other new educational infrastructure, not too far away from Newtownards, it is a disgrace — particularly in the context of the closure some years ago of Scrabo High School, which was partly to help Movilla to be sustainable in the longer term — that there has not been the commensurate investment in the infrastructure in Newtownards. Whilst it is not the whole answer to the problem, by any means, it could have helped in making the school sustainable in the longer term.

Those of us who represent the Strangford constituency are all well versed and very familiar with the many problems and issues that have beset Movilla High School over the last number of years. There is the fact that it had some 440 suspensions in the 2014-15 academic year. Attendance at the school is well below the Northern Ireland average. Attainment in English is 30% below the Northern Ireland average for similar schools, and in maths, the achievement is around 25% lower than the Northern Ireland average for similar schools.

It has had many changes of leadership over the last number of years. I acknowledge the new leadership in place and the good work that they are doing. Miss McIlveen informs me that the new deputy principal is someone who she used to teach. I am sure that has some bearing on the recent success, although she is too modest to say that herself. I am not sure how she feels about how old she is becoming given that the new deputy principal is somebody who she taught. I acknowledge and recognise the new leadership. I know Mr Bell, having been a former member of the board of governors at Movilla High School, and you would be hard-pressed to find somebody who is as committed to their school as Mr Bell.

It has had huge uncertainty, not least because of those changes in leadership. It has gone through some very well publicised controversies in recent times. They were well publicised in the media around the teacher strikes, assaults and so on, which did nothing for the reputation of the school or to attract new pupils to the school. As Mr Nesbitt mentioned, that all culminated in the school going into formal intervention in May 2014.

Over those 10 years or more, there have been many attempts — Mr Nesbitt referred to some them — to find viable solutions and ways forward for the school that would make it more sustainable in the longer term. One of the ideas that was put forward by the authorities at the time, the former South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB), probably in and around 2006 or 2007, was a suggestion that Donaghadee High School, which was not viable at the time, should be merged with Movilla and a new campus built. I hope that we do not look back with regret that that opportunity was not seized back in those days.

Whilst, of course, we are interested as Members who represent the Strangford constituency and the particular issues around Movilla, I do not think that we should take this problem and set it completely outside the wider education context. Yes, there are particular problems in Movilla, but it is part of a wider problem, particularly in respect of the attainment of young, Protestant, working-class boys in our education system. The Minister, I am sure, is well aware of the problems that that particular cohort of students faces and will wish, in his term in office, to come forward with some new ideas and innovative thoughts as to how those issues might be addressed.

There are glimmers of hope in the better exam results that Mr Nesbitt referred to, and that is good and encouraging. There are, of course, some examples from elsewhere. I think particularly of Ashfield Boys' High School, where there has been a turnaround and the seemingly impossible has been achieved. Even though the situation from some perspectives may look desperate for Movilla High School, it is not completely without hope.

I am sure the Minister will remind us of his wider policy of area planning and the need for Movilla to work closely and together with other schools in the constituency. Lest those who are not from the constituency think that there are not good schools in the Strangford constituency, I say that there are many good schools in that constituency. Nendrum College, in my home town of Comber, and Glasry College in the Ards peninsula are very good schools, achieving consistently good results. There is hope and opportunity for Movilla to work in partnership with those schools or, indeed, with other schools to try to raise standards and give it some sustainability in the longer term.

We have to acknowledge, as Mr Nesbitt did, that this is an uphill struggle for Movilla High School. It has been an uphill struggle for many years. We have to acknowledge that pupils and parents are making a choice and heading in other directions outside the constituency and beyond Newtownards to have their children educated. That is a tide that is very tough and very challenging to stop, never mind put in retreat. As somebody who served on the board of governors of the school and saw the passion and dedication of the staff, I think that we all owe it to them to work hard and fight for the future of the school and to ensure that a town the size of Newtownards has a non-selective secondary school that it can be proud of.

Mr Smith: I thank my colleague for bringing forward the topic for debate this evening. It is an important debate about an institution that is crucial to the town of Newtownards. As Mr Hamilton said, Movilla High School has had a difficult time in recent years, with falling rolls and some difficult issues played out, unfortunately, in the media. I have to say, however, that my experience of the school has been very positive. When I was the Mayor of Ards a couple of years ago, I attended a number of events at the school, including its prize distribution evening, and I was always impressed by the efforts of the pupils and the creativity and enthusiasm of the teachers. Where else would you get a teacher using the production of a school Lambeg drum decorated with a famous Ards man who served in the SAS in the Second World War to gain children's interest in both history and music? Undoubtedly, the passion and creativity is there in the staff to engage the young people.

I have to say that the catchment area for Movilla High School is not the best set against the performance of the super output areas. A number of the areas in its catchment fall into the bottom 10% of deprived areas for education and skills in Northern Ireland — places such as Glen and Scrabo 1 and 2 — and there are other areas, such as central Ards, that are not much higher in the league table. That provides the school with undoubted challenges, but, as has been mentioned, as the only secondary school in a town of nearly 30,000 people, it needs help to grow and flourish. As Mr Nesbitt said, a new head has been appointed, and there are exciting projects in development, such as the proposal for Ards Football Club to develop a new ground on the site that could be used by the school as well. There are a number of positives.

My concern is for the school and its future and for the town, but it is also for the wider area. I recall, when I was on council, the SEELB, as it then was, produced a draft area plan for post-primary schools. It showed that the old Ards Borough Council area had a net loss of over 2,000 pupils leaving the area every morning to travel to schools

in Belfast, Bangor or even the old Down District Council area. Of those, 1,700 were from the controlled sector. There is therefore a massive latent demand for secondary-school provision in the area. The challenge is obviously to get people to go to the local school. The same report also projected that pupil numbers were due to rise at secondary level by over 5% in the next decade. More importantly, there is a massive growth in the requirement for sixth-form provision in the area. At the time, it was estimated at 35% growth in the controlled sector over the next decade. There is a need for provision in the town, and that has been undoubtedly proven by the Members who have spoken. The challenge, of course, is to help Movilla High School grow and attract more pupils. I hope that that journey, with the recent appointments and some of the positive news about exams, for example, has now started.

7.15 pm

My colleague outlined a key option for taking this forward and ensuring that secondary provision can be secured for the town. I agree with him. It needs to be something that guarantees provision for pupils in the key stages from 11 to 16. I certainly support the school. My experience of it has been very positive. There is an ongoing need for a secondary school in the town, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say to see what actions we can put in place to support that school as it grows in the future.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the topic this evening. I offer apologies on behalf of my colleague Kellie Armstrong, the Alliance Strangford MLA, who regrets that she is unable to be here this evening. As Alliance spokesperson for education, I am glad to contribute to the debate.

Alliance has a vision for a first-class integrated education system that supports equality of opportunity for everyone to reach their potential. That includes the children and young people of Movilla High School in Newtownards. The Education Minister recently set out his priorities for area planning in 'Providing Pathways: Draft Strategic Area Plan for School Provision 2017-2020'. That should create opportunity for innovative and sustainable provision not only in Ards and the north Down area but across the whole school estate. It is, however, vital that local communities are involved in and listened to about what happens with education provision in their area. This evening has been a good opportunity for governors, elected representatives and all stakeholders involved in Movilla High School to put their views forward on the school and Newtownards.

We need proposals that are imaginative and put the needs of pupils at the centre of consideration, if the future of the school system in Northern Ireland is to be underpinned by an evidence-based plan and inclusive community consultation. The Minister himself has said:

"the status quo is not an option." — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 119, p32, col 2].

We need to see innovative solutions in 'Providing Pathways'. The Education Authority will develop proposals to address school provision where sustainability is an issue. Alliance believes that funding should be directed to the pupil, that pupil needs must come first and that it must give children the best educational opportunities, provision and infrastructure possible. There are, I believe,

six controlled post-primary schools in Ards and north Down, and Movilla High School is the only post-primary non-selective school in Newtownards. The Education Authority, therefore, has the ability to look at its existing school estate to consider an innovative way to ensure that appropriate education provision can continue in the best possible form available for children and young people in the area and in the right place, which may be across more than one campus.

Movilla High School has, as mentioned, faced challenges, but it has unique circumstances to overcome. It has a higher than average number of children in receipt of free school meals, a significant number of pupils with special educational needs and accommodation that is in need of investment and improvement. However, I join colleagues in welcoming the improvements and the progress that have been made, and I, of course, join them in congratulating everyone at Movilla High School on the best GCSE results it has had in its history. I welcome the leadership being shown by Jack Hawthorne, Mr Bell and the vice-principal, Simon Lemon, who says that the results are evidence that the changes that have been introduced are indeed bearing fruit.

It is, therefore, imperative that the Education Authority works to consider an innovative alternative solution to generate a sustainable, effective and non-selective post-primary solution that meets the needs of pupils and enables the local provision of suitable education to continue in the Newtownards area. I encourage the Minister to work with the Education Authority and all stakeholders to ensure that a proper plan for provision for children and young people in the area is put in place.

In closing, it is impossible not to note with concern a pattern of potential closures of controlled non-selective post-primary schools, and the Assembly is required and entitled to ask why that is occurring and to look for solutions. I welcome the fact that the Education Committee is undertaking an inquiry into educational underachievement, with a look at post-primary transfer as well. Hopefully, we will be able to make a mature contribution to some of these issues.

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): I will be commenting on various things, but one thing I probably will not comment on, as a Bangor supporter, is the future of Ards Football Club.

I do not agree with everything that Mr Lyttle says, but I will pick up on one point: our principal focus should always be on the pupil and on providing that pupil with high-quality access to high-quality education.

Last week saw the launch of the Education Authority's (EA) draft strategic area plan, and it is out for consultation. While I have commented on it, the pedant in me will say that it is neither mine nor the Department's, it is the Education Authority's plan, so just to correct that. As I said in my statement to the Assembly, the document that has been produced highlights, for the first time, the strategic issues facing our education system in the primary, post-primary and special education sectors. I clearly stated the importance of helping communities understand the high-level issues that need to be addressed so that they can contribute to the solutions that are needed. The document listed the special schools but did not refer to any particular school. I would encourage everyone in the community, and elected representatives and schools, to contribute to

the consultation during the discussion on the draft area plan and when more localised plans come forward. I want people in the community to have information on the context and know that area solutions are required if we are going to ensure that all pupils have access to equality of education and fulfil their potential. It is about looking at what is best for the overall area and what is best for the pupil.

It is therefore a little bit regrettable that just one week later we get a spotlight from one Member on a single school rather than focusing on the wider issues and outcomes that need to be addressed. Mr Nesbitt talked about wanting to get certainty tonight. Mr Nesbitt is either showing a lack of knowledge of the process or is, alternatively, being a little bit mischievous. He mentioned a range of options for Movilla, whether that is closure, any of the four options of the EA, the 4B option, or indeed any option. He should know full well that if any of those options come forward, that would be a development proposal and, as Minister for Education, I would have to give a legal ruling on it. Therefore, I cannot be drawn into comment on any individual school which could be perceived as predetermining any future decision. I am a little bit disappointed that the Member does not know that.

It is clear that the provision of education at Movilla, particularly for its pupils, is an important issue, because of the impact on individual pupils. But, focusing on a single school can be counterproductive. It can highlight and heighten the concerns of parents, pupils, teachers and the wider community. It can unintentionally focus on what is negative about a school to the exclusion of what is being achieved, often in very difficult and challenging circumstances. The Member has highlighted a number of the issues that the school is facing. I welcome the improvement in its results, but it has also been acknowledged in the debate that it is a school that is in formal intervention; it has a projected deficit over £1 million, which has been highlighted; and it has had a problem with enrolment.

Setting that aside, and looking at the wider context, it is incumbent on the board of governors of every school to ensure that it is effectively managed. The first duty is to ensure that pupils receive a quality education. I want boards of governors and principals, of whatever school, to examine critically the sustainability issues facing their school and how they can be tackled to benefit pupils. Every school should work with the managing authority to ensure that sustainability issues are proactively addressed.

I now return to the situation in Newtownards. Philip Smith highlighted the fact that, in Newtownards, with a population of 28,000 to 29,000 people, there is clearly an issue about the post-primary provision to meet the needs of young people in the town, but let us put it in context: Newtownards is larger than Newry City, Coleraine, Antrim, Omagh, Banbridge or Armagh. It is inconceivable that the town does not require and cannot support a good school. As indicated in the catchment area, enough pupils reside in the local area to support a large and vibrant controlled post-primary school, yet, every day in Newtownards, young people leave the town to attend other controlled post-primary schools in Comber, Bangor, Dundonald and, indeed, parts of Down.

It is a perfect example of why we need strategic planning rather than focusing in on individual schools, and why we need sustainable schools serving pupils well. When we look at that, it is important to ensure that, whatever schools we have, particularly at post-primary level in years 8 to 12, provide a sufficiently broad and balanced curriculum.

I want local communities and elected representatives to engage in meaningful and mature debate about what is best for our young people to equip them for further education, training, work and life in the 21st century. I want them to let their views be known, and I reiterate that I urge everyone to engage actively in the Education Authority consultation on the draft area plan to help to shape future education provision in the best interests of all young people. When we reach the point at which there is a finalised area plan and we move towards more localised detailed plans, I want people to engage with that.

The process cannot be about sectors, managing and planning authorities or even Departments. Ultimately, it has to be about young people and their needs. I want our young people to have a first-class education system that develops their knowledge and skills and draws out their talents. If we are to achieve the Programme for Government outcome:

“to give our children and young people the best start in life”,

we need to take these steps in a strategic manner. The key point is that we need to ensure that schools are serving our children and young people.

Adjourned at 7.28 pm.

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

The Executive Office

Draft Programme For Government

Published at 5.00 pm on Thursday 27 October 2016.

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness (The First Minister and the deputy First Minister): The Executive, at its meeting on 27 October, agreed the draft of a Programme for Government which it will issue for public consultation.

Government, first and foremost, must be about making people's lives better. The 'outcomes-based approach' is about setting real-world objectives on how policies make a difference – improve lives and enhance public services.

The draft reflects changes which we have made to the draft Framework which we published for public consultation on 27 May 2016. It is clear that people and organisations are on board with this ambitious new approach. We have built on that support and produced a more detailed document which clarifies our focus on outcomes and sets a clear and transparent basis for measuring progress towards those goals.

The consultation will commence at 9.30am on Friday 28 October and will close at 5pm on Friday 23 December. A copy of the consultation document will be available at:

<https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/topics/work-executive/programme-government>

Let the message go out loud and clear that government here is a force for good.

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 21 October 2016

Written Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 49590/11-16, for their assessment of the impact on community relations caused by the display commemorating republican terrorists in St Mary's University College, Belfast.
(AQW 586/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): During the Féile an Phobail festival, which has been running for the past 20 years, there was a broad range of talks and debates, as well as exhibitions, on the St Mary's University College campus.

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list the ministerial groups or sub-groups of which they, or Junior Ministers, are members; and when each group last met.
(AQW 2341/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The requirement for, and the role, remit and membership of, Executive Sub-Groups and Sub-Committees are under review following the elections of May 2016 and the restructuring of Northern Ireland Civil Service departments.

Ms Bailey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update of the Executive's action plan to increase the participation of women in community development in order to address paramilitarism, as outlined in Section A Paragraph 3.9 of the Fresh Start Agreement, Section B5 of the Executive Action Plan.
(AQW 3076/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: A Fresh Start committed to the development of a programme to increase the participation and influence of women in community development. As indicated in the Executive's action plan, which was published on 19 July, the Department for Communities will be organising a series of co-design workshops to determine the shape and content of the programme. These will include participation by other Executive departments alongside experts in the community and women's organisations who will be taking forward the delivery of the programme.

The first strand of this work will involve the development of a framework proposal for public consultation, and for delivery from April 2017. The second

strand will focus on the early identification of potential participants for the programme and is planned to take place between October 2016 and March 2017.

Mr O'Dowd asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Fresh Start Panel Report into the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups.
(AQO 244/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Executive published an action plan on tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime in July 2016, setting out the measures we will take to implement the Panel's recommendations.

Work is already underway to take the measures forward and a Cross-Departmental Programme Board has been set up to oversee progress and to allocate funding. Some funding has already been allocated for 2016/17 to statutory partners to implement particular recommendations.

When we published the action plan, we made clear our commitment to work with local communities and to build on the good work we know goes on already. This process will inform the development of detailed, costed programmes to be put in place from 2017/18 onwards.

Mr Butler asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline what plans, if any, they have to set up an EU taskforce within their Department as the United Kingdom prepares to leave the European Union.
(AQW 3566/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: An EU Future Relations team has been established within the Executive Office. An Inter-departmental Coordinating Group has also been set up under the direction of the Permanent Secretaries of the Departments of Finance and Economy.

Ms Mallon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the comments by the deputy First Minister during Question Time on 19 September 2016, when they will present the (i) June monitoring round; and (ii) forthcoming October monitoring to the departmental committee.

(AQW 3652/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The more streamlined Executive, working to a common purpose, is able to determine relative priorities in departments and agree allocations on this basis. It is more appropriate that the focus should be on what the outcome of the monitoring round means for public services, and officials will liaise with Committees on this at each monitoring round.

Mr Smith asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide the job description, key responsibilities and terms and conditions for (i) the Director of Communications to the Northern Ireland Executive; and (ii) the Executive Press Secretary.

(AQW 3899/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Under the restructuring of departments in May 2016, the former role of the Director of Communications in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister changed in the new Executive Office to include Executive support and international relations functions. A job description for this new role is not available as it was part of the internal restructuring programme. The job description for the Executive Press Secretary is attached below. Terms and conditions of appointment are a confidential matter.

Executive Press Secretary – Job Description

The role of the Executive Press Secretary is to provide trusted and well informed media advice to the First Minister, deputy First Minister and the Executive.

The Executive Press Secretary will act as a spokesperson for the FM/dFM providing regular on the record briefings articulating the Ministers agreed position on the relevant issues as well as promoting their wider vision and key messages.

The individual will also be responsible for developing communications policies capable of delivering a modern and dynamic Executive Communications Service.

Main duties will include:

- The provision of strategic advice to the First Minister, deputy First Minister, Executive Ministers and senior officials on all aspects of communications and presentational issues.
- Regularly briefing media on behalf of the First Minister and deputy First Minister ensuring their agreed position, priorities and key messages are accurately communicated to the public and key stakeholders.
- Developing policies capable of delivering a modern and dynamic communications service, using insight and evaluation to improve all communications activities ensuring that a strategic and comprehensive approach is taken to all Executive communications.
- Ensuring that all communications activities enhance the profile and reputation of the Executive.
- The provision of practical solutions for managing the reputation of the Executive, ensuring that issues are dealt with quickly and proactively.
- Building and maintaining a strong, strategic, external communications network across a wide range of stakeholders including journalists, commentators and opinion formers, NGO's and the Private Sector to ensure Executive messaging is given appropriate priority.
- Developing influential working relationships with both National Governments and devolved administrations.

Mr Smith asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide a copy of the written legal advice they received on using the Royal Prerogative to change the law to appoint the Executive press secretary.

(AQW 3903/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Use of the prerogative order to appoint the Executive press secretary was at our discretion, there was no requirement for legal advice.

Mr Smith asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide a copy of the legal advice received prior to using Royal Prerogative to change the law to appoint the Executive Press Secretary.

(AQW 4020/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We refer the Member to the answer given to AQW 3903/16-21 on 18 October 2016.

Ms S Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to advise when they were first made aware of the May 2015 report Preliminary Analysis On the Impact of a UK Referendum on its Membership of the European Union, compiled by the European Policy and Coordination Unit within the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister.

(AQW 4057/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We first became aware of this report following a Freedom of Information request to the Department in March 2016. The document contains well rehearsed arguments which were openly being aired during the referendum campaign.

Mrs Long asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 2120/16-21, for an update on the staffing formation of BREXIT teams within their Department; and the steps taken to consult with and engage the community and voluntary sector.

(AQW 4073/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The governance structures outlined in AQW 2120/16-21 are now in place. Senior officials have been nominated within all Departments to sit on an Inter-departmental Coordination Group, chaired jointly by the Permanent Secretaries of the Departments of Finance and Economy. Its role is to identify the implications for us of the EU referendum result, oversee engagement with the UK and Irish Governments and the European Union and assist in the development of a negotiating strategy for the Executive. An EU Future Relations Division has been created within the Executive Office to support this work.

Departments are engaging directly with their key stakeholders, including the community and voluntary sector, to ensure all challenges and opportunities are being identified and fed into the discussions.

Mr Smith asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline (i) departmental staff; and (ii) Northern Ireland Civil Service staff that were consulted prior to using Royal Prerogative to change the law to appoint the Executive Press Secretary.

(AQW 4087/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Use of the prerogative order to appoint the Executive press secretary was at our discretion.

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the total number of departmental reports produced over the last three years that were deemed not to be in the public interest; and the nature of each reports.

(AQW 4210/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: A public interest test would only be applied where a formal request is made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The likely public interest in disclosure of the information is taken into account but this may be outweighed by other considerations provided for by the Act's exemptions.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how many Freedom of Information Act requests their Department has received from Mr David Gordon since May 2007; (ii) how many of those requests were answered; and (iii) how many are outstanding.

(AQW 4256/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Executive Office adheres to a retention and disposal schedule, which has been agreed with the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and approved by the Assembly. This sets out timescales for the disposal of records within the Department, in compliance with the Public Records Act (NI), 1923 and the Disposal of Documents Order (S.R. & O, 1925 No.167). In line with the schedule, the Department is required to retain the case papers of Freedom of Information requests for no more than 3 years. The department does not therefore hold all of the information requested. We can, however, confirm that since 2013 the Department has received no requests from Mr Gordon.

Mr McCrossan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the Programme for Government 2016-21 will benefit West Tyrone.

(AQO 352/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The PfG provides an opportunity for local people to be involved in shaping the planned actions and playing a role in delivery. For the people of West Tyrone, it will be a further opportunity to engage in and inform thinking on matters raised in the consultation responses across a range of issues.

We are committed to securing the maximum engagement from across the community to how we intend to deliver better outcomes for all.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many staff are employed in their Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.

(AQW 4327/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: There are six press officers supporting four Ministers in the Executive Office.

In addition, there is a Head of Operations for EIS who has overall responsibility for HR and staff development in the nine departmental press offices, and a Head of Forward Planning and Business Support.

The salary cost for these eight posts in the Executive Office in 2015/16 is £452,942.50.

Mr Kennedy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 3411/16-21, to provide a copy of the job description and person specification drafted for the position of Executive Press Secretary.

(AQW 4329/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The job description and person specification for the new Executive press secretary is as follows.

Executive Press Secretary: Job Description

The role of the Executive Press Secretary is to provide trusted and well informed media advice to the First Minister, deputy First Minister and the Executive.

The Executive Press Secretary will act as a spokesperson for the FM/dFM providing regular on the record briefings articulating the Minister's agreed position on the relevant issues as well as promoting their wider vision and key messages.

The individual will also be responsible for developing communications policies capable of delivering a modern and dynamic Executive Communications Service.

Main duties will include:

- The provision of strategic advice to the First Minister, deputy First Minister, Executive Ministers and senior officials on all aspects of communications and presentational issues.
- Regularly briefing media on behalf of the First Minister and deputy First Minister ensuring their agreed position, priorities and key messages are accurately communicated to the public and key stakeholders.
- Developing policies capable of delivering a modern and dynamic communications service, using insight and evaluation to improve all communications activities ensuring that a strategic and comprehensive approach is taken to all Executive communications.
- Ensuring that all communications activities enhance the profile and reputation of the Executive.
- The provision of practical solutions for managing the reputation of the Executive, ensuring that issues are dealt with quickly and proactively.
- Building and maintaining a strong, strategic, external communications network across a wide range of stakeholders including journalists, commentators and opinion formers, NGO's and the Private Sector to ensure Executive messaging is given appropriate priority.
- Developing influential working relationships with both National Governments and devolved administrations.

Executive Press Secretary: Person Specification

The appointee should be able to demonstrate:

- First-rate news judgment under pressure
- A strong grasp of the wider media and political context in which the Executive operates
- Experience of taking a strategic approach to communications messages and campaigns
- The risk management and crisis communications skills needed to avoid pitfalls and fight fires.
- An understanding of, and ideally good experience of, the use of digital media.

The role will appeal to a very experienced and confident press operator who: enjoys working with senior ministers, political advisers, officials and journalists who is equally confident that they can articulate the clear sense of direction necessary to foster a high-performing team environment.

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action has been taken to address a potential rise in racist harassment following the European Union referendum result.

(AQW 4393/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Immediately after the referendum result, we issued a joint statement to provide assurance to our migrant and minority ethnic communities. We remain committed to the vision expressed in the Racial Equality Strategy of a society which is strengthened by its ethnic diversity, free from racism, and where we can share a common sense of belonging. This vision is unaffected by the result of the referendum.

The Racial Equality Strategy contains the commitment that we will work with the Department of Justice to develop our approach to tackling race hate crime and we are working to progress the implementation of this Strategy. It is our view that there is absolutely no place for racism or intolerance of any kind in our society.

Recent statistics from the PSNI have shown a reduction in reports of both racist incidents and racist crime. We remain committed to zero tolerance on hate crime and the attitudes that allow it to happen.

We unequivocally condemn all racist attacks and strongly encourage all victims to report any racist incident, however minor. While there may be a level of uncertainty following the referendum result, there remains no excuse for racism in any of its manifestations.

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action is being taken to (i) accommodate refugees currently in Northern Ireland; and (ii) accommodate more refugees to come to Northern Ireland.
(AQW 4394/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We have committed to receive further groups of refugees on a phased basis under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPR). Officials are in ongoing discussion with the Home Office about the arrival of further groups. Under this Scheme we have been accommodating refugees in privately owned rental properties. This will continue.

Anyone arriving here independently outside the VPR Scheme who has made a claim for asylum and who is destitute, is eligible for accommodation provided by the Home Office.

Prior to the arrival of each group of refugees under the VPR Scheme, the Operational Planning Group take a range of factors into consideration as to where refugees will be housed. The priority is to ensure that we have the appropriate services in place, including accommodation, health services and education. It is important that all plans, including settlement locations, are based on the ability to meet refugee needs and to help them to integrate.

People who have arrived outside the VPR Scheme and who are granted refugee status by the Home Office are entitled to apply for public sector housing.

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 2532/16-21, to detail the top ten projects as ranked by each zone.
(AQW 4430/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The number of projects prioritised by the Steering Group in each Social Investment Fund Zone depended on the project costs and zonal budget allocation. The following table outlines all of the projects prioritised in line with the budget for each zone.

Table showing the list of funded Social Investment Fund projects prioritised by each SIF Zone Steering Group

Zone	Project Name
Belfast North	Childcare and Family Support
	St Enda's
	Crusaders
	Increasing Community Services (BCC)
	Increasing Community Services – NB WISP
	Increasing Community Services - Joanmount refurbishment
	Ethical Investment
	Employment Fuel Poverty
Belfast South	Taughmonagh Healthy Business Centre
	Sandy Row
	Lanyon Tunnels
	Sure Start Taughmonagh
	Surestart Belvoir and Milltown
	LORAG Energy
	Increasing Community Services - Mornington
	Increasing Community Services (BCC) – St Simons
	Employability
	Early Intervention

Zone	Project Name
Belfast East	Bryson St Surgery
	Best of the East
	Increasing Community Services (BCC)
	Titanic People
	Templemore Avenue
	Short Strand
	Clarawood
	Hanwood
	Community Education
	Economic Renewal
	Community Capacity and Leadership
Belfast West	Impact
	Argyle
	St Comgalls
	InaG
	Early Intervention
	Integrated Employment
	Numeracy and Literacy
South East	Laganview
	West Lisburn
	Cloona
	Twinbrook
	Castlewellan
	Community Operated Sports
	NIHE Community Houses
	Transitions
Northern Southern	Community Capacity Hubs
	CRUN
	Fuel Poverty
	BEE
	Access to Employment
	Mental Health
	New Directions
	Sustaining the Infrastructure
Sustaining the Infrastructure – Clogher	
Armagh Harps	
Community Sports	
Thomas Davis	
Work It	

Zone	Project Name
Western	Fermanagh House
	Halls Together Now
	Community Premises
	COTHU – St Patricks
	COTHU – St Canices
	Health and Wellbeing – Banagher
	Health and Wellbeing – Youth Sport Omagh
	Work Ready West
	Satchel
Derry/Londonderry	Invest in Play
	Pitches
	Community Work Programme

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 2532/16-21, to detail the projects funded.
(AQW 4431/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We refer the member to the answer provided to AQW 4430/16-21 which provides a table detailing the projects funded.

Mr Beggs asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the £1.8m Social Investment Fund allocated to the Northern Zone to address fuel poverty, to detail (i) what has been spent specifically on improving homes suffering from fuel poverty; and (ii) the measures taken; broken down by (iii) by constituency; and (iv) by local council area.
(AQW 4462/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Work is ongoing with the lead partner organisation to finalise the scope and delivery plan for this project. This project will complement and enhance existing fuel poverty initiatives.

Until the final scope and delivery is agreed, including any revised business case approval, no project spend will be incurred. Officials are working to progress this as quickly as possible to ensure the project is delivered for the benefit of local communities.

Mr Sheehan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what monitoring arrangements are in place for the delivery of the Social Investment Fund.
(AQO 360/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Social Investment Fund monitoring framework is based on Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) methodology. OBA embeds outcome-based decision making into planning, delivery and reporting for projects, and can monitor at both performance (project) level and at population level. As you will be aware, this is in keeping with the approach to the new PFG.

In simple terms, each project clearly sets out the outcomes it intends to achieve and it must monitor and report against these.

This is done by lead partners, with support from the Department, who prepare report cards and ensure data is collected and submitted on a quarterly basis.

The Department also gathers data at population level in respect of indicators relevant to the SIF programme.

In addition, each project is subject to an independent evaluation.

This approach will allow robust monitoring and evaluation of delivery at project, zonal and programme level.

Mr Stalford asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the benefits of the Urban Village project in South Belfast.
(AQO 364/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We recently launched the Urban Villages Strategic Frameworks which identify collaborative opportunities and provide a roadmap for a comprehensive and 'joined up' approach by departments and wider stakeholders to deliver the programme's interconnected aims of fostering positive community identities; building community capacity; and improving the physical environment in each Urban Village area.

The strategic actions identified in the Framework for South Belfast will address these aims under the themes of transforming neighbourhoods; supporting enterprising communities; improving connectivity (People and Places); and improving community well-being.

We are working in partnership with Belfast City Council, the Department for Communities and the Housing Executive to undertake pre-design and feasibility studies on a range of capital projects in South Belfast. These include upgrading the play area in Donegall Pass and the Blythefield playing field and scoping longer term regeneration opportunities in the area.

Additionally, significant revenue funding is being invested this year to support the delivery of environmental clean-up projects; the establishment of support networks and educational opportunities for women; business enterprise and entrepreneurship initiatives; projects connecting local youth clubs; increasing access to industry led Digital Skills training and awareness for primary and post primary school children; and public events and activities supporting health and wellbeing.

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they intend to publish the Investigating Links in Achievement and Deprivation project report.

(AQW 4544/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The project entitled 'Understanding differential educational achievement within and between areas of multiple deprivation in NI – a case study approach' is being carried out by Professor Ruth Leitch, Professor Joanne Hughes, supported by Dr Ian Shuttleworth and Dr Michael Ievers from the Queen's University, Belfast.

Professor Ruth Leitch and her team are currently finalising the report for publication. No firm date for this has been set. Details of the publication will be provided on the Executive Office website and copied to the Committee for the Executive Office when they are available.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many Social Investment Fund schemes are being managed by paramilitary-linked groups.

(AQW 4663/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: A robust process is in place, in relation to all Social Investment Fund projects, to ensure the capability of lead partners and delivery organisations to manage public money and the projects prior to any funding commitments being made.

Mr Robinson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the current status of the Draft Childcare Strategy.

(AQW 4735/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Childcare Strategy is being delivered on a phased basis. The first phase was launched in September 2013. It included 15 Key First Actions designed to address the priority childcare needs identified through research and during an initial consultation with parents, children and childcare stakeholders.

Development of the full Childcare Strategy began in 2014 and has involved ongoing engagement with the main childcare stakeholders as well as further, extensive consultation in the second half of last year. The findings of this consultation exercise will help to shape the content of the final version of the Childcare Strategy.

I plan to bring forward the final version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail all Social Investment Fund projects and their (i) Project Lead/Management Agent; and (ii) Project Delivery Agent.

(AQW 4736/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The information requested has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on Social Investment Fund projects that have been (i) approved; (ii) started; and (iii) completed.

(AQW 4737/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: All £80 million of the Social Investment Fund has now been committed to the 69 approved projects, prioritised by local Steering Groups. Thirty-nine of these projects have commenced, and 15 are now operational. Details of the 69 approved projects have been placed in the Assembly Library.

It should be noted that capital projects which have appointed an Integrated Consultants Team (ICT) are considered commenced, and those which have completed construction works and are delivering services are considered operational. Similarly, revenue projects which have appointed a service delivery organisation are considered commenced, and those which have engaged participants, or are engaged in equivalent delivery on the ground, are considered operational.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) when the Paramilitary Monitoring Committee was set up; (ii) who serves on it; and (iii) how often has it met.

(AQW 4916/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We assume that the Member is referring to the Independent Reporting Commission which is to be set up as part of A Fresh Start. Responsibility for establishing the body rests with the UK and Irish Governments.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail all the Ministerial visits she has undertaken since taking up office, including the (i) date; (ii) purpose; and (iii) constituency visited.

(AQW 3427/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): The Ministerial visits I have undertaken since taking up office are set out in the table below.

Visit	Date	Purpose	Constituency
Ballymena Show	28-May-16	Meeting with Industry	North Antrim
The Arcadia, Portrush - Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful	01-Jun-16	Attending the Blue Flag and Seaside awards 2016	North Antrim
Ballymoney Show	04-Jun-16	Meeting with Industry	North Antrim
Fivemiletown Cheese Celebration	09-Jun-16	Meeting with Industry	Belfast North
Meeting the President of the Chinese Justice system,	11-Jun-16	Greeting Chinese delegation	Belfast East
Armagh County Agricultural Show	11-Jun-16	Meeting with Industry	Newry and Armagh
Visit to Greenmount Campus	13-Jun-16	Meeting with Officials	South Antrim
Open Farm Weekend from 18-19 June 2016	18-Jun-16	Meeting with Industry	South Down
Lisburn and Saintfield District Show including lunch	18-Jun-16	Meeting with Industry	Lagan Valley
Awards event at Ireland's Best Kept Towns	21-Jun-16	Meeting with Industry	Belfast South
Causeway Coast and Glens Local Action Group	22-Jun-16	To promote 1st call for Rural Business Investment Scheme	East Londonderry
Visit to Movanager Fish Farm (Kilrea)	22-Jun-16	Meeting with staff	North Antrim
Meeting with DAERA Rose Award trophy winner of the 2016 design competition	23-Jun-16	Meeting with award winner	Belfast East
Visiting AFBI Newforge Lane	23-Jun-16	Meeting with Stakeholders	Belfast South
Visiting AFBI Stoney Road	23-Jun-16	Meeting with Stakeholders	Belfast East
Meeting YFCU to launch the European Rally	30-Jun-16	Meeting with YFCU	Belfast East
Launch of Live Here Love Here Small Grants Scheme	30-Jun-16	Lauch Small Grants Scheme	Belfast East
Greenmount Campus Agriculture Awards Day Ceremony	30-Jun-16	Student Awards Ceremony	South Antrim
Launching the local Interim Rural Development Strategy and roll out of the new Rural Development Programme	01-Jul-16	Meeting with North Down & Ards Borough Council	Strangford
Omagh Show	02-Jul-16	Meeting with Industry	West Tyrone
North South Ministerial Council - Plenary	04-Jul-16	Meeting with Ministers	Outside NI
Farm Safety Partnership	05-Jul-16	Launch of the Farm Safety Partnership's 'Farm Safety Affiliate Scheme' and present the newly awarded affiliate membership certificates to organisations who have been awarded affiliate status	Belfast East

Visit	Date	Purpose	Constituency
Visit to a farm participating in the DairyLink programme	05-Jul-16	Meeting with Industry	North Down
AMT-Sybex Meeting	06-Jul-16	Meeting – NIFAIS Contract award	Belfast North
Visit to Asda Newtownards	07-Jul-16	Meeting with Stakeholders	Strangford
Castle Archdale	14-Jul-16	Launch of the Forest Grants Scheme	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Visit to Brussels – AGRIFISH Council	18-Jul-16	Meeting of Council	Outside NI
Royal Welsh Show	19-Jul-16	Meeting with Industry	Outside NI
Green Flag Awards	21-Jul-16	Meeting with Industry	Newry and Armagh
Meeting with David Simpson MP to discuss a range of issues	21-Jul-16	Meeting with MP	Newry and Armagh
Antrim Agricultural Society 110th Annual Show	23-Jul-16	Meeting with Industry	South Antrim
Visit to Dunbia and meeting with their Board of Directors and key suppliers	26-Jul-16	Meeting with Industry	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Farm visit - Malcolm Keys	27-Jul-16	Meeting with Industry	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Clogher Valley Agricultural Show	27-Jul-16	Meeting with Industry	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Managing Coastal Change Seminar / Ards Peninsula Coastal Erosion Group Committee Meeting	29-Jul-16	Meeting with Stakeholders	North Down
Co. Londonderry Agricultural Show	30-Jul-16	Meeting with Industry	East Londonderry
Causeway Coast and Glens under the Rural Business Investment Scheme	30-Jul-16	Hand over of first 2 letters of offer	East Londonderry
Visit to Inishkeen House	03-Aug-16	Meeting with staff	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Enniskillen Agricultural Show	03-Aug-16	Meeting with Industry	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Meeting to discuss Eel Fishing on Lough Erne	03-Aug-16	Meeting with Industry	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Visit to Portavogie Harbour	09-Aug-16	Meeting with Industry	Strangford
Visit to Ardglass Harbour	09-Aug-16	Meeting with Industry	South Down
Visit to Kilkeel Harbour	09-Aug-16	Meeting with Industry	South Down
Exploris Aquarium	11-Aug-16	Visit on reopening	Strangford
European Federation of Animal Science (EAAP) Annual meeting	30-Aug-16	Opening of conference	Belfast South
Visit to RSPB reserve to discuss their work	31-Aug-16	Meeting with Stakeholders	North Antrim
Visit to Rathlin Island Community Group	31-Aug-16	Meeting with Industry	North Antrim
Visit to Karro Cookstown	01-Sep-16	Meeting with Industry	Mid Ulster
EAAP Conference visit "Confirmation of Atlantic Heritage: Six Thousand Years of Farming and Food"	01-Sep-16	Meeting with Industry	Outside NI
Visit to Rare Breeds Show	03-Sep-16	Meeting with Industry	Newry and Armagh
Visit to Loughs Agency HQ	06-Sep-16	Meeting with Stakeholders	Foyle
Visit to Orchard House	06-Sep-16	Meeting with staff	Foyle
Visit to TVR Site	08-Sep-16	Observe TVR Programme	Upper Bann

Visit	Date	Purpose	Constituency
Visit to Wilson's Country	08-Sep-16	Meeting with Industry	Upper Bann
Visit to Kinnego Marina	08-Sep-16	Lauching of Vigilare Boat	Upper Bann
Visit Pritchitts Dairy	12-Sep-16	Promotion of recycle week	Strangford
Visit to AFBI Loughgall	15-Sep-16	Site Visit	Newry and Armagh
Visit to the Mobuoy Road waste site	16-Sep-16	Site Visit	Foyle

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the letters of offer sent to the Local Action Groups for funding of Priority 6 Rural Development Fund projects in relation to the 23 November cut-off for guarantees of future funding as announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

(AQW 3872/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I take your question to be referring to the contracts that my Department has in place with the 10 Local Action Groups (LAG) to deliver the LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme.

On Monday 3 October, the Chancellor Philip Hammond MP announced that the Treasury will guarantee EU structural and investment funds for projects (which includes the LEADER component of the Rural Development Programme) signed up until the point at which the UK departs the EU. Funding will be honoured as the LAGs Local Rural Development Strategies are in line with domestic strategic priorities.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) when her Department vacated Kilpatrick House, Ballymena; (ii) when her Department last paid rent in respect of these premises; and (iii) how much, if any, rent has been paid since the premises was vacated.

(AQW 4164/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- i My Department vacated Kilpatrick House, Ballymena with effect from 1 August 2013.
- ii. Rent in respect of the premises occupied by the then Department of Agriculture and Rural Development was paid to HMRC by the then Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP).
- iii. The leased area was handed back to HMRC by DFP on 31 July 2013. No rent was paid by DFP for Kilpatrick House after this date.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she will consider delaying the closed period for the spreading of slurry.

(AQW 4202/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I recognise that some farmers have encountered difficult circumstances this summer which has hampered normal agricultural activities such as cutting silage and spreading slurry. As you will be aware one of the aims of the Nitrates Directive and the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations (NAP Regulations) is to protect water quality by ensuring that the correct amount of nutrients are applied under favourable conditions and at a time that they can be used by growing crops, including grass. One of the key methods for achieving this is the requirement for a closed spreading period for organic manures – including both slurry and farmyard manure. The closed spreading period prohibits organic manures, excluding dirty water, from being spread from midnight 15 October to midnight 31 January. Farmyard manure must not be applied from midnight 31 October to midnight 31 January. These periods represent the time when the risk of nutrient leaching is at its highest and there is little or no plant growth. Farmers are encouraged to spread slurry and manures throughout the growing season rather than leaving applications until just before the start of the closed spreading period.

To enable the requirements of the closed spreading periods to be met all farmers are required to have a minimum of 22 weeks slurry/manure storage for their livestock enterprises. Pigs and poultry enterprises require a minimum of 26 weeks storage. However, farmers are also further required to have regard to the storage capacity likely to be needed on their farm during periods of adverse weather conditions when, due to extended periods of wet weather, frozen ground or otherwise, the land application of organic manure is not permitted. Many farmers requiring additional storage capacity to meet the requirements availed of financial assistance from the Farm Nutrient Management Scheme.

The rainfall data, obtained by my officials in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), from the Meteorological Office would indicate that whilst rainfall for Fermanagh for June, July and August 2016 was above average it was considered to be in the normal range for total monthly rainfall in relation to the long term expected average.

I can confirm that there is no legal provision in the NAP Regulations to grant farmers a waiver and let them spread organic manure during the closed spreading period. However, under exceptional circumstances, beyond the control of and not foreseeable by an individual farmer, a defence may be made for non-compliance with some of the requirements of the NAP Regulations including spreading organic manures during the closed period. I can assure you that such cases would be

considered by NIEA on a case by case basis and must be evidence based showing that the farmer had taken all reasonable steps to manage the situation and was left with no alternative.

If the legal requirement of the closed spreading period was eased it would almost certainly lead to a negative environmental impact on water quality as there is little plant growth at this time of year and, therefore, little uptake of nutrients and a high risk of leaching of nutrients to water.

I can assure you that NIEA will continue to work in partnership with the agricultural community to raise awareness of environmental obligations and support farmers in delivering better environmental and economic outcomes, through sustainable farming practices which meet all legal requirements.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the support available through her Department for farmers to enable the development of their farms.
(AQW 4252/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Farm Business Improvement Scheme (FBIS) is a package of measures aimed at improving the competitiveness and sustainability of our farming sector.

The FBIS is being rolled out in a phased way. The first phase is already well underway with the focus on knowledge transfer, with the Business Development Groups and Farm Family Key Skills training providing advice and support to help farmers clearly identify their needs and make the right decisions about developing their business.

The next phase I plan to launch is the FBIS Capital Scheme, which will offer tiered grant support linked to the needs in the farmer's business plan. The Scheme is for those who are actively farming. Tier 1 of the Scheme will support smaller scale investments costing under £30,000 to improve the sustainability of farm businesses. Tier 2 will drive larger scale, transformational investment in projects costing in excess of £30,000. The focus of Tier 2 will be on future proofed, fit for purpose, modern infrastructure and equipment.

A Preparation Stage for the Capital Scheme was launched on 20 September 2016 to provide information for potential applicants and give them time to prepare in advance of the Scheme opening later this month. Further information is available on DAERA's website. More information will be provided on the website and in the farming press over the coming weeks.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she can confirm that her Department has access to sufficient supplies of Bovine TB vaccine to ensure the TVR scheme can continue uninterrupted to the end of 2017.
(AQW 4344/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Vaccine used in the TVR project is a BCG vaccine (BadgerBCG), which aims to protect against the bacteria that causes bovine tuberculosis.

I cannot confirm that my Department will have access to sufficient supplies of BadgerBCG ensuring the uninterrupted continuation of TVR in 2017. Given the re-prioritisation of global supplies by the World Health Organisation (WHO) my officials had to source expired BadgerBCG from the Welsh Government for use in TVR during 2016.

Currently, in light of continuing unavailability of BadgerBCG, my officials are looking into a number of options for TVR in Year 4 and are hopeful of securing enough vaccine doses for TVR fieldwork in 2017.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) whether she authorised the removal of two trustees, elected by graziers, on 2 June 2016 to Mourne Mountains West; (ii) if so, to outline the rationale for the decision; and (iii) if not, who made the decision.
(AQW 4387/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- (i) I did not authorise the removal of two trustees in Mourne Mountains West.
- (ii) N/A
- (iii) A DAERA Official exercising the power under the Trust Deed made the decision to remove the two trustees.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether all voters at the election of Mourne Mountain West Trust Estate on 2 June 2016 had paid contributions to the trustees.
(AQW 4388/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- 82 graziers voted in the election on 2 June.
- 66 had paid any contributions due to the trustees.
- 16 were purchasers awaiting grazing allocations therefore no contributions were due or owing to the Trustees.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether all purchasers were consulted by her Department prior to making the Mourne Mountain West Order on 19 May 2016; and if so, did all purchasers consent in writing to the making of the order.

(AQW 4424/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: All purchasers were invited to consult with Department Officials on the content of the draft Order.

All purchasers were provided a copy of the draft Order in advance of making the Order.

There is no requirement for purchasers to consent in writing.

The Department holds a record of purchasers consultations.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how many Areas of Special Scientific Interest were designated in 2015.

(AQW 4466/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency designated 10 Areas of Special Scientific Interest in 2015.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how many potential Areas of Special Scientific Interest remain to be designated; and when this process will be completed.

(AQW 4467/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: To date, my Department has designated 387 Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs). On the basis of an earlier review (2006), there remains around 50 sites which were identified as potential ASSIs. However, designations are only made when detailed surveys confirm that ASSI designation criteria have been met, making it difficult to provide a final completion date for the network.

As outlined in the Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020, launched in 2015, the ASSI programme has now reached the phase where a greater emphasis is being placed on managing existing sites while maintaining progress towards completion of the site network. One of the primary delivery mechanisms will be through the new Environmental Farming Scheme.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the costs incurred in renaming the Banrion Uladh.

(AQW 4468/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The change of lettering was carried out at a scheduled annual maintenance event involving repairs, repainting and antifouling. The total cost of these works was £6835.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline her plans to (i) protecting fishing stocks; and (ii) stop overfishing if fishing quotas and the Common Fisheries Policy are replaced following the referendum result to leave the European Union.

(AQW 4472/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: As I have said previously, new arrangements will need to be negotiated between the UK, the EU and other coastal states to manage fishing opportunities and access to resources. The trading and support framework that will apply to the fisheries sector following a UK withdrawal from the European Union will be the subject of negotiation.

I have already held a series of meetings with both Ministers from the UK government and Devolved Administrations as well as with our own stakeholders to consider the potential implications of Brexit. The meetings included discussions on the need to ensure that future trade and policy frameworks take account of the importance of Northern Ireland's agri-food and fishing industries, rural communities and environment sector.

I intend to be closely and directly involved in the domestic agricultural, environmental, fisheries, and trade policy agendas as they unfold in order to maximise the opportunities that will come from leaving the European Union.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline (i) the action her Department has taken to remove barriers to agri-food exports such as charges for Export Health Certificates; and (ii) how she plans to explore the potential to achieve separate certification for Northern Ireland animal health status with authorities in the Republic of Ireland to hasten and assist market entry.

(AQW 4493/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Your question relates to a recommendation made by the Agri-Food Strategy Board in their strategic action plan Going for Growth. The Executive published its response to Going for Growth in October 2014 including agreed actions to be taken forward by government departments and agencies. An update on Executive-led actions outlined in the response is available on the DAERA website at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Going%20for%20Growth%20Progress%20Update%20-%20period%20ending%2030%20June%202016.pdf>.

This update has also been shared with the Assembly's Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on 22 September 2016.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) what support her Department is giving to the local agri-food industry in developing distribution hubs for transporting produce to market; and (ii) whether she has considered the development of co-operative centres for the intake of raw materials.
(AQW 4494/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Your question relates to a recommendation made by the Agri-Food Strategy Board in their strategic action plan Going for Growth. The Executive published its response to Going for Growth in October 2014 including agreed actions to be taken forward by government departments and agencies. An update on Executive-led actions outlined in the response is available on the DAERA website at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Going%20for%20Growth%20Progress%20Update%20-%20period%20ending%2030%20June%202016.pdf>.

This update was also shared with the Assembly's Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on 22 September 2016.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on her Department's actions to overcome the barriers to shared land used through rental or conacre by the interpretation and application of the tax regime, including Inheritance Tax, and the Common Agricultural Policy.
(AQW 4495/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The independent Expert Working Group on Sustainable Land Management have been looking at the issues of land mobility and land rental. They expect to issue their Sustainable Agricultural Land Management Strategy soon and my department will respond to that report in due course. Over the last few years there have been helpful clarifications from HMRC on the issue of how conacre and longer term leasing of land is treated in respect of the available inheritance tax exemptions. The linking of direct payments to agricultural land under the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) may influence who it is farmed by, and have impacts on land purchase and rental values. However, provided CAP subsidies are claimed by the person farming the land, the operation of the CAP does not prevent land transfers by sale, long term lease or short term rental agreements.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the recommendation within the Going for Growth Strategy, for an update on her Department's efforts in (i) determining the best model for efficient production in all relevant agri-food sectors; and (ii) developing a policy that will facilitate more rapid consolidation of resources into effective and efficient operating units.
(AQW 4496/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Agri-Food Strategy Board, in Going for Growth, advised that 'Industry will work with Government to determine the best model for efficient production in relevant sectors and in developing policy that will facilitate more rapid consolidation of resources into effective and efficient operating units' (Recommendation 7).

The Executive published its response to Going for Growth in October 2014 including agreed actions to be taken forward by government departments and agencies. Decisions leading to the adoption of more efficient models of production or a consolidation of resources are primarily a matter for the industry in response to market conditions. Therefore, as detailed within the Executive Response, lead responsibility for action to address this recommendation lies with the industry. My Department has, however, undertaken action to address a number of related recommendations (18, 20 and 101) which seeks to support improved efficiency in the industry. An update on Executive-led actions is available on the DAERA website at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Going%20for%20Growth%20Progress%20Update%20-%20period%20ending%2030%20June%202016.pdf> and was shared with the Assembly's Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on 22 September 2016.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) for an update on the Executive's investment of £400m as committed to by the Going for Growth Strategy; and (ii) for her assessment of how much investment this has unlocked and leveraged from the agri-food industry.
(AQW 4497/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- i) The AFSB, within Going for Growth, recommended that Government invest £400m over three years to unlock and leverage investment of over £1.3bn from industry. The Executive Response to Going for Growth provides a detailed action plan for the agreed Government-led actions to address 81 AFSB recommendations, and includes a specific commitment for Government investment totalling £300m, including up to £250m for the Farm Business Improvement Scheme. The Executive Response was clear that the actual level of funding required would depend on the industry's capacity to avail of support. In addition, Executive departments committed to a range of other actions with unspecified resource implications. These include work to develop a strategic marketing organisation, the work of a TB Strategic

Partnership on a comprehensive TB eradication strategy, work to advise and negotiate on market entry, and the commissioning and funding of R&D relevant to the needs and aspirations of industry.

Delivering Growth, an update on progress to support the agri-food industry, published in March 2016, records actual and committed Government investment totalling £370m for the period up to 31 December 2015. This includes planned expenditure which had not been quantified at the time of publication of the Executive Response to Going for Growth.

- ii) My Department does not hold figures for the amount of investment which has been leveraged from the industry, as a result of Government's investment in Going for Growth related actions. However, Delivering Growth does record that InvestNI assistance to individual companies had leveraged over £400m of investment at that stage.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether her Department has fast tracked a solution for turning poultry waste into energy.

(AQW 4505/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department has progressed a range of actions to develop sustainable solutions to utilise poultry litter. DARD and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute have carried out a number of technical studies and published a review of alternative technologies for utilisation of poultry litter in April 2012.

To progress the recommendations of the review, in 2012 DARD and DETI launched a Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) competition. This funded nine "proof of concept" projects on alternative environmentally and commercially sustainable ways to better utilise poultry litter.

Building on the progress of the SBRI, the project team comprised of Strategic Investment Board, DARD, DETI and InvestNI officials developed the £12million Sustainable Use of Poultry Litter (SUPL) Loan Scheme. This Scheme has fast tracked the development of two commercial scale plants to process poultry litter.

The Glenmore plant in Donegal and the Stream BioEnergy plant at Tully Quarry near Ballymena will process a total of 65,000 tonnes of NI poultry litter per year.

Both plants are currently under construction and on target to become operational in 2017. They will use Anaerobic Digestion (AD) technologies to produce biogas for electricity generation and organic fertilisers.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether her Department has commissioned research into measurable, best practice systems for sustainable intensification on-farm.

(AQW 4506/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: One of the Strategic Goals of my Department's Evidence and Innovation Strategy is to help the agri-food industry prepare for future market opportunities and economic challenges. Consequently, DAERA has invested in research over many years to measurably improve production efficiency, and in finding ways to improve on-farm sustainability. This includes the development and adoption of best-practice systems in livestock, grassland and a variety of other sectors. As important, is the work to translate the findings of that research to farmers and other stakeholders through knowledge extension at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE).

My Department continues to invest in new research and development to underpin sustainable farming systems. For example, as part of its Evidence and Innovation Strategy, my Department has recently commissioned 26 new research projects at the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI). Details of all projects commissioned since 2011 are available on the DAERA website. (link below).

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/daera-directed-afbi-research-projects-2011-2016>

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the scientific base for the measurement of greenhouse gas emissions; and whether this is being used to promote Northern Ireland as a low carbon location for food production within Europe

(AQW 4507/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Northern Ireland Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventory contains data detailing greenhouse gas emissions in Northern Ireland from 1990 to the latest reporting year. It is a subset of the UK GHG Inventory, which is produced to fulfil both European Union Monitoring Mechanism (EUMM) and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) reporting requirements the UK has under the Kyoto Protocol. It is compiled in line with international guidance from the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The inventory reports on seven direct greenhouse gases and four indirect greenhouse gases. The emissions are reported under five broad categories: energy; industrial processes and other product use; agriculture; Land Use Change and Forestry; and waste. Each year the greenhouse gas inventory is extended and updated. The whole historical data series is revised to incorporate methodological improvements and new data to ensure a consistent data series.

My department's Statistics and Analytical Services Branch use the UK GHG inventory to prepare the Northern Ireland greenhouse gas inventory statistical bulletin, published in June every year, which reports that Northern Ireland greenhouse gas emissions have reduced by 17.4% since 1990.

My department is also supporting the Agricultural Greenhouse Gas Research Platform (Agriculture Inventory), led by the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. This project seeks to provide more accurate measurement of agricultural GHG's and reduce current uncertainties. It provides the evidence for a UK specific method of calculating methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O) emissions, reflecting the adoption of mitigation practices by the farming industry, enabling more accurate forecasting and monitoring of performance against emissions reduction targets. A fully revised inventory model is anticipated in the near future.

Supplementary work is also being taken forward by my department, in partnership with AFBI, to develop a scientifically and statistically robust method of calculating an average figure for the carbon intensity of Northern Irish milk each year from 1990. Preliminary results show that the carbon intensity of local dairy farms has reduced to the order of 25% since 1990, marking significant progress and confirming our dairy industry as one of the most sustainable and efficient suppliers to home and export markets. A statistical bulletin will be published with full details when the work is finalised, which will add to the tools we have at our disposal to promote the carbon efficiency of production locally. Work to develop a similar methodology for the beef sector is also underway.

My department also continues to work with the agriculture sector and environmental organisations to promote carbon and farm efficiency, via the Agri- Forestry Greenhouse Gas Implementation Partnership. I was pleased to announce the publication of the updated 'Efficient Farming Cuts Greenhouse Gas Implementation Plan 2016-2020' in September, which highlights the positive work underway and reflects our shared commitment to a profitable, efficient and sustainable agriculture sector. The GHGIP has been working hard over a number of years to raise awareness and promote efficient farming practices which have a beneficial impact on GHG emissions and on farm profits. The plan also signposts the financial and advisory assistance available from my Department to support the sector's ambition to be a world-leading, sustainable producer of safe, high quality and nutritious food products.

This work will feed into ongoing work to create an Agri-Food Marketing organisation with a clear food promotion strategy. This project is being taken forward by my colleague Minister Simon Hamilton at the Department for the Economy, working with the Agri-Food Strategy Board. Any sustainable growth in the agri-food sector will be export-led and a strategic and a coordinated approach to marketing, through a single organisation, is key to delivering this growth. My officials are supporting their DfE counterparts and industry representatives in developing an agreed model which will allow the Executive to provide suitable government support to the new body and that will satisfy the requirements of the industry and government. Once established, this body will play a key role in the promotion of Northern Ireland as a sustainable, carbon efficient location for food production.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 3241/16-21, how many of her Department's staff have availed of the (i) AQ Course delivered by the Centre for Applied Learning; and (ii) workplace / at their desk training and guidance, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4527/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- (i) The number of DAERA staff who have attended the formal Assembly Questions (AQ) training, delivered by the Centre for Applied Learning (CAL), in each of the last three year is detailed below -
- 2013 = 22;
 - 2014 = 36;
 - 2015 = 12.
- (ii) The Department does not keep records of staff who receive informal workplace / desk training but all DAERA staff involved in responding to AQs receive appropriate, and ongoing training and support from line management.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how her Department has worked in collaboration with other Executive colleagues to combine agri-food innovation funding under the control of one dedicated Executive Department.

(AQW 4531/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: This question relates to Recommendation 29 made by the Agri-Food Strategy Board in their strategic action plan Going for Growth. The Executive published its response to Going for Growth in October 2014 including agreed actions to be taken forward by government departments and agencies. An update on Executive-led actions outlined in the response is available on the DAERA website at

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Going%20for%20Growth%20Progress%20Update%20-%20period%20ending%2030%20June%202016.pdf>.

This update has also been shared with the Assembly's Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on 22 September 2016.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how her Department has reduced bureaucracy to enable the agri-food industry to overtake its competition in pursuing new opportunities.

(AQW 4532/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The implementation of the Better Regulation and Simplification review reduced the administrative burden on the agri-food industry by 10.4%. I am committed to reducing this further, including by working with the Department for the Economy in taking forward recommendations of the Business Red Tape Review to ensure an efficient and effective regulatory regime for businesses that increases competitiveness. My Department has, and will, examine any specific areas of excessive administrative burden which are brought to our attention and will simplify wherever possible. I also believe that delivering more services online offers tremendous opportunities to eliminate unnecessary paperwork, reduce errors and cut the cost of compliance.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what plans she has to ensure equal treatment of hill farmers and lowland farmers.

(AQW 4561/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: As a large public service provider my Department has statutory equality duties to meet under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

All services provided by my Department are subject to equality screening and, where required, equality impact assessments.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs why local farmers do not receive a production payment when they sell livestock, as is the case with farmers from England, Scotland and Wales.

(AQW 4562/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Following a consultation on a Review of CAP Coupled Support Options earlier this year, in line with the view of the majority of respondents, I decided not to reduce the Basic Payment Scheme to fund a Coupled Support Scheme (payments directly linked to the volume of output of a specific agricultural product). I would point out that this is in line with previous decisions taken on coupled support options and there have been no such schemes linked to livestock in Northern Ireland since 1 January 2005.

I do not believe there are any convincing arguments to introduce Coupled Support Schemes in Northern Ireland during the current CAP period. In particular, as ewe numbers have been relatively stable since 2010, there does not appear to be any immediate argument in favour of coupled support for the sheep sector in order to maintain production at current levels. As regards the beef sector, the level of suckler cows in Northern Ireland has fluctuated over the 2008 – 2015 period, but there is as of yet no compelling evidence that coupled support is needed to stem a long term decline in livestock numbers.

It would also be questionable how effective coupled support would be as economic research suggests that the impact on production of such payments would be small and farm incomes could actually be slightly reduced.

Currently, the only region of the UK to operate a coupled support scheme is Scotland. England and Wales do not operate a coupled support scheme.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what assurances she can give that local producers' interests will be represented in Brexit negotiations on production pricing equally with those from England, Scotland and Wales.

(AQW 4563/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: As I have previously stated, over the past weeks and months I have had the opportunity to meet with a number of Ministers to discuss some of the important issues that need to be resolved in the months ahead. I spoke to Andrea Leadsom and met with George Eustice for an early useful discussion in the immediate aftermath of the referendum result. At our meeting in July George Eustice, made a commitment that he would visit Northern Ireland. This visit is taking place this month and it will be an opportunity to start to explore the policy issues and set out our early thinking with him.

I also met with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, James Brokenshire, and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, David Davis, at the beginning of September. I impressed upon them the importance of the Agri-Food sector to our economy and sought an assurance that we would be kept closely and directly involved in the agricultural, environmental and fisheries policy and trade agendas as they unfold over the coming months and years.

I received a positive response and I believe that the Northern Ireland Secretary of State in particular has an important role to play in ensuring that our voice is heard loud and clear around the Cabinet table in Westminster. We agreed to work closely on key aspects of policy development, trade and support arrangements.

My officials are also in ongoing contact with their counterparts in Defra and HM Government and will continue with these discussions as we move through the exit process.

I have developed strong links with Defra and the other UK Administrations to ensure that I can defend the interests of the Northern Ireland agri-food industry in the forth-coming negotiations.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how her Department will be taking forward the learnings from the Maximising Access to Services, Grants and Benefits in Rural Areas project.

(AQW 4591/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The aim of the Maximising Access to Services, Grants and Benefits in Rural Areas (MARA) Project was “to improve the health and well being of rural dwellers in Northern Ireland by increasing access to services, grants and benefits by facilitating a co-ordinated service to support rural dwellers living in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion”. The MARA Project proactively targeted the most vulnerable households in identified rural communities using a community development approach. The project was subject to continuous review and evaluation which assisted on-going refinement and learning to maximise its impact.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the outputs and outcomes achieved by the Maximising Access to Services, Grants and Benefits in Rural Areas project, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 4592/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Maximising Access to Services, Grants and Benefits in Rural Areas (MARA) Project achieved 17,824 individual household visits between April 2011 and September 2016. More details on these outputs and the outcomes achieved, from the 46,205 referrals generated from these visits, are provided by constituency below.

Summary of Outcomes from the MARA Project, 2011 – September 2016

Constituency	Accessed Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Complete. No Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Advised to 'Make the Call' to Improving Benefit Uptake	Signposted	Pending	Outstanding	Grand Total
Belfast East	3	4	1	1		1	10
Belfast North	1	2					3
East Antrim	560	1291	107	29	71	27	2085
East Londonderry	1111	1760	104	37	115	65	3192
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	2481	2831	151	36	101	142	5742
Foyle	95	200	2	2	9	2	310
Lagan Valley	1356	1375	70	26	49	57	2933
Mid Ulster	1501	2489	115	39	109	60	4313
Newry and Armagh	1211	1866	156	34	119	18	3404
North Antrim	1366	2287	241	49	90	24	4057
North Down	66	81	6	5	4		162
South Antrim	709	1409	102	34	118	39	2411
South Down	2357	3690	199	55	192	87	6580
Strangford	1793	2118	224	48	163	53	4399
Upper Bann	572	1099	92	24	71	30	1888
West Tyrone	2003	1939	192	61	204	185	4584
Not Assigned	55	61	8	1	3	4	132
Grand Total	17240	24502	1770	481	1418	794	46205

Outcomes from the MARA Project, 2011 – September 2016 – by Constituency

Constituency	Accessed Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Complete, No Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Advised to 'Make the Call' to Improving Benefit Uptake	Signposted	Pending	Outstanding	Grand Total
Belfast East	3	4	1	1		1	10
Benefit Entitlement Check			1	1			2
Home Safety Check	1					1	2

Constituency	Accessed Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Complete, No Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Advised to 'Make the Call' to Improving Benefit Uptake	Signposted	Pending	Outstanding	Grand Total
Local Services		2					2
Occupational Therapy Assessment	1	1					2
Rural Community Transport Partnerships		1					1
Smartpass	1						1
Belfast North	1	2					3
Benefit Entitlement Check		1					1
Home Safety Check	1						1
Local Services		1					1
East Antrim	560	1291	107	29	71	27	2085
Benefit Entitlement Check	32	327	107	29	33		528
Boiler Replacement Scheme	6	75			38	7	126
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	48	126					174
Home Safety Check	259	139				14	412
Local Services	80	269					349
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)	31	69				1	101
Occupational Therapy Assessment	32	163				1	196
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	33	91					124
Smartpass	29	7				4	40
Social Services	10	25					35
East Londonderry	1111	1760	104	37	115	65	3192
Benefit Entitlement Check	31	567	104	37	41		780
Boiler Replacement Scheme	25	112			74	24	235
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	81	160					241
Flexicare	37	70					107
Home Safety Check	478	108				19	605
Local Services	211	288					499
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)	27	122				9	158

Constituency	Accessed Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Complete, No Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Advised to 'Make the Call' to Improving Benefit Uptake	Signposted	Pending	Outstanding	Grand Total
Occupational Therapy Assessment	49	136				7	192
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	110	147				1	258
Smartpass	51	13				5	69
Social Services	11	37					48
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	2481	2831	151	36	101	142	5742
Benefit Entitlement Check	49	761	151	36	65	1	1063
Boiler Replacement Scheme	27	250			36	25	338
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	167	348					515
Flexicare	65	45					110
Home Safety Check	1091	197				12	1300
Local Services	574	448				3	1025
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)	37	143				51	231
Occupational Therapy Assessment	151	210				46	407
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	272	196				1	469
Smartpass	42	16				3	61
Social Services	6	217					223
Foyle	95	200	2	2	9	2	310
Benefit Entitlement Check	2	42	2	2	1		49
Boiler Replacement Scheme	9	20			8		37
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	11	14					25
Flexicare	13	6					19
Home Safety Check	42	16					58
Local Services	12	37					49
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)		20				1	21
Occupational Therapy Assessment		18					18

Constituency	Accessed Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Complete, No Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Advised to 'Make the Call' to Improving Benefit Uptake	Signposted	Pending	Outstanding	Grand Total
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	3	18					21
Smartpass	2					1	3
Social Services	1	9					10
Lagan Valley	1356	1375	70	26	49	57	2933
Benefit Entitlement Check	28	282	70	26	22		428
Boiler Replacement Scheme	39	216			27	22	304
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	86	141					227
Home Safety Check	647	147				10	804
Local Services	14	249					263
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)	74	94				14	182
Occupational Therapy Assessment	216	93				2	311
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	180	126				7	313
Smartpass	71	10				2	83
Social Services	1	17					18
Mid Ulster	1501	2489	115	39	109	60	4313
Benefit Entitlement Check	46	680	115	39	28		908
Boiler Replacement Scheme	69	186			81	27	363
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	162	381					543
Home Safety Check	729	284				21	1034
Local Services	77	495					572
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)	56	65				2	123
Occupational Therapy Assessment	164	182				6	352
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	70	145					215
Smartpass	114	9				4	127
Social Services	14	62					76

Constituency	Accessed Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Complete, No Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Advised to 'Make the Call' to Improving Benefit Uptake	Signposted	Pending	Outstanding	Grand Total
Newry and Armagh	1211	1866	156	34	119	18	3404
Benefit Entitlement Check	42	563	156	34	53		848
Boiler Replacement Scheme	51	243			66	9	369
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	122	269					391
Home Safety Check	686	157					843
Local Services	51	230					281
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)	52	101				6	159
Occupational Therapy Assessment	60	160				1	221
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	104	94				2	200
Smartpass	36	13					49
Social Services	7	36					43
North Antrim	1366	2287	241	49	90	24	4057
Benefit Entitlement Check	45	733	241	49	42		1110
Boiler Replacement Scheme	21	160			48	14	243
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	112	232					344
Home Safety Check	610	141				7	758
Local Services	169	445				1	615
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)	60	182					242
Occupational Therapy Assessment	99	191				1	291
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	130	144					274
Smartpass	99	11				1	111
Social Services	21	48					69
North Down	66	81	6	5	4		162
Benefit Entitlement Check	3	29	6	5	3		46
Boiler Replacement Scheme		6			1		7
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	5	14					19

Constituency	Accessed Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Complete, No Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Advised to 'Make the Call' to Improving Benefit Uptake	Signposted	Pending	Outstanding	Grand Total
Home Safety Check	35	3					38
Local Services	10	5					15
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)		1					1
Occupational Therapy Assessment	8	5					13
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	2	13					15
Smartpass	3	1					4
Social Services		4					4
South Antrim	709	1409	102	34	118	39	2411
Benefit Entitlement Check	30	337	102	34	41		544
Boiler Replacement Scheme	23	147			77	11	258
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	36	121					157
Home Safety Check	374	187				8	569
Local Services	92	245				1	338
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)	30	81				9	120
Occupational Therapy Assessment	55	167				1	223
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	29	84					113
Smartpass	35	8				9	52
Social Services	5	32					37
South Down	2357	3690	199	55	192	87	6580
Benefit Entitlement Check	69	945	199	55	85	1	1354
Boiler Replacement Scheme	89	481			107	30	707
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	274	504					778
Home Safety Check	1049	280				15	1344
Local Services	288	611					899
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)	82	203				31	316
Occupational Therapy Assessment	200	250					450

Constituency	Accessed Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Complete, No Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Advised to 'Make the Call' to Improving Benefit Uptake	Signposted	Pending	Outstanding	Grand Total
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	194	344				3	541
Smartpass	103	31				7	141
Social Services	9	41					50
Strangford	1793	2118	224	48	163	53	4399
Benefit Entitlement Check	57	612	224	48	80	2	1023
Boiler Replacement Scheme	65	239			83	20	407
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	152	298					450
Home Safety Check	705	101				20	826
Local Services	290	342					632
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)	58	107				9	174
Occupational Therapy Assessment	250	91					341
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	151	277					428
Smartpass	55	20				2	77
Social Services	10	31					41
Upper Bann	572	1099	92	24	71	30	1888
Benefit Entitlement Check	15	300	92	24	42	1	474
Boiler Replacement Scheme	12	141			29	7	189
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	52	136					188
Home Safety Check	306	89				1	396
Local Services	60	185					245
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)	27	50				14	91
Occupational Therapy Assessment	39	86				1	126
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	38	97				4	139
Smartpass	22	7				2	31
Social Services	1	8					9

Constituency	Accessed Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Complete, No Additional Grants Benefits or Services	Advised to 'Make the Call' to Improving Benefit Uptake	Signposted	Pending	Outstanding	Grand Total
West Tyrone	2003	1939	192	61	204	185	4584
Benefit Entitlement Check	36	563	192	61	61		913
Boiler Replacement Scheme	54	144			143	51	392
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	120	253					373
Flexicare	124	127					251
Home Safety Check	913	109				89	1111
Local Services	348	142				5	495
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)	12	90				16	118
Occupational Therapy Assessment	77	220				18	315
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	178	203				1	382
Smartpass	127	11				5	143
Social Services	14	77					91
Not Assigned	55	61	8	1	3	4	132
Benefit Entitlement Check	2	18	8	1			29
Boiler Replacement Scheme	1	4			3	2	10
Energy Saving Homes Scheme	7	10					17
Flexicare	1						1
Home Safety Check	26	8					34
Local Services	6	7					13
NI Sustainable Energy Programme (Levy Scheme)		3				2	5
Occupational Therapy Assessment	8	6					14
Rural Community Transport Partnerships	2	4					6
Smartpass	2						2
Social Services		1					1
Grand Total	17240	24502	1770	481	1418	794	46205

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what projects she intends to fund from the European Union Exceptional Adjustment Aid package.
(AQW 4623/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I successfully made the case for a significant share of the €30 million UK envelope of EU exceptional adjustment aid, and indications are that Northern Ireland will receive €4.8 million.

I want to maximise the impact of that money and ensure that we get it out quickly to farmers, get the best value from it, and that it makes a meaningful difference to our industry going forward. My officials and I have discussed a range of potential options with stakeholders. I have asked my officials to undertake some further work on a number of these so that I can make a final decision in the very near future.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the grade and end usage of the beef imported from (i) Brazil; and (ii) Botswana.

(AQW 4624/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The beef consignments arriving from both Botswana and Brazil is certified as frozen boneless beef for human consumption.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) the number of cattle stolen in Fermanagh and South Tyrone in the last five years; and (ii) how many have been recovered.

(AQW 4688/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The tables below shows the number of bovine animals reported and recorded on the Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS) as missing or stolen in the Enniskillen Divisional Veterinary Office (DVO) area and the Dungannon DVO area, for each of the last three financial years and the current financial year to date. The table also shows the total number of animals still recorded as lost / stolen. Figures for financial year 2012-2013 have not been supplied as it was not until 1 January 2013 that missing/stolen cattle had to be notified to DAERA in writing due to the Cattle identification (miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (NI) 2012.

Enniskillen DVO

Financial Year	Total number of Incidents	Total number of cattle lost / stolen	Total number of animals still recorded as lost / stolen
2013 – 2014	164	268	257
2014 – 2015	157	231	224
2015 – 2016	112	182	176
2016 – to date	40	50	50

Dungannon DVO

Financial Year	Total number of Incidents	Total number of cattle lost / stolen	Total number of animals still recorded as lost / stolen
2013 – 2014	244	608	595
2014 – 2015	234	441	434
2015 – 2016	185	443	437
2016 – to date	49	87	86

Information held on APHIS is recorded against a DVO area and not on a constituency basis.

APHIS does not differentiate between missing or stolen cattle.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline whether her Department has developed a code of practice for the implementation of regulations that impact the Northern Ireland Agri-Food Sector, as was recommended in the Going for Growth Strategy.

(AQW 4788/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Your question relates to Recommendation 40 made by the Agri-Food Strategy Board in their strategic action plan Going for Growth. The Executive published its response to Going for Growth in October 2014 including agreed actions to be taken forward by government departments and agencies. An update on Executive-led actions outlined in the response is available on the DAERA website at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Going%20for%20Growth%20Progress%20Update%20-%20period%20ending%2030%20June%202016.pdf>.

This update has also been shared with the Assembly's Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on 22 September 2016.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how her Department has benchmarked internationally its application of legislation and standards to identify the best practice in cost effective regulation.

(AQW 4789/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Your question relates to a recommendation made by the Agri-Food Strategy Board in their strategic action plan Going for Growth. The Executive published its response to Going for Growth in October 2014 including agreed actions to be taken forward by government departments and agencies. An update on Executive-led actions outlined in the response is available on the DAERA website at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Going%20for%20Growth%20Progress%20Update%20-%20period%20ending%2030%20June%202016.pdf>.

This update has also been shared with the Assembly's Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on 22 September 2016.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether there is a facility to provide security of last resort to meet the Bank security requirement for those partners in an agri-food sector scheme that are seeking to invest as part of their commitment to their supply chain partners.

(AQW 4869/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Your question relates to a recommendation made by the Agri-Food Strategy Board in their strategic action plan Going for Growth. The Executive published its response to Going for Growth in October 2014 including agreed actions to be taken forward by government departments and agencies. An update on Executive-led actions outlined in the response is available on the DAERA website at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Going%20for%20Growth%20Progress%20Update%20-%20period%20ending%2030%20June%202016.pdf>. This update was also shared with the Assembly's Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on 22 September 2016.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the procedure for providing progress and the outcome of a complaint to the complainant.

(AQW 4880/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Details of the Complaints Procedures are available on the DAERA website at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dard/daera-complaints-procedure-leaflet-august-2016.PDF>

The Department acknowledges all complaints received within 3 working days of receipt and will provide a full response to both verbal and written complaints were possible within 15 working days of receipt. If it is not possible to provide a full response within 15 working days then an interim reply will be issued to the customer explaining why and an approximate date for the full response will be given. The customer will be contacted every 15 working days in writing until a full response can be issued. This applies to all Step1, 2 and 3 complaints.

When the complaint has been fully investigated and a final outcome reached the customer will receive a written response detailing the decision made and explaining the reasons for this. They will also be advised that they may contact the NI Public Services Ombudsman if they are not content with the outcome of the investigation.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment on the recent comments by George Freeman MP regarding the prospect of financial support for agriculture being diverted once the United Kingdom leaves the European Union.

(AQW 4939/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: It is too early in the process to provide a meaningful assessment of the composition of a future domestic support framework.

The support framework that will apply to the agricultural industry following the UK's withdrawal from the EU will be subject to negotiation and agreement within the UK and between the UK and the EU. The Treasury's commitment to maintain current levels of CAP support to farmers out to 2020 gives us the time to develop a new approach to domestic agricultural support.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail all assets that changed name due to her Department's Single Language Policy, broken down by former and current name.

(AQW 4975/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Fisheries Protection Vessel is the only asset that has had its name translated since the formation of DAERA.

Department for Communities

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline his Department's investment in disability sports over the last ten years.

(AQW 2713/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): My Department, through Sport Northern Ireland has invested a total of £7.07m in disability sports over the last ten years.

This is broken down as follows:

Disability Sport Northern Ireland	£2,731,008
Paralympics Ireland	£330,645
Special Olympics Ulster	£3,340,981
Other individuals and organisations	£667,920
Total:	£7,070,554

In addition, Sport NI supported disability sports through their Active Communities programme which saw an investment of £17m across all District Council areas during the period 2010-2016. As 14.1% of participants were people with disabilities, the estimated spend on developing disability sport through the Active Communities programme was £2.4m.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities (i) whether Sport NI has been instructed to use only internal departmental legal advice; and (ii) if so, to provide the rationale for this decision and when it was made.

(AQW 3890/16-21)

Mr Givan: I can confirm that Sport NI has not been instructed to use only internal Departmental legal advice.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities whether politicians are allowed to attend Personal Independence Payment or Employment Support Allowance medicals.

(AQW 3908/16-21)

Mr Givan: Politicians are allowed to accompany a claimant at Personal Independence Payment and Employment and Support Allowance assessments in the role of a friend, relative or support worker.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities to outline on what projections the budget for Discretionary Housing Payments is based.

(AQW 3974/16-21)

Mr Givan: The budget for Discretionary Housing Payments in Northern Ireland is determined by the application of the Barnett formula to the budget set for this purpose in England. The budget for Discretionary Housing Payments in England is set by the UK Government taking account of the expected demand for the payments arising from changes to the policy which sets the eligibility conditions for Housing Benefit.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities what financial support his Department, or its arm's-length bodies, will provide to Banbridge Hockey Club as they host Round 1 of the European Hockey League in October 2016.

(AQW 4006/16-21)

Mr Givan: Following representation from Carla Lockhart MLA, my Department has provided £5,000 funding to Banbridge Hockey Club to assist them with activities that support the development of hockey and promote participation as a result of the Club hosting the European Hockey League round one games in October.

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 3669/16-21, when an answer will be provided to this priority written question.

(AQW 4273/16-21)

Mr Givan: A response to AQW 3669/16-21 issued to the Business Office on 30 September 2016.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister for Communities to detail the Causeway Coast and Glens council's planned housing association schemes.

(AQW 4307/16-21)

Mr Givan: There are currently 364 social housing units programmed to start on-site in the Causeway Coast and Glens Council area as part of the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP). The detail of these schemes is provided below.

Please be advised that programmed schemes can be lost or slip to future programme years for a variety of reasons such as issues relating to delays in acquiring sites and/or failure to secure planning permission.

You may wish to note that the annual programme formulation process is currently underway for the new SHDP period 2017/18 to 2019/20. Further schemes may be added to the programme for the Causeway Coast and Glens Council area.

Social housing schemes programmed to start in the Causeway Coast & Glens Council area as part of the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) 2016/17 – 2018/19 at 3rd October 2016

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Apex Housing	2 Ashbourne Park	Coleraine	1	2016/17	2016/17
Apex Housing	Frail Elderly, Rathmoyle	Ballycastle	28	2016/17	2018/19
Clanmil	PSNI, Charlotte Street	Ballymoney	8	2016/17	2017/18
Clanmil	Station Road (Transfer)	Dunloy	10	2016/17	2017/18
Habinteg	76 Coleraine Road	Portrush	1	2016/17	2016/17
Habinteg	Girona Avenue	Portrush	10	2016/17	2017/18
Helm Housing	21 Charles Street	Ballymoney	7	2016/17	2018/19
Triangle	Coleraine ESPs	Coleraine	5	2016/17	2016/17
Triangle	Portstewart/Portrush ESPs	Portstewart	10	2016/17	2017/18
Apex Housing	Chapelfield, Laurelhill Road	Coleraine	18	2017/18	2018/19
Fold	Coleraine Road	Portstewart	85	2017/18	2020/21
Fold	Beresford Place	Coleraine	26	2017/18	2019/20
Helm Housing	Ramore Hall, Ramore Street	Portrush	8	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Kilnadore Road	Cushendall	14	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Artikelly	Limavady	6	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Coleraine ESPs	Coleraine	5	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	2A Garryduff Road (CAT 1)	Ballymoney	10	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Harpurs Hill, Phase 2 (Transfer)	Coleraine	9	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	New Street	Armoy	6	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Portstewart/Portrush ESPs	Portstewart	10	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	2A Garryduff Road	Ballymoney	9	2017/18	2018/19
Fold	Leyland Road Phase 2	Ballycastle	20	2018/19	2019/20
Helm Housing	1-5 Portrush Road	Coleraine	8	2018/19	2019/20
Helm Housing	Parkview/Jubilee Court	Ballymoney	21	2018/19	2019/20
Triangle	Coleraine ESPs	Coleraine	5	2018/19	2019/20
Triangle	Cregagh View, Knocknacarry	Knocknacarry	14	2018/19	2019/20
Triangle	Portstewart/Portrush ESPs	Portrush	10	2018/19	2019/20

Mr Lyons asked the Minister for Communities how many people were in receipt of Carer's Allowance in East Antrim in each year since 2011.

(AQW 4338/16-21)

Mr Givan: The table below shows the number of recipients of Carers Allowance in East Antrim in the last five years.

Year	Recipients
2011	1,170
2012	1,330
2013	1,420
2014	1,460
2015	1,530
2016	1,620

Figures rounded to nearest 10.

The Information provided is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities, in relation to medical assessments for Personal Independence Payment claims, to outline under what circumstances a trainee Disability Assessor would carry out medical examinations alone and unsupervised by a qualified Disability Assessor.

(AQW 4349/16-21)

Mr Givan: There are no circumstances where a trainee Disability Assessor would carry out a Personal Independence Payment face to face consultation alone. Each disability assessor must have a minimum of two years post registration experience which must be fulfilled within an approved health profession, as dictated by my Department. These professions include nursing, physiotherapy, paramedic as well as occupational therapy

Having satisfied that requirement a Disability assessor undergoes an extensive 10 week training programme and can only conduct a face to face consultation having successfully completed their training and clearly demonstrated they have met key competencies for performing this role.

In addition, once they have passed their training they are physically shadowed by an experienced disability assessor, who observes them undertaking assessments and provides feedback. This one to one support ends once their reports have gone through a robust audit process to ensure they are attaining the required quality standard. There is also an ongoing quality monitoring and support programme in place for Disability Assessors.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Communities what reports they have received from the Strategic Investment Board regarding the proposed transfer of ownership of Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) buildings; and what is the purpose of the proposed GIS mapping of NIHE buildings.

(AQW 4371/16-21)

Mr Givan: Neither I nor my Department have received any reports from the Strategic Investment Board regarding the transfer of ownership of Northern Ireland Housing Executive buildings.

The purpose of mapping assets is to ensure appropriate and accurate records are maintained and that public sector assets are being utilised effectively and efficiently to deliver the strategic objectives of government.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Communities (i) to whom ownership of the Northern Ireland Housing Executives (NIHE) buildings will be transferred; (ii) whether NIPSA has been consulted about the proposed transfer of ownership of the NIHE buildings; (iii) whether representatives of NIHE tenants have been consulted about the proposed transfer of ownership of the buildings.

(AQW 4373/16-21)

Mr Givan: In relation to office accommodation, the Reform of Property Management Programme has been established to improve the management and reduce the cost of the Central Government office estate through exiting leases, developing more efficient office accommodation and transferring the offices into the control of the Department of Finance.

Relevant stakeholders are always consulted regarding options or proposals which may impact working conditions or service delivery. Where and when appropriate this includes NIPSA and representatives of tenants.

Also, as part of the Housing Strategy, the NIHE has undertaken to transfer 2,000 homes to housing associations in order to deliver £100 million of investment to the stock. Any such transfers as part of this process of small scale stock transfer will only take place with tenant agreement.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Communities what discussions he has had with the (i) Strategic Investment Board; and (ii) Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) regarding the proposed transfer of ownership of NIHE buildings.

(AQW 4374/16-21)

Mr Givan: I have had no discussions with either the Strategic Investment Board or the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in relation to the proposed transfer of ownership of Housing Executive buildings.

The Housing Executive has advised that the only discussions it has participated in relating to the transfer of ownership of buildings, involving the Strategic Investment Board, has been as a result of the Department of Finance Reform of Property Management Programme.

The Strategic Investment Board is supporting the Department of Finance with the delivery of the Reform of Property Management Programme. As I mentioned in my reply to your written question (AQW 4373/16-21), this Programme has been established to improve the management and reduce the cost of the Central Government office estate through exiting leases, developing more efficient office accommodation and transferring ownership into the control of the Department of Finance.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Communities whether (ii) the terms of any transfer of ownership of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) buildings be subject to approval by the Executive; and (iii) the terms of any transfer of ownership of NIHE buildings be reported to and subject to Assembly approval.

(AQW 4423/16-21)

Mr Givan: In terms of governance arrangements, the Housing Executive has confirmed that it will manage any activities related to the delivery of the Executive's approved Asset Management Strategy, in line with those requirements and structures defined, which will include oversight by my Department.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Communities to detail the total amount his Department has recovered from individuals convicted of benefit fraud in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4489/16-21)

Mr Givan: The table below details recoveries relating to fraud cases over the last five financial years;

Financial Year	Total Fraud Recoveries
11/12	£1.55m
12/13	£1.84m
13/14	£1.82m
14/15	£1.80m
15/16	£1.55m

These recovery figures include sums recovered by the Financial Investigation Unit, by means of confiscation orders, compensation orders and voluntary payments.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities (i) whether a Health Impact Assessment was conducted for the proposed law changes regulating the sale and supply of alcohol, and (ii) if so, to outline the conclusion.

(AQW 4498/16-21)

Mr Givan: Research and consultation carried out prior to the introduction of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill flagged up concerns about the potential negative health impacts of those measures which introduce additional opening hours and an increase in drinking up time in licensed premises. A short health screening exercise was conducted and it was considered that the proposed changes to current opening hours did not require a full health impact assessment.

In recent years, drinking patterns in Northern Ireland have changed, with 70% of drink now sold for consumption at home. Placing limitations on the number of occasions when alcohol may be sold to 2.00am in licensed premises which provide food and/or entertainment represents a cautious approach to increasing the availability of alcohol. In addition there are inbuilt safeguards to increase or decrease such opportunities in light of experience.

The safeguards in relation to increasing drinking up time represent a similar sensible and cautious approach to ensure that the increase in "drinking up" time is discouraging customers from drinking too quickly or stockpiling drinks.

The Liquor Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill also includes measures to tackle practices which may encourage alcohol misuse. In particular

- prohibiting the removal of alcohol in sealed containers (off-sales from a pub) at the end of the night will reduce impulse buys which often leads to prolonged drinking elsewhere;
- prohibiting the supply of alcohol by self-service and vending machines will ensure that the sale of alcoholic drinks is always supervised, allowing trained staff in a regulated environment the opportunity to monitor alcohol consumption and refuse the sale of alcoholic drinks when necessary;
- approving voluntary codes of practice with legal consequences for non-compliance looks to promote best practice and to prevent alcoholic drinks being promoted or sold in an irresponsible fashion;
- further regulation of how alcohol is advertised in supermarkets will encourage people to make conscious decisions about whether to purchase alcohol and help to emphasise that alcohol is not an ordinary product.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities what his Department is doing to assist and support people in Strabane in financial hardship and debt due to credit cards, catalogues and pay day loans.

(AQW 4572/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department provides funding to Derry City and Strabane Council of £425k for generalist advice provision in the 2016/17 year. This enables frontline advice organisations deliver a wide range of advice services including advice on money and debt.

The Department is also funding a freephone helpline and a face to face advice service in the Derry City and Strabane Council area to provide additional advice services to assist people through the implementation of the ongoing changes to the welfare system.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities, given the success and rise in popularity of cycling over recent years, whether (i) he has considered the possibility or costed locating a velodrome in the North West; and (ii) whether he has plans to work with the Minister for Infrastructure to improve the cycling infrastructure.

(AQW 4577/16-21)

Mr Givan: Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department, has met with Cycling Ireland, the Governing Body for cycling, on a number of occasions to discuss their priorities for the provision of 'track cycling' in Ulster. The need for an indoor velodrome is high on Cycling Ireland's priorities. However, I am not aware of any plans to locate one in the North West.

With regard to improving the cycling infrastructure my Department has invested in a range of initiatives to improve access for cyclists, these include:-

- Waterside Greenway, Londonderry;
- Queens Quay and Foyle embankment;
- Pedestrian and cycle bridge, Strabane; and
- Omagh Riverside Walk and Cycle Path.

My Department is also currently working with delivery partners including the Department for Infrastructure and Councils on plans that should further develop the cycling infrastructure in Newry and Belfast City Centre.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Communities for an update on Enabling Success; and who are the lead responsible Departments for the (i) Outcomes Framework; (ii) Pilot; (iii) Control; (iv) Incentives; (v) Protection; (vi) Promotion; (vii) Awareness; (viii) Health and Work; (ix) Advocates; (x) Oversight; and (xi) Information projects.

(AQW 4593/16-21)

Mr Givan: Enabling Success was the last Executive's strategy for addressing Northern Ireland's high economic inactivity rate.

The current draft Programme for Government Framework carries forward that commitment to reducing economic inactivity and my department has developed a Programme for Government Delivery Plan that sets out the interventions it believes will achieve this. (Reduce Economic Inactivity, Indicator 17 in the Programme for Government Framework). Building on Enabling Success, the commitments made are action oriented and focused on delivering a step change in our approach to supporting people with health conditions and disabilities, and those with family and caring responsibilities who want to work.

Through the actions proposed we will ensure that work pays, that people have the skills they need to access and progress in work, that they have access to health related support they may need to stay in work and that they can afford the childcare they may need.

The Delivery Plan proposes an important role for local government, working closely with us through the Community Planning process, to deliver improved skills and employability outcomes for the economically inactive.

The actions have been designed with input from the Department of Health, the Departments for the Economy and Education, as well as the Public Health Agency, Health and Safety Executive, employers, employer organisations and other important stakeholders. All of these partners will also have a role in delivery.

The proposals in the delivery plan will be the subject of a full public consultation as part of the next stage of the Programme for Government process over the coming weeks. The Senior Responsible Owner for the Delivery Plan is identified in the Framework document.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Communities to outline how the regulations accompanying the Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 take account of the difficulties faced by unemployed people from the most disadvantaged parts of Northern Ireland who are over 50 years of age, are more likely to have no qualifications and be in poor health.

(AQW 4600/16-21)

Mr Givan: A number of changes introduced by the Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 were designed to increase personal responsibility to ensure that those who can work are helped move towards work, and not trapped in benefit dependency and also to ensure resources are focused on those most in need. The 2015 Order makes provision for an integrated working-age benefit, universal credit. This will be available to people who are in work as well as out of work, and replaces a number of benefits and tax credits. The core objective of Universal Credit is to support claimants to enter work, earn more or prepare for work in the future.

The 2015 Order introduces the claimant commitment to the existing out of work benefits - Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance. Under Universal Credit all claimants will be required to accept a claimant commitment as a condition of entitlement for receipt. The claimant commitment will be tailored for each individual and will take account of the individual's capabilities and circumstances, including health, age, skills and other personal circumstances.

The current draft Programme for Government Framework includes a commitment to both address economic inactivity and increase economic opportunities for our most deprived communities, and my department has developed a Programme for Government Delivery Plan that sets out the interventions it believes will achieve this. The proposals take account of the need to address skills shortages and support people with health conditions, and have been designed with input from the Departments of Health and the Economy as well as other important stakeholders. All of these partners will also have a role in delivery. The proposals in the delivery plan will be the subject of a full public consultation as part of the next stage of the Programme for Government process over the coming weeks.

To assess if a claimant has barriers to employment in relation to their literacy, numeracy and IT skills, Employment Service Advisers will use a Work Readiness assessment toolkit. Where an Essential Skills need is identified, a referral for an Essential Skills Assessment will be made and the claimant will have access to a range of provision to address the barrier. If any physical issues are identified during the assessment, the Employment Service Adviser will ensure the claimant is referred for the appropriate support.

In relation to ensuring resources are focused on those most in need, my Department's Disability Employment Service provides a range of support measures, aimed at helping people with disability and health related barriers, to progress towards, move into and sustain paid employment.

This specialist provision includes pre-employment support, such as the Job Introduction Scheme, a subsidised work trial period for people with disabilities, as well as the Condition Management Programme.

Condition Management Programme is a person-centered work-focused, health rehabilitation programme. The key aim of the programme is to help people who are unemployed to manage their health condition and symptoms, improve their confidence and well-being, and in doing so, help improve their chances of making a successful return to work. The programme is delivered by experienced multi-disciplinary teams of healthcare professionals from the five Health & Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland.

In addition, my department works closely with a large number of disability organisations throughout Northern Ireland, who deliver employability and vocational training to disabled people of all ages. Specifically, we provide public match funding to seventeen local disability projects, aimed at helping people to gain qualifications, and then supporting them to move into paid employment.

To illustrate my department's long term commitment to supporting people with disabilities, the 'Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities' was launched in March 2016. <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/del/Disability%20Strategy%20report%20%28Web%29.pdf>

The strategy has been developed with the disability sector, with extensive consultation, involving people who have a disability. The strategy aims to support those people in our society with the most significant disability related barriers, but who want to work, are highly motivated, and with the right type of tailored support, are capable of securing paid employment and realising their full economic and career potential.

Steps 2 Success is my Department's main adult employment programme. It is delivered across 3 regions by contracted providers and is designed to allow Lead Contractors to deliver a flexible, personalised service, tailored to meet individual need. Lead Contractors work with each participant to help them to address barriers to employment and to find and sustain work. Steps 2 Success is for all eligible jobseekers, irrespective of their employability need or age. Each of the three delivery organisations offers a range of supports to people with complex needs to help them improve their chances of finding work. These can include:

- A clear focus on supporting health and wellbeing, addressing issues such as self esteem, confidence building, stress and anxiety, where necessary;
- access to specialist, professionally qualified staff such as occupational psychologists;
- referral to specialist support organisations, that are a key part of their delivery supply chain, to deal with issues such as mental health problems, managing health conditions, language barriers and addiction; and
- signposting and referral to a wide range of external specialist organisations.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities (i) for an update on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Choice Based Lettings pilot scheme; and (ii) whether he plans on expanding this scheme.

(AQW 4606/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) The Housing Executive's Choice Based Lettings (CBL) pilot began in January 2014 and is continuing to date. The pilot was set up to test out a CBL approach as an alternative to the allocation of difficult to let properties under the Multiple Offer system. The pilot aimed to test out an approach where the onus is on the applicant to search for / register interest in available properties and to test the practicalities of this approach in terms of advertising online, managing registrations of interest, time taken to re-let properties etc. While still a needs-based approach, the CBL pilot is undertaken as an exception to the usual operating rules of the Housing Selection Scheme and so has been restricted to specific low demand localities as approved by the Housing Executive Board and the Department (under Rule 84 of the Housing Selection Scheme which allows for specified departures from the usual rules of the Scheme). The CBL approach was designated in 15 Common Landlord Areas (CLAs) and has involved approximately 600 properties to date. It is currently operating in specific locations within 4 local areas.

- (ii) My officials are currently finalising evidence-based proposals as part of a fundamental review of social housing allocations policy. I will be putting these forward for public consultation later this year.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities to detail all (i) items; (ii) exhibits; (iii) artefacts; and (iv) anything connected with the old Great Northern Railway (Ireland) which are held by his Department in storage or in museums outside County Tyrone but that are associated with or originate in County Tyrone.

(AQW 4636/16-21)

Mr Givan: The list of (i) items; (ii) exhibits; (iii) artefacts; and (iv) anything connected with the old Great Northern Railway (Ireland) which are held by my Department in storage or in museums outside County Tyrone but that are associated with or originate in County Tyrone is set out at Annex A.

Annex A

List of items etc held by DfC and its ALBs outside of County Tyrone which relate to the old Great Northern Railway (Ireland)

National Museums NI

National Museums NI has the national collection representing Ireland's transport history. The majority of the transport collection is housed in purpose-built museum galleries at the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, Cultra, County Down.

National Museums NI has 1009 items or artefacts associated with the Great Northern Railway Ireland. Of these items or artefacts, 105 are associated with or originate in County Tyrone. These items include railways signs; technical drawings of locomotives, carriages, wagons and track work; timetables, rulebooks, booklets and memos; handbills; railway tickets and luggage labels; artwork; and, photographs.

Historic Environment Division (HED)

HED maintain the Industrial Heritage Record and it has mapped 163 individual records associated with the Great Northern Railway in County Tyrone. Locational information for these features can be accessed on its web mapping at <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/services/historic-environment-map-viewer>

In addition HED also hold some 430 photographic records within the McCutcheon Industrial Heritage collection that recorded surviving features related to the Great Northern Railway in Tyrone. These images can be accessed via appointment to visit the Monuments and Buildings Record, at the Klondyke Building, Cromac Avenue in Belfast.

PRONI:

TYR/7/1/2 (1897-1925)

A series of documents relating to the intention to procure land in County Tyrone for railway construction. Includes maps, schedules, costs, arbitrator's drafts, final awards, appeals by the County Council as to the value of the land. Townlands mentioned in the documentation include Cloghfin, Mullygruen, Cavanakeran, Sixmilecross, Kerrib and Kilmakardle.

UTA 23 (Ulster Transport Authority, c.1880-1950)

Records of the UTA relevant to the Great Northern Railway. The information is not catalogued on a geographical basis but focuses on the business carried out by the UTA; i.e. rate books, legal papers, engineer reports etc.

UTA 24 (Ulster Transport Authority, 1954-1958)

Records of the Board of the Great Northern Railway including four Annual Reports & Statement of Accounts.

VAL/11 (Valuation and Lands Railway Files Series, c.1900-1968)

Series of files relating to stations and halt across Northern Ireland, including County Tyrone.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister for Communities what plans he has to transfer regeneration powers to local councils.

(AQW 4638/16-21)

Mr Givan: This AQ has been asked several times, please refer to previous answers:

(AQW 4483/16-21), (AQW 3109/16-21), (AQW 2920/16-21) & (AQW 1115/16-21)

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) any plans to sell or transfer Northern Ireland Housing Executive buildings and properties; (ii) the timeline for any such proposals and; (iii) any work undertaken by his Department in preparation.

(AQW 4668/16-21)

Mr Givan: As part of the Housing Strategy, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has undertaken to transfer 2,000 homes to housing associations in order to deliver £100 million of investment to the stock. Any such transfers as part of this process of small scale stock transfer will only take place with tenant agreement.

In addition the Housing Executive has confirmed that it currently has no plans to sell any of its office buildings and therefore, in relation to this, there is no timeline available and no work has been undertaken by my Department.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to outline what action his Department is taking to reduce personal debt in Strabane.

(AQW 4681/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department provides funding to Derry City and Strabane Council of £425k for generalist advice provision in the 2016/17 year. This enables frontline advice organisations deliver a wide range of advice services including advice on money and debt.

The Department is also funding a freephone helpline and a face to face advice service in the Derry City and Strabane Council area to provide additional advice services to assist people through the implementation of the ongoing changes to the welfare system.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail all (i) land; and (ii) property owned by his Department and its arm's-length bodies in West Tyrone.

(AQW 4685/16-21)

Mr Givan: The land and property owned by the Department for Communities and its arm's length bodies are as detailed below:

(i) Land

Ref	District	Location	Site Area (HA)
NI Housing Executive Owned (excludes homes or other non-residential property (e.g. garages or commercial premises).			
708/7	Strabane	Allen Park, Donemana	0.6
708/8	Strabane	Duncastle Road, Donemana	0.2
708/10	Strabane	Listymore Park	0.92
708/11	Strabane	Drumrallagh/Fountain Street	0.48
708/13	Strabane	Urney Road, Clady	0.1
708/17	Strabane	Townsend Street	0.14
708/22	Strabane	Mourne Park, Newtownstewart	0.13
708/23	Strabane	Camus Road	0.06
708/27	Strabane	Glebe Park, Glebe	0.23
709/4	Omagh	Knockmoyle	0.53
709/10	Omagh	Dergmoney Heights, Omagh	0.85
709/11	Omagh	Watson Park Sites 1-3	0.3
709/19	Omagh	Lammy Crescent/Drive Site 1	0.28
709/21	Omagh	Lammy Crescent/Drive Site 3	0.17
709/22	Omagh	Lammy Crescent/Drive Site 4	0.21
709/23	Omagh	Brookfield Close	0.9
709/26	Omagh	Riverview Park	0.01
709/27	Omagh	O'Kane Park	0.06
709/28	Omagh	McKinley Bungalows	0.09
708/4	Strabane	The Crescent, Clady	1.32
708/12	Strabane	Mason Road/Blackstone	0.38
708/14	Strabane	Corickmore/Plumbridge Sites 1 & 2	0.44
708/15	Strabane	14-16 Newtown Street	0.02
708/25	Strabane	Ulster Cottages	0.16
709/2	Omagh	Gardrum Heights, Dromore	0.44
709/3B	Omagh	(Drumnaforbe) Loughrey Terrace, Drumquin	1.16

Ref	District	Location	Site Area (HA)
709/8	Omagh	Montague Villas	0.21
709/9	Omagh	Hawkes Crescent, Omagh	0.26
709/24	Omagh	Clanabogen Road	0.09
709/29	Omagh	25 & 26 Edinburgh Park	0.07
708/9	Strabane	Glenelly View, Plumbridge	0.07
709/5	Omagh	Rectory Avenue, Beragh	1.73
709/17	Omagh	McFarland Terrace	0.07
Department Owned			
NCA0038543	Strabane	Canal Street/Dock Street	1.52 (sites adjacent)
NCA0038648	Strabane	Gateway Site	
NCA0038673	Carrickmore	Main Street Car Park *	0.12
NCA0038678	Castledearg	The Diamond	0.25
NCA0038679	Plumbridge	Plumbridge	0.15

* This car park is transferring to DfI .

(ii) Property

District	Location
NI Housing Executive Owned	
Strabane	48 Railway Road
Omagh	9 Woodside Avenue
Omagh	7 Holmview Terrace
NI Housing Executive Leased	
Strabane	40-46 Railway Road
National Museums NI	
Omagh	Ulster American Folk Park buildings (land is leased)
Strabane	Wilson House (homestead, lay-by and lane)
Libraries NI	
Castledearg	Branch library
Fintona	Branch library
Newtownstewart	Branch library
Omagh	Library/headquarters
Strabane	Branch library
Historic Environment Division State Care Monuments (Owned)	
Balix	Lower Court Tomb
Lisky	Court Tomb
Churchtown	Wedge Tomb
Churchtown	Portal Tomb
Berrysfort	Standing Stone
Glenknock/ Cloghogle	Portal Tomb
Newtownstewart	Harry Avery's Castle
Newtownstewart	Newtownstewart Castle

District	Location
Damphcloy	Megalithic structure
Cregganconroe	Court Tomb
Creggandevsky	Court Tomb

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 3203/16-21 and AQW 3292/16-21, to outline whether capital investment made through Housing Association Grants is included as part of the capital budget allocated to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

(AQW 4697/16-21)

Mr Givan: Housing Association Grant is included as part of the Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) budget allocated to the NI Housing Executive by my Department and funds investment in social housing.

AQW 3203/16-21 shows the amount of grant awarded in each financial year for new build starts. The time taken to construct new build projects means that the related expenditure may be incurred in subsequent financial years. AQW 3292 / 16 -21 shows the Capital DEL budget for expenditure by financial year.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment on the introduction of a depth specification for re-thatching historical thatched cottages.

(AQW 4752/16-21)

Mr Givan: I can advise the Member that such an approach is being seriously considered by my officials and others, as part of a wider consideration of thatching issues. The argument for a depth specification is that it will increase the longevity of work, thereby reducing overall costs and increasing the attractiveness of such buildings for owners.

The alternative argument is that patch repairs of varying depth should be supported to increase the time between recoats, and that, as the specification of a depth may result in the loss of sound historic material, thatchers should be relied upon to make such decisions.

This second approach has been followed to date in Northern Ireland, but evidence from our records shows that the time between re-thatching has reduced over the last 40 years. This may be due to climate change but it may also suggest a drop in quality of workmanship over time.

The Historic Environment Fund I introduced in September seeks more detailed specification information from applicants than previous support schemes. This will provide evidence to allow the Department to engage with the industry and refine its guidance for future years.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for Communities to outline how Irish Thatched Cottage Heritage is protected, given that 21 per cent of thatched cottages are currently on the Buildings at Risk Register.

(AQW 4753/16-21)

Mr Givan: Since 1973, when listing was first introduced to Northern Ireland, my Department and its predecessors have sought to identify and protect the most important thatched buildings in the region. Listing, coupled with grant aid, has been the principal route that has been employed to protect and encourage the continued use of these structures. Over the period, a large number of buildings have been successfully conserved, extended and changed to meet new uses. This has helped to reduce significantly the loss of these buildings which are considered by many to be too small for modern use; costly to maintain; and a relic of a poorer era.

This heritage is, however, fragile and can decay quickly if an owner dies and a building becomes unoccupied or a roof is left unmaintained. As a result, monitoring surveys of the region's listed thatched buildings were conducted in 1992, 1995, 2000-2005, 2006, and 2012. This is the only type of listed building that has received such attention. My Department's architects also seek to engage with owners and keep aware of the buildings in their areas.

Because of the need for regular maintenance, the Historic Environment Fund I launched in September identifies thatched buildings as a priority category for support. 75% of costs, up to a cap of £50k, is currently available for repairs. I very much hope to continue this support in future years.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities to detail projects promoting the Irish language in County Tyrone that his Department is assisting in the current financial year.

(AQW 4755/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department for Communities does not directly fund projects to promote Irish Language in County Tyrone. Foras na Gaeilge, which is part of the North South Language Body co-funded by Department for Communities, is the statutory body with responsibility for promoting the Irish Language. It has approved funding to 28 projects in County Tyrone in 2016, totalling £153,114.67.

All libraries hold Irish Language stock (the size and scope of the collections depend on demand and usage). Coalisland, Cookstown, Dungannon, Omagh and Strabane libraries in County Tyrone provided Irish language material for the Big Summer Read for children.

In Coalisland Library Leigh Leat Reading Group meets fortnightly and the local Gaelscoil class visits to the library are facilitated by an Irish speaking member of staff who also reads stories to the children in Irish.

Cookstown Library facilitates an Irish Conversation Group meeting on a monthly basis and the University of Ulster first year Irish Language class use the library also on a monthly basis.

An Irish Conversation Circle meets on a monthly basis in Dungannon Library. In partnership with Mid Ulster Council the Dungannon Library also facilitates the hosting of Irish Language events e.g. Frances Quinn will visit the Library on 27 October for adult storytelling session in Irish and on 29 October for Irish language storytime and craft session for 4 – 8 year olds.

One of National Museums NI's (NMNI) three sites is located in County Tyrone – the Ulster American Folk Park. Irish language activity delivered at the Ulster American Folk Park during the current financial year includes an Irish language visitor information booklet and trail, and the facilitation of Irish language groups visiting the museum.

NMNI has ongoing partnerships with An Droichead and Coláiste Feirste to provide increased access to the Irish language for its audiences.

The Arts Council has awarded Dun Uladh Ltd, Omagh £18,475 core costs and £8,075 programme costs from the Lottery fund to promote Irish language projects in County Tyrone.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities to provide the average timeframe to process claims for ESA joint claimants. **(AQW 4756/16-21)**

Mr Givan: This information is not available. It is not possible to have joint Employment and Support Allowance claimants. A claimant applying for Income Related Employment and Support Allowance may be entitled to claim for a partner but their partner cannot be treated as a claimant. The target for processing all new claims is 14 working days, on average.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Communities to outline the additional distance travelled by workers in the Omagh Jobs and Benefits office, as a consequence of staff redeployment to Dungannon and Armagh. **(AQW 4763/16-21)**

Mr Givan: No staff have been redeployed to fill posts in Dungannon and Armagh from Omagh Jobs and Benefits Office. A number of staff from Omagh Jobs and Benefits Office volunteered and were successful in applying for posts in Discretionary Support in Dungannon Jobs and Benefits Office. On average, these staff will have to travel 18.6 miles from their home address to Dungannon Jobs and Benefits Office.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the total cost of investment for placing, developing and maintaining the (i) Telephony Service Unit; (ii) FSS Pilot; and (iii) Crisis Loans Telephony Service, in Omagh since April 2013. **(AQW 4764/16-21)**

Mr Givan: The table below sets out the implementation and running costs for the Telephony Service Unit, the Financial Support Service pilot and the Crisis Loan telephony service in Omagh from April 2013 to the end of August 2016.

Area of Expenditure	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17 Ytd @ Aug 2016	Total
1 Telephony Support Unit					
IT – Telephony Implementation Costs	£50.8k				£50.8k
IT – Telephony Running Costs ¹	£37.3K	£46.2K	£54.6K	£19.6K	£157.7K
Salary Costs	£729.8K	£713.9K	£634.3K	£239.4K	£2,317.4K
2 Financial Support Service Pilot					
IT – Telephony Implementation 2		£30.9K			£30.9K
IT – Telephony Running Costs		£1.92K			£1.92K
Salary Costs		£32.8K			£32.8K
3 Crisis Loan Telephony Service					
Salary Costs		£202.3K	£260.8K	£124.4K	£587.5K

Notes:

- 1 The IT Telephony Running Costs the Telephony Support Unit include the IT Telephony Running Costs for the Crisis Loan Telephony Service.
- 2 The IT Telephony Implementation costs for the Financial Support Service Pilot and implementation Costs for the Crisis Loan Telephony Service are amalgamated.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Communities whether he plans to survey departmental staff to gauge the level of interest in transferring to a role in Omagh.

(AQW 4765/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department has no plans to survey departmental staff as to whether they would be interested in transferring to a role in Omagh. Job opportunities in Omagh will be filled in line with the NICS Vacancy Management Policy which includes the use of Interest Circulars or Elective Transfer notices which are distributed across the NICS or through redeployment within the Department for Communities.

Interest is also sought from career breakers wishing to return to work or those staff on priority pools such as employees with welfare reasons or staff with disabilities who wish to move closer to home.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Communities to outline his Department's efforts seeking volunteers from the Working Age Group to transfer to a role in Omagh.

(AQW 4766/16-21)

Mr Givan: Responsibility for resourcing sits with our Departmental Human Resources and they seek candidates using a range of tools when they are notified by business areas to fill vacancies.

Internally, tools range from the use of interest circulars or elective transfer notices which are distributed across the NICS or through redeployment within DfC. Interest is also sought from career breakers wishing to return to work or those staff on priority pools such as employees with welfare reasons or staff with disabilities who wish to move closer to home.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Communities what investment the Department for Social Development made in the Omagh Jobs and Benefits Office between 2010 and May 2016.

(AQW 4767/16-21)

Mr Givan: Omagh Jobs and Benefits Office forms part of the Government-owned estate. The building is therefore held by the Department of Finance's Properties Division. Any investment in the building would have been a matter for the Department of Finance to maintain its condition and fabric as an asset.

The Department for Social Development made no investment in the Omagh Jobs and Benefits Office during the period 2010 to May 2016 apart from a spend of c£75,000 to enhance the telephony infrastructure in 2013/14.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities for a breakdown of how the reported £6 million has been spent on the Casement Park project.

(AQW 4791/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department has been allocated £110 million by the Executive to deliver the Regional Stadia Programme. £62.5 million has been made available to the Ulster Council of the GAA to build a new stadium at Casement Park.

As of 31 March 2016, actual spend on the Casement Park project was £6.4 million. Expenditure is related to eligible development costs, as per the letter of offer, for grant eligible items such as project related employment and governance, design, pre-development construction, legal and statutory fees, surveys and business case development.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities, in relation to his Department's responsibilities, to outline how the UK exiting the European Union will impact children, with specific reference to any protections enshrined in European Union law that are not currently transposed into UK and Northern Ireland legislation.

(AQW 4808/16-21)

Mr Givan: The UK Government will be responsible for overseeing negotiations to leave the EU and establishing the future relationship between the UK and EU. Whilst the UK Government will be engaging with the devolved administrations as the negotiations progress, it is too early at this stage to make an assessment of any potential impact on children arising from the UK's withdrawal from the EU. The Prime Minister has given a commitment that the Northern Ireland Executive will be fully involved and represented in the negotiations and the issue of the ambit of EU law will be considered in this context.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities to outline how many people have applied for crisis loans in Strabane since 2014.

(AQW 4812/16-21)

Mr Givan: The number of applications, applicants and awards of Crisis Loans since 2014 in the Strabane Social Security Office Boundary/Strabane Local Government District are set out in the tables below. Data is up to and including June 2016

Social Security Office Boundary	Applications	Applicants	Awards
2014	3,310	1580	3,000
2015	3,310	1530	3,000
2016	1,530	880	1,320

Local Government District	Applications	Applicants	Awards
2014	3,360	1600	3,040
2015	3,320	1540	3,010
2016	1,540	890	1,330

* Please note figures have been rounded to the nearest 10. An applicant can make more than one application during the year

The information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities , pursuant to AQW 3310/16-21, what are identified as potential adverse impacts that the proposals might have; and what are the appropriate measures indicated which can be put in place to mitigate adverse impacts.

(AQW 4833/16-21)

Mr Givan: A draft Rural Impact Assessment Screening document has been prepared which has indicated that a Rural Impact Assessment is not required. Impact for service users can be mitigated through the continued availability of face-to-face services from alternative locations and the use of enhanced telephony and digital services.

My Department will also use any evidence provided in response to the public consultation exercise to inform the rural proofing process and the Rural Impact Assessment Screening document is being kept under review during the consultation period.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities , pursuant to AQW 3312/16-21, (i) how many meetings have taken place with Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs officials on this matter; and (ii) what documents are available to provide detail of an initial rural-proofing exercise.

(AQW 4834/16-21)

Mr Givan: Department for Communities officials have had 5 telephone conversations with Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs officials for advice on the rural proofing of the proposals. The outcome of these discussions has informed the development of a draft Rural Impact Assessment Screening document. A meeting has been arranged for 26 October 2016 with officials of the Rural Policy Unit of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to discuss the draft document.

The document once finalised will be made available.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline the size a room must be to legally be classed as a bedroom.

(AQW 4870/16-21)

Mr Givan: Under the current scheme for allocation of social housing, bedroom size is taken into account (under Rules 28 and 29) to govern situations in which the applicant is awarded points for overcrowding. According to these rules, for the purposes of allocating housing, "rooms which are less than 3.7sq.m (40sq. Ft) will not be deemed suitable for use as a bedroom". A full list of definitions and rules of the scheme can be found at www.nihe.gov.uk/housing_selection_scheme_rules.pdf

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities what discussions his Department had with Motability to implement a buffer period for claimants appealing a decision not to award Personal Independent Payment from DLA.

(AQW 4871/16-21)

Mr Givan: Whilst my department has no statutory or administrative role in the operation of the Motability Scheme officials liaised with Motability to ensure that they were aware of the planned introduction of Personal Independence Payment in Northern Ireland on 20 June 2016. As part of that engagement the Director of Motability attended a wider Departmental event on 26 April 2016 with local disability and advice groups, at which he confirmed the transitional arrangements Motability had put in place in Great Britain to support existing Disability Living Allowance claimants who do not qualify for the enhanced rate mobility of PIP would equally apply in Northern Ireland. Further information on these administrative arrangements can be obtained by writing to: Declan O'Mahony, Director of Motability, Warwick House, Roydon House, Harlow Essex, CM19 5PX.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline when (i) Universal Credit is to be implemented; and (ii) he expects the system administering Universal Credit to be in place.

(AQW 4872/16-21)

Mr Givan: Universal Credit will begin to be implemented in Northern Ireland from September 2017 on a phased geographical basis. The Universal Credit IT system will be in place from this date.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment of an increase in the threshold for an individual in employment to be able to claim Carer's Allowance.

(AQW 4873/16-21)

Mr Givan: The primary purpose of Carer's Allowance is to provide a measure of financial support and recognition for people who give up the opportunity of full-time employment in order to provide regular and substantial care for a severely disabled person. It is not, and was never intended to be, a carer's wage or a payment for the services of caring, nor is it intended to replace lost or forgone earnings in their entirety.

As you are aware, an earnings limit exists in Carer's Allowance which enables a carer to undertake some part-time work whilst still retaining entitlement to the allowance. The earnings limit is currently set at £110 per week. It is applied after the deduction of certain allowable expenses, such as Income Tax, National Insurance contributions and half of any contribution towards an occupational or personal pension. There are also a number of other deductions which can be made that mean that people can earn significantly more than £110 per week and still be eligible for Carer's Allowance.

It is important to note that the Carer's Allowance earnings limit is not linked to the number of hours worked. Instead, it is set at a level that aims to encourage those who give up full time work in order to undertake caring responsibilities to maintain a link with the labour market through part-time work.

I fully recognise the value of the work undertaken by those who have the responsibility of caring for others. However, there are no plans to increase the earnings threshold in Carer's Allowance at this time. The earnings limit is not linked to any other particular factor, but it is kept under regular review and increased when it is warranted and affordable. Most recently in April 2015 the earnings limit was increased by 8% to £110, far outstripping the general increase in earnings.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 4224/16-21, what consideration has been given to an increased number of smaller grants for more support to musicians.

(AQW 4879/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department for Communities funding for the Arts is mainly disbursed through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) and a range of smaller grants to support musicians already exists.

ACNI's Support for Individual Artists Programme offers support to individual musicians through schemes which include General Art Awards, Self Arranged Residencies, Travel Grants, the Artists' International Development Programme, Artists Career Enhancement Scheme and Major Individual Awards.

Also, the Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme can provide funding to formally constituted bands for the purchase of musical instruments.

In addition, ACNI offer support for the purchase of instruments by individuals through the "Take it Away Scheme" which enables musicians to purchase instruments from approved retailers through an interest free loan repayable over months.

Further information on these schemes can be found by accessing the Arts Council's website at www.artscouncil-ni.org.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities to detail the numbers of void stock for each Housing Association, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 4885/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department does not hold the number of void stock for each Housing Association, broken down by constituency.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities to provide (i) the start date for the Public Land for Housing Project; (ii) the completion date; (iii) the date the digital spatial catalogue of all (material) public sector assets held by all Government Departments and their arm's-length bodies that may be suitable to re-use for housing will be published; and (iv) any plans to ensure these assets are used for housing.

(AQW 4887/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) Following approval of the project from the NICS Board, the inaugural meeting of the Public Land for Housing Project Board took place in May 2016.
- (ii) Due to the magnitude and complexity of the task it is not possible at this early stage to provide a definitive completion date for the project. An Interim Report on progress is scheduled to be provided to the NICS Board by March 2017.

- (iii) No publication date for the Digital Spatial Catalogue has been set.
- (iv) The project is being led by DfC Housing Division with the intention of identifying further public sector land that may be suitable for housing.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities in relation to the Musical Instruments for Bands Programme, to outline (i) all applications; (ii) successful applications; and (iii) the funding received in each case, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 4905/16-21)

Mr Givan: Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) has confirmed that in 2013/14, 64 eligible applications were received to the Programme and 45 received funding. In 2014/15 29 eligible applications were received and 25 received funding. The Programme did not run in 2015/16 and in 2016/17 68 eligible applications were received with successful applications not yet confirmed.

Details of the funding received in 2013/14 and 2014/15, broken down by Constituency are shown in the attached table.

Finance Year	Name	Award	Parliamentary Constituency
2013-2014	Jim O'Neill & Robert Allsopp Memorial Flute Band	4,225.00	Belfast North
2013-2014	Ballyboley Pipe Band	5,000.00	East Antrim
2013-2014	1st Larne Old Boys Association Silver Band	5,000.00	East Antrim
2013-2014	Killaloo Accordion Band	4,920.00	East Londonderry
2013-2014	Bellarena Accordion Band	5,000.00	East Londonderry
2013-2014	Blackhill Accordion Band	4,995.00	East Londonderry
2013-2014	Articlave Flute Band	5,000.00	East Londonderry
2013-2014	Ballyrashane Flute Band	5,000.00	East Londonderry
2013-2014	Letterbreen Silver Band	5,000.00	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
2013-2014	Lack Pipe Band	5,000.00	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
2013-2014	Church Hill Silver Band	5,000.00	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
2013-2014	Crilly Pipe Band	5,000.00	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
2013-2014	Dungannon Silver Band	5,000.00	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
2013-2014	The Pride of the Orange and Blue Auld Boys Flute Band	5,000.00	Foyle
2013-2014	Drumlough Pipe Band	5,000.00	Lagan Valley
2013-2014	Quilly True Blues Flute Band	5,000.00	Lagan Valley
2013-2014	Ballyronan Accordion Band	5,000.00	Mid Ulster
2013-2014	Annaghmore Star & Crown Flute Band	5,000.00	Mid Ulster
2013-2014	Lislea Lambeg Drumming Club	1,500.00	Mid Ulster
2013-2014	Cloughfin Pipe Band	5,000.00	Mid Ulster
2013-2014	Killeen Pipe Band	5,000.00	Newry and Armagh
2013-2014	Mullintur Crown Defenders Flute Band	2,925.00	Newry and Armagh
2013-2014	Corcrair Flute Band	5,000.00	Newry and Armagh
2013-2014	Broughshane and District Pipe Band	4,908.00	North Antrim
2013-2014	Lisnamurrigan Temperence Flute Band	5,000.00	North Antrim
2013-2014	Ahoghill Loyal Sons of William Flute Band	4,470.00	North Antrim
2013-2014	Bann Valley Communtiy Association	5,000.00	North Antrim

Finance Year	Name	Award	Parliamentary Constituency
2013-2014	Flutes and Drums Donaghadee	3,825.00	North Down
2013-2014	Johnston Memorial Flute Band	3,873.75	North Down
2013-2014	Ballydonaghy Pipe Band	4,797.00	South Antrim
2013-2014	Flute Band Church	2,591.00	South Antrim
2013-2014	Dunmore Silver Band	4,920.00	South Down
2013-2014	Spa Accordion Band	4,920.00	South Down
2013-2014	Loyal Sons of Benagh	5,000.00	South Down
2013-2014	Kilkeel Silver Band	4,515.00	South Down
2013-2014	Orangefield Flute Band	3,892.00	South Down
2013-2014	North Down First Flute Band	4,800.00	Strangford
2013-2014	Ballylone Concert Flute Band	4,751.00	Strangford
2013-2014	Cahard Flute Band	2,486.00	Strangford
2013-2014	Wellington Memorial Silver Band	5,000.00	Strangford
2013-2014	Joseph Forde Memorial Pipe Band	5,000.00	Upper Bann
2013-2014	Blacksull Orange and Blue Flute Band	5,000.00	Upper Bann
2013-2014	Kilmore Flute Band	4,946.25	Upper Bann
2013-2014	Strawhill Voluntary Independent Pipe Band	2,295.00	West Tyrone
2013-2014	Blair Memorial Flute Band	5,000.00	West Tyrone
		205,555.00	
2014-2015	Ormeau Concert Band	3,577.00	Belfast East
2014-2015	Third Carrickfergus BB & OB Silver Band	4,032.00	East Antrim
2014-2015	Kildoag Pipe Band	5,000.00	East Londonderry
2014-2015	Macosquin First Flute Band	5,000.00	East Londonderry
2014-2015	Garvagh Pipe Band	5,000.00	East Londonderry
2014-2015	Hamilton Flute Band	4,650.00	Foyle
2014-2015	Britannia Concert Band	2,135.00	Foyle
2014-2015	Caw Flute Band	3,236.00	Foyle
2014-2015	Lisburn Flute Orchestra	3,446.00	Lagan Valley
2014-2015	Dynamic Brass	5,000.00	Lagan Valley
2014-2015	Ballynenagh True Blues Flute Band	1,436.00	Mid Ulster
2014-2015	Sandholes Accordion Band	4,773.00	Mid Ulster
2014-2015	Tullycoll Coronation Accordion Band	5,000.00	Mid Ulster
2014-2015	Drumderg Flute Band Keady	5,000.00	Newry and Armagh
2014-2015	Killylea Silver Band	3,892.00	Newry and Armagh
2014-2015	Marlaco and District Pipe Band	4,466.00	Newry and Armagh
2014-2015	Altnaveigh Memorial Pipe Band	3,807.00	Newry and Armagh
2014-2015	Craigyarren Flute Band	2,040.00	North Antrim
2014-2015	Dunaghy Flute Band	5,000.00	North Antrim
2014-2015	Ballyrea Flute Band	4,725.00	South Down
2014-2015	Goldsprings True Defenders Flute Band	5,000.00	Strangford

Finance Year	Name	Award	Parliamentary Constituency
2014-2015	Ballygowan Concert Flute Band	5,000.00	Strangford
2014-2015	Poyntzpass Silver Band	5,000.00	Upper Bann
2014-2015	Killen Pipe Band	4,825.00	West Tyrone
2014-2015	Pride of William Auld Boys	3,375.00	West Tyrone
		104,415.00	

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Communities whether he has plans to address the housing waiting list.
(AQW 4913/16-21)

Mr Givan: Officials are currently working up proposals for changes to the allocations system for social housing, following publication of independent recommendations on this issue. Any proposals for change will be subject to a full public consultation.

Increasing the supply of social housing also addresses the housing waiting list. My Department has been working with the Housing Executive and housing associations to deliver new build across all areas of Northern Ireland. We have made significant achievements in new build and exceeded Programme for Government targets each year. We will continue to deliver new build housing and target those areas most in need, bearing in mind that many sites have competing development demands and some will have planning constraints, including zoning for non-residential use.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Communities to list the councils that have a training programme for staff and management in all sectors of their councils remit, to include all community centres, swimming pools and leisure centres; and whether the training is mandatory.
(AQW 4977/16-21)

Mr Givan: The provision by councils of training programmes for their staff is an operational matter and I would advise the Member to request this information directly from the eleven councils.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities to outline the total Housing Benefit paid in 2015-16, broken down by (i) Housing Executive tenants; (ii) housing association tenants; (iii) hostel claims; and (iv) private rental sector tenants.
(AQW 4984/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive is unable to provide the information in the format requested as it is not possible to separate the elements of housing benefit expenditure in relation to (ii) (iii) and (iv). The Housing Executive has provided the information in the table attached detailing the total Housing Benefit paid in 2015-16, broken down by housing benefit paid to Housing Executive tenants and collectively to those of housing associations, hostel claims and private rental sector tenants.

	Housing Benefit paid in 2015-16
Housing Executive	£249,216,487.72
Housing Associations; Hostel Claims; & Private Rental Sector	£416,014,307.09
Total	£665,230,794.81

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 3673/16-21, to outline whether the provision to build new social housing in locations where housing associations are unable or unwilling to develop social accommodation, as outlined in the review of housing policy Building on Success published by the direct rule Department of the Environment in 1996, sits within its landlord function or regional service function.
(AQW 4985/16-21)

Mr Givan: New build powers (set out in the 1981 Housing (Northern Ireland) Order) are available to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive as a body corporate.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for Communities to outline any departmental engagements with the (i) women's sector; (ii) lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender sector; (iii) disability sector; and (iv) older people's sector, in relation to the development of a social strategy.
(AQW 4989/16-21)

Mr Givan: My officials have held a series of events to inform our work in support of the new approach to the Programme for Government. These events have been well attended by representatives across local and central government, the voluntary and community sector, business community and representatives of Section 75 organisations. All of this has helped inform

the work my department is responsible for under the Programme for Government including development of a draft Social Strategy.

I plan to bring a draft Social Strategy to the Executive with the intention of having it issued for public consultation, subject to Executive approval. During the public consultation period, we propose to engage with people across society and would welcome the views of everyone.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for Communities how many people have presented as homeless to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive due to victimisation, broken down by category, in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 4990/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive holds data on those who present and are accepted as homeless due to intimidation, rather than victimisation, across a number of categories. This data for the last 10 years is set out at Appendix 1.

Appendix 1: People who presented as homeless to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive due to intimidation, broken down by category, in each of the last ten years.

N.B. Prior to 2011/12, the information regarding full duty application status by category was not collected and only a total figure can be provided for the years 2006/7 to 2010/11. Records from 2011/12 to 2015/16 also detail the number accepted as full duty applicants broken down by intimidation category.

Intimidation 2006/07

Give Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	No breakdown data for Acceptances
Intimidation-Disability	0	
Intimidation-Paramilitary	448	
Intimidation-Racial	41	
Intimidation-Sectarian	67	
Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	0	
No Data at time of presentation	212	
Total	768	403

Intimidation 2007/08

Give Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	No breakdown data for Acceptances
Intimidation-Disability	28	
Intimidation-Paramilitary	433	
Intimidation-Racial	32	
Intimidation-Sectarian	53	
Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	11	
No Data at time of presentation	0	
Total	557	302

Intimidation 2008/09

Give Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	No breakdown data for Acceptances
Intimidation-Disability	10	
Intimidation-Paramilitary	453	
Intimidation-Racial	45	
Intimidation-Sectarian	61	
Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	11	
No Data at time of presentation	0	
Total	580	307

Intimidation 2009/10

Give Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	No breakdown data for Acceptances
Intimidation-Disability	13	
Intimidation-Paramilitary	577	
Intimidation-Racial	96	
Intimidation-Sectarian	75	
Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	13	
No Data at time of presentation	0	
Total	774	407

Intimidation 2010/11

Give Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	No breakdown data for Acceptances
Intimidation-Disability	8	
Intimidation-Paramilitary	261	
Intimidation-Racial	37	
Intimidation-Sectarian	44	
Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	6	
No Data at time of presentation	338	
Total	694	361

Intimidation 2011/12

Give Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	No breakdown data for Acceptances
Intimidation-Anti-Social Behaviour	44	30
Intimidation-Disability	2	2
Intimidation-Paramilitary	326	213
Intimidation-Racial	29	18
Intimidation-Sectarian	52	34
Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	9	6
Total	462	303

Intimidation 2012/13

Give Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	Accepted as Full Duty Applicants
Intimidation-Anti-Social Behaviour	75	46
Intimidation-Disability	1	0
Intimidation-Paramilitary	387	292
Intimidation-Racial	36	26
Intimidation-Sectarian	66	48
Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	21	15
Total	586	427

Intimidation 2013/14

Give Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	Accepted as Full Duty applicants
Intimidation-Anti-social Behaviour	77	37
Intimidation-Paramilitary	472	293
Intimidation-Racial	39	18
Intimidation-Sectarian	65	32
Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	14	10
Intimidation-Disability	1	1
Total	668	391

Intimidation 2014/15

Give Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	Accepted as Full Duty Applicants
Intimidation-Anti-Social Behaviour	62	30
Intimidation-Paramilitary	433	312
Intimidation-Racial	47	33
Intimidation-Sectarian	35	19
Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	13	11
Total	590	405

Intimidation 2015/16

Give Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	Accepted as Full Duty Applicants
Intimidation Anti-social behaviour	77	48
Intimidation disability	1	1
Intimidation Paramilitary	433	325
Intimidation Racial	23	14
Intimidation Sectarian	39	21
Intimidation sexual orientation	9	5
Total	582	414

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Communities to outline why Job Seekers Allowance claimants were advised to cease Educational Courses, as doing so will result in their benefits being withdrawn.

(AQW 4995/16-21)

Mr Givan: A person on a course of full-time study is not generally entitled to Job Seeker's Allowance as they are not regarded as available for employment. The only exception to this is if that person satisfies both of the following conditions:

- 1 (a) in the case of a student with a partner, that partner is also a full-time student and either of them is treated as responsible for a child or young person or
- (b) the student is treated as responsible for a child or young person.

and

- 2 the student is available for employment or treated as available for employment in specific circumstances and want to claim during the summer vacation appropriate to their course.

Jobseekers who undertake part-time courses of study may be entitled to Jobseeker's Allowance provided they satisfy all the conditions of entitlement, including being available for and actively seeking employment.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 2910/16-21, to outline when he will provide a response.

(AQW 5017/16-21)

Mr Givan: The proposed Irish-Language Academy is still under consideration.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities to detail the funding provided to South Belfast Community Resource Centre. (AQW 5028/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department currently provides the following funding to Belfast South Community Resource (BSCR) under its Neighbourhood Renewal initiative:

Total

Year	Thematic Contract	Salaries	Running Costs	Total
2016/17	Community Confidence	£22,800.12 BSCR Project Officer(full time) BSCR Operations Manager (50%)	Rent - £3,026.67	£25,826.79
2016/17	Economic Renewal	£39,162.78 BSCR Operations Manager (50%) BSCR IT Co-Ordinator (full time)	Rent - £5,196.92 Exam Fees - £2,286.00	£46,645.70
2016/17	Physical Renewal	£14,648.84 BSCR Operations Manager (50%)	Rent - £1,977.43	£16,626.27
2016/17	Education	£21,606.62 BSCR Education / Youth officer (full time)	Rent - £1,918.60	£23,525.22
Overall Total		98,218.36	14,405.62	£112,623.98

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Communities to outline if his Department relayed the Assembly's views following the debate on Women Against State Pension Inequality. (AQW 5055/16-21)

Mr Givan: I have written to Richard Harrington MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Pensions at the Department for Work and Pensions requesting that the motion agreed by the Assembly be carefully considered to see what can be done to assist the women affected.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline whether cavity walls were inspected, using borescopes, in developing the 2015 Department of Social Development/Northern Ireland Housing Executive Asset Commission Summary Report; and to detail the number of households inspected. (AQW 5059/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive gave extensive consideration to including within the Savills' Survey provision for 3-4,000 Boroscope investigations into cavity walls. Having sought Savills' independent and expert advice, they determined such investigations and any systematic remedial work they may require would not be a valuable nor effective inclusion within the survey. Savills also advised the then Department for Social Development and Housing Executive that no UK landlord of whom they were aware was addressing the issue of cavity walls through such detailed investigations.

The methodology adopted was consistent with custom and practice and the objectives for the commission agreed between the Housing Executive and Department for Social Development at the time.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities for his Department's assessment of every recommendation in the (i) 2015 Asset Commission Summary Report; and (ii) 2014 SERC Cavity Wall Insulation Inspection Report. (AQW 5060/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- i The Asset Commission Summary Report was prepared by the Department, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Savills who undertook the Commission and was published on 9 March 2016 along with other products of the work. The report details the key findings of the Commission and also contains a joint response from the Department and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to these.

The Summary Report can be found on the Department's website at www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/joint-asset-commission.

- ii. The 2014 SERC Cavity Wall insulation Report was commissioned by the NIHE, and my Department has made no assessment of the recommendations made within it.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Communities , pursuant to AQO 423/16-21, to specify the audit report on the Urban Development Grant Scheme referred to in the answer.

(AQW 5169/16-21)

Mr Givan: The audit report referred to is the Internal Audit Review of Urban Development Grants completed in May 2014. That report advised that, "In the absence of complete, accurate and up-to-date guidance there is a risk that an inconsistent approach to the assessment, analysis and award of UDG funding is adopted which could lead to criticism and challenge from disaffected applicants."

The guidance contained in Annex 4.9 of Managing Public Money NI (MPMNI) gives clarity on State Aid. MPMNI states that one of the characteristics of State Aid is that: "aid is granted by a member state or through state resources (including e.g. lottery distributions and European funds)".

Department of Education

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education , in relation to his predecessor's requirement of the Education Authority to formally revisit its decision of June 2015 to reduce Special Educational Needs (SEN) nursery hours and to fully engage with principals on this matter, (i) whether all principals have been formally and individually notified in writing of the opportunity for them to participate in the SEN Nursery Review Pre-Consultative Professional Practitioner Group; and (ii) to detail the structure and forward work programme for the Group.

(AQW 4275/16-21)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): The Education Authority (EA) has advised that an engagement strategy for the Strategic Review of Pre-school Provision in Special Schools, which will include the structure and forward work programme for the Pre-Consultative Professional Practitioner Group, has been developed and is currently awaiting ratification by the EA Board.

The EA anticipates that, as part of its engagement strategy, special school and mainstream school principals with nursery provision will be contacted about the opportunity to participate in the consultation process, including the Pre-Consultative Professional Practitioner Group.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) the Education Authority Strategic Review of Nursery Provision in Special Schools Project Plan; (ii) its timeline; (iii) its milestones; and (iv) any consultation/stakeholder engagement arrangements.

(AQW 4309/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) has advised that this documentation has been developed and, subject to ratification by the EA Board, will be forwarded to the Department of Education in the first instance.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how many staff are employed in his Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.

(AQW 4325/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are currently 4 press office staff. The total salary costs for EIS Press Officers for 2015/16 is £169,066.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education , further to his predecessor's requirement of the Education Authority revisiting the decision of June 2015 to reduce special educational needs (SEN) nursery hours, and engage with parents on this matter, whether (i) the Parents for Equal Education Coalition have been notified by letter about the opportunity to participate in the SEN Nursery Review Pre-Consultative Parental Group; and (ii) for a detailed structure and forward work programme for this group.

(AQW 4360/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) has advised that an engagement strategy for the Strategic Review of Pre-school Provision in Special Schools, which will include the structure and forward work programme for the Pre-Consultative Parental Group, has been developed and is currently awaiting ratification by the EA Board.

The EA anticipates that, as part of its engagement strategy, the Parents for Equal Education Coalition will be contacted about the opportunity to participate in the Pre-Consultative Parental Group.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail what the five year audit of Parkhall Integrated College demonstrated in terms of (i) the attainment of targets; and (ii) requirements in attracting students from both communities.

(AQW 4398/16-21)

Mr Weir: In August 2015, a review indicated continued low enrolments from the minority community at Parkhall Integrated College. My Department, therefore, asked the Education Authority to work with the school to refresh and renew its transformation development plan, with a particular emphasis on increasing the number of pupils from the minority community background.

The school is now taking forward implementation of a revised development plan.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the different types of capital programmes that are managed by his Department; (ii) the amount of capital investment made with regard to Dean Maguirc College, Carrickmore over the last five years; and (iii) any current plans that his Department has to make future capital investments in Dean Maguirc College. **(AQW 4404/16-21)**

Mr Weir:

- (i) There are number of capital programmes managed by my Department. These include Major Capital projects, the School Enhancement Programme, Fresh Start Projects, Youth Capital projects and Minor Capital projects.

Major Capital Programme

This programme funds the major capital works to the schools' estate including new build, extend and refurbishment works. This programme includes a total of 66 projects, which have been announced to advance in planning since 2012. Nine of these projects are complete and the remaining 57 are at various stages of planning and construction. Given the substantial Major Capital Investment Programme underway, a further call for projects is not anticipated at present.

School Enhancement Programme (SEP)

This programme was announced in 2013 and includes 53 projects valued at between £500,000 and £4,000,000, to refurbish or extend schools' buildings. Fifteen of these have been completed and the remaining 38 are at various stages of planning and construction. These are expected to complete within the next three years. I am currently considering the merits of a fresh call for project proposals under this programme.

Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) Programme

The Fresh Start Agreement includes provision of up to £500 million over ten years to provide capital funding in support of shared and integrated education. Individual projects are subject to agreement between the Executive and the UK Government. Fifteen new major capital projects in the integrated sector were announced on 23 March 2016. These projects are all in the early stages of planning and will continue to progress over the next three years and beyond.

Shared Education Campus (SEC) Programme

To date there have been two calls for projects under this programme, resulting in five projects being announced to progress to planning.

Youth Capital Works Programme

A call for Voluntary Youth Capital projects was made in April 2013 with 53 projects being taken forward, 24 of these schemes are now complete. A further call was made in March 2016 for new applications, this closed on 30 September 2016 with the Department receiving 48 applications.

Minor Capital Works Programme

A minor work is a capital project that costs less than £500,000 (ex VAT) and the following are examples of what a minor capital project might constitute:-

- Minor works schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health & Safety, Fire Protection and our statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act
- Essential minor works to ensure the integrity and suitability of the school's estate
- Curriculum based minor works schemes that would meet needs currently not met in schools

In addition works have been completed under Facilities Improvement, for which funding was only available in the 2014/15 financial year.

At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health & Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act are progressing to delivery.

The Department has invested significant capital funding in Dean Maguirc College since 2011. The table below provides detail on the minor works schemes for which funding has been made available:

- (ii) -

Scheme	Total Approved Cost including VAT and Fees(£)	Financial Year
Minor Works		
Perimeter Fencing	59,628	Completed 13/14
Security Works	53,378	Completed 13/14
Replace 3 Mobiles	634,746	Currently on site

Scheme	Total Approved Cost including VAT and Fees (£)	Financial Year
Facilities Improvements		
Verti-draining/Sanding of Pitches	2,571	Completed 15/16
Roofing Works	142,861	Completed 15/16
Total	893,184	

The table below details current minor works schemes under consideration for future capital investment:

(iii) -

Scheme	Estimate of Costs (£)	Current Status
Special Educational Need Adaptations for visually impaired pupil	18,720	Works expected to be approved and completed in the current financial year
Refurbishment of Toilet and Changing Area	Costs Awaited	With Education Authority for scoping and estimate of cost
Replace 2 Mobiles	287,040	Cannot be progressed at present until current works completed.

Dean Maguire College has not been included in any of the major capital announcements to date due to issues around sustainability. However, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), as managing authority for Dean Maguire College, will have the opportunity to submit a project for consideration as part of any future major capital announcement project.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail the arrangements, including (i) date; (ii) agenda; (iii) resourcing and; (iv) proposed attendees of the first meeting of the new Department-led working group being set up to explore the future of those sites that will become vacant in Omagh when schools relocate to the Strule Shared Education Campus.

(AQW 4405/16-21)

Mr Weir: The first meeting of the Vacated Sites Working Group is scheduled to take place on 15 November 2016. The agenda will focus on the objectives of the Group, the terms of reference under which it will operate and initial discussions on the issues involved and potential workstreams to be progressed.

The Group will be made up of representation from the Strule Programme Team within my Department; the vacated site owners, namely the Education Authority and the Voluntary School Trustees; the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, and other areas of Government that have an interest or involvement in the disposal of public assets within Northern Ireland.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Education to outline what consideration has been given to funding the Buddy Bear Trust.
(AQW 4407/16-21)

Mr Weir: The statutory responsibility for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) rests with schools, and EA which is the body responsible under special education legislation for identifying, assessing and in appropriate cases, making provision for children with SEN. It is for the EA to determine, through the statutory assessment process, the most appropriate placement for a child with a statement of SEN.

The Buddy Bear School is an independent school, and as such does not fall under the grant-aided status for receiving funding under the Education (Northern Ireland) Orders. The school is however approved by DE, under Article 26 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, as an institution suitable for the admission of children with special educational needs (SEN). Therefore should the EA consider placement other than in a grant-aided school is appropriate to meet the child's SEN, and is compatible with the efficient use of resources, it can consider a placement in Buddy Bear School.

Should the EA determine that a child should be placed in the school, it is legally obliged to pay any fees in regard to attendance and may pay any fees in regard to boarding and transport. In this context, DE, through the EA, can provide a tangible level of support to the school and there is therefore no blockage placed towards the School from the Department.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the timeframe on the planned extension to St. Mary's Primary School, Rathlin island.
(AQW 4427/16-21)

Mr Weir: The school submitted a minor works application for redesign and extension of the front entrance to the school to include for storage space for the server and provision of an additional steel storage container in June 2013. The Education Authority (EA) provided a scoping report in January 2014 and outline costs. Approval in principle was granted on 11 February

2014 at an estimated cost of £60,000. However, as part of the design and development work the EA identified a number of DDA and Health and Safety works were required to include an upgrade of the electrics, lighting, fire alarm, intruder alarm and toilets. Following subsequent meetings between the school and the EA it was considered that works should be undertaken in the summer months and a start date of June 2017 was agreed.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister of Education, given the number of newborn children on Rathlin Island, that could potentially double the number of pupils at St. Mary's primary School, to outline his longer term plans for the school infrastructure on the island.

(AQW 4428/16-21)

Mr Weir: As planning authority for the maintained sector, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools would be responsible for assessing whether there is a need for increased provision at St Mary's Primary School, set within the context of strategic Area Plans for education provision. Should a significant change be proposed to the size of the school, the publication of a statutory Development Proposal (DP) would be required.

Any associated infrastructure changes are progressed through the Minor Works Application Programme.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of schools in South Antrim that currently open their pitches for community use outside of school opening hours; and (ii) what measures his Department intends to take to ensure that more schools facilitate this.

(AQW 4429/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) This information is not currently held by the Department of Education or the Education Authority (EA).
- (ii) Responsibility for decisions relating to the use of individual school premises rests with the Board of Governors of those schools.

The Department of Education continues to encourage schools to make their premises available for use by local communities when not otherwise required for education purposes by means of existing legislation and a range of policies such as Extended Schools, Full Service programmes and commitments made through Every School a Good School. The Department's guide for school governors also highlights the responsibility which governors have in promoting the use of the school as a community facility where possible.

In January 2014, the Department issued a set of operational guidelines entitled Community Use of School Premises: A Guidance Toolkit for Schools which is designed to encourage and assist schools, especially those who may not already do so, to facilitate community access to school premises. The majority of schools (81% - School Omnibus Survey 2014) currently report that they do make their facilities available for wider community use.

In line with the duties placed upon it by the Education Act (NI) 2014, the EA has appointed a standing committee to help exercise its statutory functions with regard to the community use of schools.

The EA has advised that the standing committee will give consideration to the use of the Guidance Toolkit in schools. My officials will continue to work closely with EA colleagues to promote the use of the school as a community facility.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to detail each school's maintenance costs, broken down by (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary school.

(AQW 4434/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) is responsible for maintenance in controlled, voluntary maintained and Irish medium primary and post primary schools and has provided details of maintenance expenditure in individual schools for the 2015/16 financial year. I have arranged for this information to be placed in the Assembly Library.

The EA's total maintenance expenditure in primary schools in 2015/16 was £8,561,798; while £5,160,282 was spent in post-primary schools.

Voluntary Grammar Schools and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools are responsible for their own maintenance, with the cost being met from the school's own recurrent budget. The Department of Education does not therefore hold information on maintenance expenditure in these schools.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education what his Department is doing to ease access to the Northern Ireland Office's Fresh Start capital money.

(AQW 4435/16-21)

Mr Weir: The first tranche of projects funded from the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) for shared and integrated education, was announced in March 16 and included the acceleration of 6 shared and integrated projects already underway. An additional 17 shared and integrated new school proposals were also announced to advance to planning, including the second tranche of the Executive's shared campus programme. All of the new projects are in the early stages of planning.

I will continue to engage with the Northern Ireland Office regarding future tranches of projects to advance in planning under the fund to ensure that the allocation of FSA spend has a maximum impact on shared and integrated education here.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the cooperation between the Education Authority and the Health and Social Care Trusts for families and children with special educational needs.

(AQW 4438/16-21)

Mr Weir: I recognise that successful outcomes for children with special educational needs (SEN), particularly those with more significant educational and health-related needs, depend on successful collaboration across education and health and social care sectors.

Statutory frameworks are in place to support collaborative working between the Education and Health sectors in terms of supporting children and young people with SEN. The support of health professionals is important at both the statutory assessment stage and the provision stage. The Education Authority (EA) and Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) are already working collaboratively to deliver provision for pupils and their families. I do, however, recognise the need to build upon and improve co-operation between health and education.

I welcome the very specific co-operation duties which the SEND Act 2016 will place upon both the EA and health and social services authorities. They specifically relate to the identification and assessment of children who have, or who may have, special educational needs. The SEND Act also covers provision of services to children who have special educational needs. Department officials have been engaging with officials from the Department of Health (DoH) and the EA to determine when the SEND Act duties regarding co-operation should commence.

The new Children's Services Cooperation Act (NI) 2015 also creates the imperative for children's authorities to co-operate with other children's authorities and with other children's service providers.

My Department and the DoH have initiated a SEN Education & Health Interface Project Board to consider improvements for children and young people with SEN; with involvement of the EA, the HSCTs and the Public Health Agency (PHA). The aim of the project board and its associated project teams will be to improve the interfaces and co-operation between the EA and HSCTs within the SEN framework and will result in improving the delivery of services to children and young people who have special educational needs.

The member will also be aware that the PHA conducted a review of Allied Health Professional support for children and young people with statements of special educational needs and both the Department and the EA were represented on its Project Board.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) whether a new round of nurture unit funding will be made available; (ii) when it will be available; and (iii) how schools will be able to apply.

(AQW 4499/16-21)

Mr Weir: Over the coming months I will be considering how best to mainstream nurture provision in the future and ensure that available resources are targeted to those schools with children most in need of nurture support. Until such time that a new nurture programme is agreed, there is unlikely to be further funding available. I have committed my Department, however, to protecting the expertise that has now been built up in schools and will ensure there is no break in current funding support for the existing 32 nurture groups.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to detail all school funding granted for nurture units.

(AQW 4503/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department currently funds a total of 32 nurture units at an annual cost of £70k per school. In addition to these annual operating costs, schools that set up a new nurture unit under the Delivering Social Change (DSC) Signature Project also received one-off start up costs of between £10k to £20k to refurbish and equip their nurture room. From the commencement of the DSC project, the total annual funding has been:

Year	Total Funding to Schools *
2012/13	£60,000
2013/14	£1,162,000
2014/15	£1,821,000
2015/16	£2,100,000
2016/17	£2,210,000

* This includes funding provided by other Departments, but administered by the Educational Value of Musical Services

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education (i) for his assessment of the educational value of Music Services in his Department; and (ii) whether he can provide an assurance that his Department will continue to invest appropriately in this service.

(AQW 4541/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority's (EA) Music Service enables learners from all backgrounds to receive musical education of the highest quality. The Music Service's district music ensembles and orchestras provide young people with opportunities to be educated together with those from differing backgrounds and cultures. Its aims link to my Department's Shared Education policy.

The service is a non-statutory one and will be required to consider how it might reach challenging savings targets. It is the responsibility of the EA to prioritise its resources accordingly and schools also have an important role to play in ensuring that our young people access music education.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Education to outline how his Department monitors whether risk assessments are carried out before approving increased class sizes in practical subjects.

(AQW 4551/16-21)

Mr Weir: DE Circulars 2004/05, 2013/07 and 2016/11 provide post-primary schools with guidance on class sizes in practical subjects as well as other subjects that include a practical activity.

This guidance provides schools with flexibility to determine class sizes in excess of 20 pupils, and within permitted maxima, in Science, Technology and Design, Home Economics, Art and Design, Physical Education and Music, for certain year groups, subject to the school first carrying out a health and safety risk assessment. Consequently, it is a matter for the school to determine the appropriate class size, within the permitted maxima, based on the findings of the risk assessment.

The Department does not monitor whether risk assessments have been carried out by schools, nor is a school, having undertaken a risk assessment, required to revert to the Department for approval to operate these larger class sizes.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Education to detail in which secondary schools has his Department approved class sizes in excess of 20 for; (i) Science, Technology and Design; (ii) Home Economics; (iii) Art and Design; (iv) Physical Education; and (iv) Music for the academic year 2016-17.

(AQW 4552/16-21)

Mr Weir: DE Circulars 2004/05, 2013/07 and 2016/11 provide post-primary schools with guidance on class sizes in practical subjects as well as other subjects that include a practical activity.

This guidance provides schools with flexibility to determine class sizes in excess of 20 pupils, and within permitted maxima, in Science, Technology and Design, Home Economics, Art and Design, Physical Education and Music, for certain year groups, subject to the school first carrying out a health and safety risk assessment. Consequently, it is a matter for the school to determine the appropriate class size, within the permitted maxima, based on the findings of the risk assessment.

The Department does not monitor whether risk assessments have been carried out by schools, nor is a school, having undertaken a risk assessment, required to revert to the Department for approval to operate these larger class sizes.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the current number and grade of Education Authority posts located at the Western Region offices in Omagh; whether (ii) he will make a commitment to retain and increase the number of Education Authority posts located in Omagh; and (iii) his Department will support the case for greater decentralisation to Omagh, including having a Director and locating at least one Directorate in Omagh.

(AQW 4555/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- 1 The Education Authority has provided the following tables regarding the number and grade of staff employed in the Western Region.
- 2 Table 1 relates to a break down by current grade and (where identifiable) occupational grouping, the number of EA staff based (only) in the main office in Omagh.
- 3 Table 2 provides a breakdown, by current grade and (where identifiable) occupational grouping, the number of EA staff based in the main office in Omagh, other affiliated out-centres in Omagh and other locations within the geographical authority of the former Western Education and Library Board.

Table 1: Staff Employed by EA, Based in (Main) Omagh Office

Salary Scale	Points	Number of Employees
Student Placement	JNC - 6	1
Catering Assistant	JNC - 6-8	5
Cleaner	JNC - 9-11	7

Salary Scale	Points	Number of Employees
Cook	JNC - 11-13	1
Graphic Scale	Printers 2	2
Clerical Officer	JNC 8 - 13	6
Senior Clerical Officer	JNC 14 - 17	53
Executive Officer	JNC 18 - 25	62
Building Supervisor (W/S)	JNC 22 - 25	2
Senior Executive Officer	JNC 26 - 31	50
Admin Officer	JNC 33 - 36	22
Senior Admin Officer	JNC 38 - 41	24
Assistant Principal Officer	JNC 42 - 45	16
Principal Officer	JNC 46 - 49	15
Senior Principal Officer 1	JNC 49 - 52	4
Senior Principal Officer 2	JNC 58 - 61	6
Education Officer	JNC 64 - 69	3
Education Welfare Officer	JNC 26 - 35	10
Educational Psychologist	1 - 9	9
Educational Psychologist	8 - 14	1
Educational Psychologist	10 - 16	1
Soulbury	38 - 44	2
Soulbury	26 - 32	5
Soulbury	20 - 26	5
Senior Management Team	1 - 9	1
Teachers	1 - 9	14
Total Number of Employees		327

Table 2: Staff Employed by EA, Based in (Main) Omagh Office and Outcentres

Salary Scale	Points	Number of Employees
Student Placement	JNC - 6	1
Catering Assistant	JNC - 6-8	7
Cleaner	JNC - 9-11	7
Cook	JNC - 11-13	1
Graphic Scale	Printers 2	2
Clerical Officer	JNC 8 - 13	12
Senior Clerical Officer	JNC 14 - 17	73
Executive Officer	JNC 18 - 25	76
Building Supervisor (W/S)	JNC 22 - 25	2
Senior Executive Officer	JNC 26 - 31	72
Admin Officer	JNC 33 - 36	45
Senior Admin Officer	JNC 38 - 41	31
Assistant Principal Officer	JNC 42 - 45	26
Principal Officer	JNC 46 - 49	21

Salary Scale	Points	Number of Employees
Senior Principal Officer 1	JNC 49 - 52	5
Senior Principal Officer 2	JNC 52 - 55	1
Education Officer	JNC 58 - 61	7
Assistant Senior Education Officer	JNC 64 - 69	4
Education Welfare Officer	JNC 26 - 35	25
Educational Psychologist	1 - 9	24
Educational Psychologist	8 - 14	1
Educational Psychologist	10 - 16	4
Soulbury	38 - 44	4
Soulbury	26 - 32	9
Soulbury	20 - 26	5
Senior Management Team	1 - 9	1
Music Tutors	1 - 7	31
Teachers	1 - 9	14
Total Number of Employees		511

- 4 No decisions have been taken as yet by the EA about future staffing requirements or the number of senior management positions that will be based in Omagh.
- 5 In consultation with Trades Unions, the EA will be developing a location strategy which will address the matter of the location of its staff and functions. Decisions on the location of staff will be subject to achieving value for money and in line with service requirements. They will also be subject to relevant statutory and policy requirements, including the assessment of equality considerations.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education, pursuant AQW 3449/16-21, to detail how many staff in his Department and the Education Authority have completed (i) Autism Spectrum Disorder Awareness; (ii) Disability Awareness for Frontline Staff; and (iii) Diversity Now.

(AQW 4557/16-21)

Mr Weir: Completion figures for Department of Education staff are as follows:-

- (i) Autism Spectrum Disorder Awareness – None
- (ii) Disability Awareness for Frontline Staff – None
- (iii) Diversity Now – 577 staff have completed this e-learning course since July 2015.

The e-learning modules referred to in the answer to AQW 3449/16-21 are not available to Education Authority (EA) staff.

Face to face training on Autism Spectrum Disorder (including autism and Asperger's Syndrome) was delivered to 4,741 school staff across the EA between April 2014 and March 2016. Also 880 teachers and youth workers were trained in the areas of disability and diversity as part of the EA's Community Relations, Equality & Diversity in Education Policy (CRED) training.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to detail each (i) primary school; (ii) post-primary school that has a deficit; and (iii) to detail each deficit at the end of each financial year (a) 2010/2011; (b) 2011/2012; (c) 2012/2013; (d) 2013/2014; and (e) 2014/2015.

(AQW 4558/16-21)

Mr Weir: I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

The information provided is in respect of Controlled/Maintained schools only. Similar data is not available for Voluntary Grammar (VG) and Grant-Maintained Integrated (GMI) Schools, for which my Department is the Funding Authority. VG and GMI schools are not reported on in the same way as each other (the same accounting policies are not used by all) or in the same way as Controlled/Maintained schools for which the Education Authority (EA) (formerly Education and Library Boards) are the Funding Authority.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to outline the statutory role of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta in working with his Department to advise or decide on development proposals and other resource and policy issues affecting Irish Medium Education.

(AQW 4632/16-21)

Mr Weir: Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is not a statutory body.

The role of Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta is to promote Irish-medium education and to perform a wide range of roles in facilitating its development.

The organisation may bring forward Development Proposals for Irish-medium provision on behalf of and in their support role for parent groups and schools in the Irish-medium sector. It is represented in the Area Planning Governance arrangements at a strategic, operational and local level to provide advice on issues relating to Irish-medium schools and the future development of the sector.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Education what level of destination data is collected by schools.

(AQW 4651/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department collects information on the destination of pupils leaving grant-aided post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. Published figures are based on those leaving the school system to avoid double counting of those pupils who transfer from one school to another. The destination categories are provided in the table below.

Code	Description
021	Higher Education NI: Degree Course
022	Higher Education NI: Teacher Training Course
023	Higher Education NI: Non-Degree, above A Level Standard
024	Higher Education NI: Foundation Degree Course
041	Higher Education GB: Degree Course
042	Higher Education GB: Teacher Training Course
043	Higher Education GB: Non-Degree, above A Level Standard
044	Higher Education GB: Foundation Degree Course
061	Higher Education Non-UK: Degree Course
062	Higher Education Non-UK: Teacher Training Course
063	Higher Education Non-UK: Non-Degree, above A Level Standard
064	Higher Education Non-UK: Foundation Degree
081	Higher Education Unknown: Degree Course
082	Higher Education Unknown: Teacher Training Course
083	Higher Education Unknown: Non-Degree, above A Level Standard
084	Higher Education Unknown: Foundation Degree
320	Further Education NI: Foundation Degree
321	Further Education NI: Degree Course
323	Further Education NI: Non-Degree, above A Level Standard
324	Further Education NI: Non-Degree, less than or equivalent to A Level Standard
340	Further Education GB: Foundation Degree
341	Further Education GB: Degree Course
343	Further Education GB: Non-Degree, above A Level Standard
344	Further Education GB: Non-Degree, less than or equivalent to A Level Standard
360	Further Education Non-UK: Foundation Degree
361	Further Education Non-UK: Degree Course
363	Further Education Non-UK: Non-Degree, above A Level Standard

Code	Description
364	Further Education Non-UK: Non-Degree, less than or equivalent to A Level Standard
380	Further Education Unknown: Foundation Degree
381	Further Education Unknown: Degree Course
383	Further Education Unknown: Non-Degree, above A Level Standard
384	Further Education Unknown: Non-Degree, less than or equal to A Level Standard
700	Employment
720	Training for success/Training/Apprenticeship
725	Training for success at Further Education College
740	Unemployed/Seeking Employment
800	Unknown
900	Deceased
910	Another School: Unknown
920	Another School: Grammar
940	Another School: Non-Grammar
950	Day Care
960	Emigrated
980	Long Term Sick/Pregnant/Hospitalisation
990	Home Tuition

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education whether the integrated status of Parkhall Integrated College is still justified in terms of it attracting adequate numbers of students from Protestant and Roman Catholic backgrounds.

(AQW 4665/16-21)

Mr Weir: Parkhall Integrated College is a controlled integrated school, as provided for in legislation. Any proposal to change this status would require the publication and approval of a statutory Development Proposal.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to outline the policies and training his Department has and delivers for principal teachers and Board of Governors in relation to budget management.

(AQW 4669/16-21)

Mr Weir: The policies which the Department has in place for Boards of Governors in relation to budget management are contained in the Financial Guides which have been established for the Controlled and Maintained schools (Guidance on Financial and Management Arrangements for Controlled and Maintained Schools Funded under the Common Funding Scheme), Voluntary Grammar schools (Financial & Audit Arrangements Manual for Voluntary Grammar Schools) and Grant-Maintained Integrated schools (Financial & Audit Arrangements for Grant-Maintained Integrated Schools).

Each Guide sets out the arrangements and conditions for the payment of grant by the Department, and the financial responsibilities of Boards of Governors in ensuring that monies from grant payments are used appropriately and within the guidance provided.

The Education Authority provides training on an annual basis to both Boards of Governors and first time Principals in relation to budget management.

The Education Authority's 2016/17 training programme for members of Boards of Governors includes a training course entitled Financial Management and Accountability. The Authority has also developed a one day training programme for first time Principals which covers local management of schools, financial planning and management, budget management and internal audit.

In addition, those teachers seeking to become Principals can avail of the Professional Qualification for Headship, which includes a module on "managing school finances".

Guidance is also contained in Chapter 8 of 'Every School a Good School – The Governor's Role', which is published on my Department's website. This explains how schools are funded and sets out the main responsibilities of the Board of Governors and the Principal in relation to the management of school finances.

The Educational television website – <http://www.esags.tv/> - also hosts a short programme on school finances.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Education for an update on the implementation of the recommendations within the Going for Growth Strategy to (i) introduce food into the education curriculum at pre-school, primary and secondary level to enhance the understanding of agriculture and food; and (ii) examine the scope for development of primary and secondary level curriculum based training in agriculture and food to GCSE exam level.

(AQW 4699/16-21)

Mr Weir: For action (i), the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has continued to develop curricular resources linked to farming and food production, building on existing materials. These include for example, Key Stage 2 resources for primary schools linked to the Balmoral Show focusing on farming and food; and post-primary resources, including STEM-related material, developed with support from the former Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry, Matrix NI and the local agri-food industry.

Action (ii) has focused on reviewing the content of the Agriculture and Land–Use GCSE and industry experts have been heavily involved in this work. One outcome of this is that there is a greater emphasis on food-processing in the current specification. CCEA will continue to engage with the agri-food industry on any future revisions to this GCSE qualification.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children going to school without a breakfast in the last 12 months.

(AQW 4724/16-21)

Mr Weir: This information is not collected by the Department of Education.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education to outline what he is doing in conjunction with primary schools to promote healthy living and exercise.

(AQW 4725/16-21)

Mr Weir: I refer the member to my answer to AQW 3034/16-21 tabled by Barry McElduff MLA and published in the official report on 23 September 2016.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Education what discussions he has had with the Ministry of Defence in relation to the viability of extending the Educational Support Fund to include adopted children.

(AQW 4768/16-21)

Mr Weir: I have not had any discussions with the Ministry of Defence on this issue however I understand that their Educational Support Fund applies to schools with any pupils from families of service personnel irrespective of whether the children are adopted or not.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans to increase the number of schools that monitor air quality.

(AQW 4778/16-21)

Mr Weir: Neither the Department of Education nor the Education Authority (EA) formally monitors external air quality at schools. There are currently no plans to introduce air monitoring. The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has overall responsibility for air monitoring in Northern Ireland, while monitoring at a local level is the responsibility of the relevant Council.

The EA promotes the use of its own transport fleet and encourages children to walk, cycle or scoot to school through participation in Eco-Schools and Active School Travel Programmes. These measures can help reduce traffic around schools which can impact positively on air quality.

Air quality inside new schools is measured in terms of temperature and carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels. Older schools would not have this facility for monitoring air quality and there are currently no plans to make it standard within existing school buildings.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the names of the schools that have air quality monitoring; and (ii) the names of the schools which have indicated they have plans to provide air quality monitoring.

(AQW 4779/16-21)

Mr Weir: Neither the Department of Education nor the Education Authority (EA) formally monitors external air quality at schools. There are currently no plans to introduce air monitoring. The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has overall responsibility for air monitoring in Northern Ireland, while monitoring at a local level is the responsibility of the relevant Council.

The EA promotes the use of its own transport fleet and encourages children to walk, cycle or scoot to school through participation in Eco-Schools and Active School Travel Programmes. These measures can help reduce traffic around schools which can impact positively on air quality.

Air quality inside new schools is measured in terms of temperature and carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels. Older schools would not have this facility for monitoring air quality and there are currently no plans to make it standard within existing school buildings.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education whether there are any plans for the procurement of new school buses.
(AQW 4780/16-21)

Mr Weir: As no capital budget has yet been set for 2017/18 onwards, discussions are currently ongoing with the Department of Finance to assess the capital budget requirements for Education going forward. The capital funding requirements for Home to School Transport for 2017/18 onwards will form part of this discussion. Until the outcome of these discussions is known and the overall capital budget set, it is not possible to confirm how much will be available for school buses in the next financial year.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail the procedure or process used to determine when teacher training days can take place.
(AQW 4781/16-21)

Mr Weir: The scheduling of teacher training days is determined by a school's Principal and Board of Governors.

Department of Education Circular 2016/04 - School Development Days 2016/17 to 2017/18 advises schools to reflect carefully before deciding on the number of days they wish to take and also satisfy themselves that the closure minimises disruption to pupils' learning. They are also advised that parents and pupils should be given as much advance notice of closure dates as possible.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education for an update on the review of the Home to School Transport policy.
(AQW 4782/16-21)

Mr Weir: No decision has been taken at this time regarding a revision to the Home to School Transport policy. Any decision to review or amend the current policy in light of the recommendations from the Review team would be subject to full public consultation.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail how many exceptional closure days have occurred in each school due to teacher training.
(AQW 4783/16-21)

Mr Weir: No exceptional closures have occurred due to teacher training. An exceptional closure day is an unplanned closure to take account of exceptional circumstances or where the closing of the school is outside the control of the school authorities. For example, due to:

- the death of a member of staff, pupil or person working at the school;
- flooding or burst pipes;
- electricity failure;
- an exceptionally heavy snowfall; or
- the use of the school as a polling station for parliamentary/local government elections.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the number of taxis contracted by the Education Authority to transport children to schools in each of the last three years, broken down by EA region; and (ii) whether there will be an increase in the number of taxis used as a result of the review by the EA.
(AQW 4784/16-21)

Mr Weir: Since its formation on 1 April 2015, the Education Authority (EA) has operated as a single organisation and no longer reports on a regional basis. The number of taxis contracted to transport children to school in each of the last three years, was as follows:

- 2013/14 - 1,280
- 2014/15 - 1,347
- 2015/16 - 1,345

There has been no indication that would suggest an increase in taxi provision in the coming years.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Education what guidance his Department has produced for schools that use external providers to support the delivery of relationship and sexuality education.
(AQW 4807/16-21)

Mr Weir: DE Circular 2015/22 advised all schools about revised guidance for Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) for primary and post-primary schools. The guidance recognises that schools may wish to make use of external providers to support their delivery of RSE and contains advice to schools on the use of such providers. This is set out in the "Strengthening the partnership between school and the wider community" section of the guidance.

Both the guidance for primary schools and the separate guidance for post-primary schools are available to download from my Department's website.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education what impact the difference the dates of the financial year and the academic year has on educational outcomes.

(AQW 4831/16-21)

Mr Weir: There is no available evidence to indicate that the difference in the dates of the financial and academic year has any impact on the educational outcomes of children.

Since its introduction in 1991, Local Management of Schools (LMS) budgets have been determined and allocated on a financial year basis. Schools are familiar with their own budgetary management and align this with the academic year.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has carried out research and analysis of the educational attainment levels of Young for Year pupils; and whether a comparative analysis has been carried out between pupils with birthdays in June and birthdays in July.

(AQW 4832/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department's Analytical Services Unit carried out an analysis of end of Key Stage 2 data and GCSE data by month of birth covering a number of years in June 2015. That analysis showed that within any year group, there will be a differential between the oldest and youngest pupils and that this reduces over time until rendered all but insignificant by the end of compulsory schooling.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Education how many post-primary schools have developed gay/straight alliances or similar models to address homophobic and transphobic bullying.

(AQW 4860/16-21)

Mr Weir: The approach taken by each school to tackle bullying is a matter for its Principal and Board of Governors and the Department does not collect specific data on this issue. The Department is aware that Shimna Integrated College established a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) in 2011; however this is the only school the Department is aware of where a GSA has been set up.

The Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (NI) 2016, once commenced, will require all schools record incidents and complaints of bullying along with their motivating factors. This information will allow Boards of Governors to monitor the problem and take whatever actions they deem necessary when an issue, such as recurring homophobic or transphobic bullying, is identified.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Education, given that the Children's Services Co-operation Act prescribes that the first strategy must be laid before the Assembly within one year of the Act receiving Royal Assent, to outline when the draft Children's Strategy will be published for consultation.

(AQW 4876/16-21)

Mr Weir: The new Children and Young People's Strategy, like the Programme for Government (PfG), is being developed using the outcomes based approach. It is therefore important that it aligns appropriately with the PfG. However, the timeframe for the publication of the draft PFG, combined with the wide ranging pre-engagement of the Children and Young People' Strategy, means that consultation on the Strategy is not planned to commence until November 2016. It is therefore not possible for the final Strategy to be laid before the Assembly within one year of the Act receiving Royal Assent. It is however anticipated that the Strategy will be laid before the Assembly as early as possible in the New Year. Whilst any delay is regrettable, it is important that the necessary time is given to ensuring that the Strategy is right for children and young people.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Education to outline what engagement his Department has had with the Education Authority and/or schools regarding the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre's ThinkUKnow campaign to help teachers and parents to protect children from online abuse.

(AQW 4893/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department has issued a number of circulars and advice letters to schools regarding on-line safety and the Departmental website, link below, contains information for schools, pupils and parents on keeping children safe. A further circular on online safety will issue to schools in the near future.

CEOP and the ThinkuKnow campaign are signposted on the DE website and a CEOP App is prominent on C2k and available to all children.

Advice on internet safety issued to schools in June 2015 to help Head Teachers draft letters to parents and to signpost information on the C2K exchange which contains detailed advice and guidance on eSafety. C2k has also held a number of eSafety conferences for schools, most recently in May 2016.

The PSNI Sexting and the Law leaflet was issued to all schools in September 2015 and the PSNI are supporting the SBNI in taking forward an e-Safety strategy, which should be out for consultation in the near future.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/keeping-children-safe-online>

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Education for an update on all planned capital expenditure in South Down, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4951/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' and youth estate funded from the Department's capital budget. In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The tables below provide a list of capital projects that have been selected to advance in planning under each of the various programmes. Those projects which have moved on site and are therefore contractually committed are likely to be completed within the next two years. Definitive timescales cannot be allocated to projects that remain in planning due to the number of uncertain influencing factors, such as the capital budget availability beyond 2016/17; the availability of a suitable site and the need to secure the relevant planning approvals. Where the total estimated cost of a project has been developed within an approved business cases this has been provided.

Major Capital Investment Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Estimated Total Cost (£m)
St Bronagh's Primary School	On Site	£3.9m
Down High School	In Planning	£21m

School Enhancement Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Sacred Heart Grammar School	On Site	£1.77m
St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint	On Site	£3.07m

Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Shimna College, Newcastle	In planning	Unknown

The Department also has a Youth Capital Works Programme however many of the projects in planning involve multi-funding strands and it is therefore not possible to provide accurate timescales for completion or associated costs of individual projects. The following Voluntary Youth Capital schemes are currently ongoing (this includes schemes that are due to go on site, currently on site or in the retention period):

- Patrician Youth Centre, Downpatrick
- Kingdom Youth Club, Kilkeel

The Department launched a Voluntary Youth Capital Scheme in March 2016, which closed in September 2016. Applications are currently being assessed and the successful applications will be notified once this process has been completed.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister of Education for an update on all planned capital expenditure in Lagan Valley, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4953/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' and youth estate funded from the Department's capital budget. In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The tables below provide a list of capital projects that have been selected to advance in planning under each of the various programmes. Those projects which have moved on site and are therefore contractually committed are likely to be completed within the next two years. Definitive timescales cannot be allocated to projects that remain in planning due to the number of uncertain influencing factors, such as the capital budget availability beyond 2016/17; the availability of a suitable site and the need to secure the relevant planning approvals. Where the total estimated cost of a project has been developed within an approved business cases this has been provided.

School Enhancement Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
St Patrick's Academy, Lisburn	On Site	£3.7m
Wallace High School	On Site	£3.2m

Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Rowandale Integrated Primary School, Moira	In planning	Unknown
Fort Hill Central Integrated Primary School, Lisburn	In planning	Unknown
Fort Hill Integrated College, Lisburn	In planning	Unknown

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Education for an update on all planned capital expenditure in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4954/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' and youth estate funded from the Department's capital budget. In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The tables below provide a list of capital projects that have been selected to advance in planning under each of the various programmes. Those projects which have moved on site and are therefore contractually committed are likely to be completed within the next two years. Definitive timescales cannot be allocated to projects that remain in planning due to the number of uncertain influencing factors, such as the capital budget availability beyond 2016/17; the availability of a suitable site and the need to secure the relevant planning approvals. Where the total estimated cost of a project has been developed within an approved business cases this has been provided.

Major Capital Investment Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Estimated Total Cost (£m)
Enniskillen Model Primary School	In planning	£6m
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	On Site	£28.7m
Devenish College/Lisnaskea College, Enniskillen	In Planning	£23.2m
Enniskillen Royal Grammar School	In Planning	Unknown
Gaelscoil Aodha Rua, Dungannon	In Planning	Unknown

School Enhancement Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
St Michael's College, Enniskillen	In Planning	£1.07m
Mount Lourdes Grammar School	In Planning	£1.1m
Integrated College, Dungannon	On Site	£3.1m
Willow Bridge Primary School	On Site	£3.9m

Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Enniskillen Integrated Primary School	In planning	Unknown

Shared Education Campus Programme (All now funded under FSA)

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Moy Shared Education Campus – Moy Regional Primary School, St John's Primary School, Moy and Moy Area Playgroup	In planning	£7.0m
Brookeborough Shared Education Campus – St Mary's Primary School, Brookeborough and Brookeborough Primary School	In planning	Unknown

The Department also has a Youth Capital Works Programme however many of the projects in planning involve multi-funding strands and it is therefore not possible to provide accurate timescales for completion or associated costs of individual projects. The following Voluntary Youth Capital schemes are currently ongoing (this includes schemes that are due to go on site, currently on site or in the retention period):

- Cladagh Glen Centre, Fermanagh
- 1st Tyrone Scouts, Dungannon
- Share Discovery Village, Lisnaskea
- St Michael's Scout Group, Enniskillen
- 6th Fermanagh Scouting Ireland, Irvinestown

The Department launched a Voluntary Youth Capital Scheme in March 2016, which closed in September 2016. Applications are currently being assessed and the successful applications will be notified once this process has been completed.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education for an update on all planned capital expenditure in Newry and Armagh, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.
(AQW 4958/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' and youth estate funded from the Department's capital budget. In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The tables below provide a list of capital projects that have been selected to advance in planning under each of the various programmes. Those projects which have moved on site and are therefore contractually committed are likely to be completed within the next two years. Definitive timescales cannot be allocated to projects that remain in planning due to the number of uncertain influencing factors, such as the capital budget availability beyond 2016/17; the availability of a suitable site and the need to secure the relevant planning approvals. Where the total estimated cost of a project has been developed within an approved business cases this has been provided.

Major Capital Investment Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Estimated Total Cost (£m)
St Joseph's and St James Primary School, Poyntzpass	In Planning	£2m
St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen	In Planning	£15m
St Peter's Primary School, Dungannon	In Planning	Unknown
St Malachy's Primary School, Armagh	In Planning	Unknown

School Enhancement Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh	On Site	£4.0m
Our Lady's Grammar School, Newry	In Planning	£3.3m
Killeen Primary School	On Site	£1.5m
Rathore Special School	On Site	£1.6m

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
The Armstrong Primary School, Armagh	On Site	£2.5m

The Department also has a Youth Capital Works Programme however many of the projects in planning involve multi-funding strands and it is therefore not possible to provide accurate timescales for completion or associated costs of individual projects. The following Voluntary Youth Capital schemes are currently ongoing (this includes schemes that are due to go on site, currently on site or in the retention period):

- Magnet Young Adult Centre, Newry

The Department launched a Voluntary Youth Capital Scheme in March 2016, which closed in September 2016. Applications are currently being assessed and the successful applications will be notified once this process has been completed.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Education for an update on all planned capital expenditure in Upper Bann, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4960/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' and youth estate funded from the Department's capital budget. In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The tables below provide a list of capital projects that have been selected to advance in planning under each of the various programmes. Those projects which have moved on site and are therefore contractually committed are likely to be completed within the next two years. Definitive timescales cannot be allocated to projects that remain in planning due to the number of uncertain influencing factors, such as the capital budget availability beyond 2016/17; the availability of a suitable site and the need to secure the relevant planning approvals. Where the total estimated cost of a project has been developed within an approved business cases this has been provided.

Major Capital Investment Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Estimated Total Cost (£m)
Tannaghmore Primary School	On Site	£7.34m
St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge	On Site	£6.8m
St Ronan's College, Lurgan	In Planning	£26.5m
Portadown Integrated Primary School	In Planning	Unknown
Lismore Comprehensive, Lurgan	In Planning	£22.8m
Kings Park Primary School, Lurgan	In Planning	Unknown

School Enhancement Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Newbridge Integrated College, Banbridge	In Planning	£4.0m
Ceara Special School, Lurgan	In Planning	£2.3m
Donard Special School, Banbridge	On Site	£1.184m
Millington Primary School, Portadown	On Site	£3.87m

Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
New-Bridge Integrated College, Loughbrickland	In Planning	Unknown

The Department also has a Youth Capital Works Programme however many of the projects in planning involve multi-funding strands and it is therefore not possible to provide accurate timescales for completion or associated costs of individual

projects. The following Voluntary Youth Capital schemes are currently ongoing (this includes schemes that are due to go on site, currently on site or in the retention period):

- Clann Eireann Youth Club, Lurgan
- Portadown YMCA, Portadown
- Goal Line Youth Trust, Portadown

The Department launched a Voluntary Youth Capital Scheme in March 2016, which closed in September 2016. Applications are currently being assessed and the successful applications will be notified once this process has been completed.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Mr Allen asked the Minister of Education for an update on all planned capital expenditure for each Belfast constituency, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4962/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' and youth estate funded from the Department's capital budget. In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The tables below provide a list of capital projects that have been selected to advance in planning under each of the various programmes. Those projects which have moved on site and are therefore contractually committed are likely to be completed within the next two years. Definitive timescales cannot be allocated to projects that remain in planning due to the number of uncertain influencing factors, such as the capital budget availability beyond 2016/17; the availability of a suitable site and the need to secure the relevant planning approvals. Where the total estimated cost of a project has been developed within an approved business cases this has been provided.

Major Capital Investment Programme

Project / Scheme	Parliamentary Constituency	Timescale for Completion	Estimated Total Cost (£m)
Elmgrove School and Nursery	Belfast East	In Planning	£9.95m
Edenderry Nursery	Belfast North	On Site	£1.3m
Glenwood Primary School	Belfast North	In Planning	£10.5m
St Patrick's Primary School	Belfast North	In Planning	£7.5m
St Vincent de Paul Primary School, Belfast	Belfast North	In Planning	Unknown
Gaelscoil Eanna, Newtownabbey	Belfast North	In Planning	Unknown
Seaview Primary School, Belfast	Belfast North	In Planning	Unknown
Methodist College	Belfast South	In Planning	£7.1m
Scoil An Droichid Primary School, Belfast	Belfast South	In Planning	£3.85m
Breda Academy	Belfast South	In Planning	£21.0m
Colaiste Feirste, Belfast	Belfast West	On Site	£15.5m
Holy Evangelists Primary School, Twinbrook	Belfast West	In Planning	£6.45m

School Enhancement Programme

Project / Scheme	Parliamentary Constituency	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Strandtown Primary School	Belfast East	In Planning	£4.0m
St Malachy's College, Belfast	Belfast North	In Planning	£3.5m
St Bernard's Primary School, Newtownabbey	Belfast North	On Site	£1.2m
Malone Integrated College, Belfast	Belfast South	In Planning	£3.3m
Victoria College, Belfast	Belfast South	On Site	£3.9m
Methodist College, Belfast	Belfast South	On Site	£3.7m

Project / Scheme	Parliamentary Constituency	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
John Paul II Primary School	Belfast West	On Site	£1.1m
De La Salle College, Belfast	Belfast West	In Planning	£1.66m

Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) Programme

Project / Scheme	Parliamentary Constituency	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Forge Integrated Primary School	Belfast South	In planning	Unknown

The Department also has a Youth Capital Works Programme however many of the projects in planning involve multi-funding strands and it is therefore not possible to provide accurate timescales for completion or associated costs of individual projects. The following Voluntary Youth Capital schemes are currently ongoing (this includes schemes that are due to go on site, currently on site or in the retention period):

- Ballysillan Youth for Christ Drop-in Belfast North
- John Paul 2 Youth Club, Belfast Belfast North
- Ardoyne Youth Club, Belfast Belfast North
- Croi Eanna, Antrim Belfast North
- Corpus Christi Youth Club, Belfast Belfast West
- Catholic Guides of Ireland, Northern Belfast West

Region, Belfast

- Holy Trinity Youth Centre, Belfast Belfast West
- Newhill Youth & Community Centre, Belfast Belfast West

Belfast

- Conway Youth Centre, Belfast Belfast West
- Forthspring Inter-Community Group Belfast West
- St Peter's Immaculate Youth Centre Belfast West
- Willowfield Parish Church Belfast East
- Rosario Youth Club Belfast South

The Department launched a Voluntary Youth Capital Scheme in March 2016, which closed in September 2016. Applications are currently being assessed and the successful applications will be notified once this process has been completed.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education for an update on all planned capital expenditure for East Antrim, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.
(AQW 4964/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' and youth estate funded from the Department's capital budget. In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The tables below provide a list of capital projects that have been selected to advance in planning under each of the various programmes. Those projects which have moved on site and are therefore contractually committed are likely to be completed within the next two years. Definitive timescales cannot be allocated to projects that remain in planning due to the number of uncertain influencing factors, such as the capital budget availability beyond 2016/17; the availability of a suitable site and the need to secure the relevant planning approvals. Where the total estimated cost of a project has been developed within an approved business cases this has been provided.

Major Capital Investment Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Estimated Total Cost (£m)
Corran Integrated Primary School, Larne	In planning	£3.197m
Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus	In planning	£2.734m

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Estimated Total Cost (£m)
Abbey Community College	In planning	Unknown
St Killian's College, Ballymena	In planning	Unknown
Islandmagee Primary School	In planning	Unknown

Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Ulidia College, Carrickfergus	In planning	Unknown

The Department also has a Youth Capital Works Programme however many of the projects in planning involve multi-funding strands and it is therefore not possible to provide accurate timescales for completion or associated costs of individual projects. The following Voluntary Youth Capital schemes are currently ongoing (this includes schemes that are due to go on site, currently on site or in the retention period):

- 314 NI Girls Brigade, Monkstown

The Department launched a Voluntary Youth Capital Scheme in March 2016, which closed in September 2016. Applications are currently being assessed and the successful applications will be notified once this process has been completed.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister of Education for an update on all planned capital expenditure for South Antrim, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4966/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' and youth estate funded from the Department's capital budget. In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The tables below provide a list of capital projects that have been selected to advance in planning under each of the various programmes. Those projects which have moved on site and are therefore contractually committed are likely to be completed within the next two years. Definitive timescales cannot be allocated to projects that remain in planning due to the number of uncertain influencing factors, such as the capital budget availability beyond 2016/17; the availability of a suitable site and the need to secure the relevant planning approvals. Where the total estimated cost of a project has been developed within an approved business cases this has been provided.

Major Capital Investment Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Estimated Total Cost (£m)
Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim	On site	£20.7m

School Enhancement Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Ballyclare Secondary School	On site	£3.7m

Shared Education Campus Programme (All now funded under FSA)

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Duneane/Moneynick Shared Education Campus	In planning	Unknown

The Department also has a Youth Capital Works Programme however many of the projects in planning involve multi-funding strands and it is therefore not possible to provide accurate timescales for completion or associated costs of individual projects. The following Voluntary Youth Capital schemes are currently ongoing (this includes schemes that are due to go on site, currently on site or in the retention period):

- St Comgall's Youth Centre, Antrim

■ 1st Randalstown Scout Group, Antrim

The Department launched a Voluntary Youth Capital Scheme in March 2016, which closed in September 2016. Applications are currently being assessed and the successful applications will be notified once this process has been completed.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education for an update on all planned capital expenditure for Mid Ulster, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4968/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' and youth estate funded from the Department's capital budget. In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The tables below provide a list of capital projects that have been selected to advance in planning under each of the various programmes. Those projects which have moved on site and are therefore contractually committed are likely to be completed within the next two years. Definitive timescales cannot be allocated to projects that remain in planning due to the number of uncertain influencing factors, such as the capital budget availability beyond 2016/17; the availability of a suitable site and the need to secure the relevant planning approvals. Where the total estimated cost of a project has been developed within an approved business cases this has been provided.

Major Capital Investment Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Estimated Total Cost (£m)
Gaelscoil Uí Neill, Coalisland	In planning	£5.25m
Holy Trinity College, Cookstown	In planning	£36.1m
Edendork Primary School, Dungannon	In planning	Unknown

School Enhancement Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Rainey Endowed School, Magherafelt	On Site	£4.0m
Anahorish Primary School, Toomebridge	On Site	£1.5m
St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt	On Site	£4.0m

Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Phoenix Integrated Primary School, Cookstown	In planning	Unknown

The Department also has a Youth Capital Works Programme however many of the projects in planning involve multi-funding strands and it is therefore not possible to provide accurate timescales for completion or associated costs of individual projects. The following Voluntary Youth Capital schemes are currently ongoing (this includes schemes that are due to go on site, currently on site or in the retention period):

- St Patrick's Youth Centre, Donaghmore
- Fairhill Youth Centre, Maghera
- 6th Tyrone Scouts, Dungannon

The Department launched a Voluntary Youth Capital Scheme in March 2016, which closed in September 2016. Applications are currently being assessed and the successful applications will be notified once this process has been completed.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Education for an update on all planned capital expenditure for North Down, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4970/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' and youth estate funded from the Department's capital budget. In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The tables below provide a list of capital projects that have been selected to advance in planning under each of the various programmes. Those projects which have moved on site and are therefore contractually committed are likely to be completed within the next two years. Definitive timescales cannot be allocated to projects that remain in planning due to the number of uncertain influencing factors, such as the capital budget availability beyond 2016/17; the availability of a suitable site and the need to secure the relevant planning approvals. Where the total estimated cost of a project has been developed within an approved business cases this has been provided.

Major Capital Investment Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Estimated Total Cost (£m)
Crawfordsburn Primary School	In planning	Unknown

School Enhancement Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Sullivan Upper School, Hollywood	On Site	£2.9m

Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Bangor Central Integrated Primary School	In planning	Unknown
Priory College, Hollywood	In planning	Unknown

The Department also has a Youth Capital Works Programme however many of the projects in planning involve multi-funding strands and it is therefore not possible to provide accurate timescales for completion or associated costs of individual projects. The following Voluntary Youth Capital schemes are currently ongoing (this includes schemes that are due to go on site, currently on site or in the retention period):

- Hollywood Family Trust, Hollywood

The Department launched a Voluntary Youth Capital Scheme in March 2016, which closed in September 2016. Applications are currently being assessed and the successful applications will be notified once this process has been completed.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Education for an update on all planned capital expenditure for Strangford, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4971/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' and youth estate funded from the Department's capital budget. In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The tables below provide a list of capital projects that have been selected to advance in planning under each of the various programmes. Those projects which have moved on site and are therefore contractually committed are likely to be completed within the next two years. Definitive timescales cannot be allocated to projects that remain in planning due to the number of uncertain influencing factors, such as the capital budget availability beyond 2016/17; the availability of a suitable site and the need to secure the relevant planning approvals. Where the total estimated cost of a project has been developed within an approved business cases this has been provided.

Major Capital Investment Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Estimated Total Cost (£m)
Drumlins Integrated Primary School	On site	£3.4m

Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Millennium Integrated Primary School, Carryduff	In planning	Unknown
Strangford College	In planning	Unknown

The Department also has a Youth Capital Works Programme however many of the projects in planning involve multi-funding strands and it is therefore not possible to provide accurate timescales for completion or associated costs of individual projects. The following Voluntary Youth Capital schemes are currently ongoing (this includes schemes that are due to go on site, currently on site or in the retention period):

- Comber Youth for Christ, Comber

The Department launched a Voluntary Youth Capital Scheme in March 2016, which closed in September 2016. Applications are currently being assessed and the successful applications will be notified once this process has been completed.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Education whether all (i) school teachers; (ii) staff; and (iii) classroom assistants in all educational facilities are both trained and educated to the required standard for people diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

(AQW 4979/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) has advised that it's Autism Advisory Service, in collaboration with the Educational Psychology Service, the Middletown Centre for Autism and the Health Trusts, provides a wide range of training and education targeted to and appropriate for all (i) school teachers; (ii) staff; and (iii) classroom assistants in all educational facilities. It is the responsibility of schools and other educational facilities to identify the training needs of their staff.

The training, advice and support provided meets the standards required to ensure a) a comprehensive understanding of the continuum of autism conditions, b) that best practices are followed in meeting the needs of children and young people with autism in educational settings, and c) compliance with educational legislation and policy. All training is designed, directed and delivered by a team of highly qualified and experienced professionals.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Education to outline the elements of the curriculum that his Department allows schools to interpret according to their own ethos.

(AQW 4983/16-21)

Mr Weir: The statutory curriculum provides schools with the flexibility to make decisions about how best to interpret minimum requirements with a view to providing a broad and balanced curriculum.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education for an update on all planned capital expenditure in (a) West Tyrone: and (b) Foyle, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4997/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' and youth estate funded from the Department's capital budget. In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The tables below provide a list of capital projects that have been selected to advance in planning under each of the various programmes. Those projects which have moved on site and are therefore contractually committed are likely to be completed within the next two years. Definitive timescales cannot be allocated to projects that remain in planning due to the number of uncertain influencing factors, such as the capital budget availability beyond 2016/17; the availability of a suitable site and the need to secure the relevant planning approvals. Where the total estimated cost of a project has been developed within an approved business cases this has been provided.

Major Capital Investment Programme

Project / Scheme	Constituency	Timescale for Completion	Estimated Total Cost (£m)
Strabane Academy	West Tyrone	In planning	£21.5m
Omagh Integrated Primary School	West Tyrone	In planning	£5.7m
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh, Strabane	West Tyrone	In planning	£3.1m
Gaelscoil na gCrann Primary School, Omagh	West Tyrone	In planning	£2.97m
Foyle College, Londonderry	Foyle	On site	£24m
Ebrington Primary School	Foyle	On site	£7.4m
Ardnashee School and College	Foyle	In planning	£20.15m

School Enhancement Programme

Project / Scheme	Constituency	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
St Columb's College, Londonderry	Foyle	On site	£2.7m
Broadbridge Primary School, Londonderry	Foyle	On site	£3.2m
New Buildings Primary School, Londonderry	Foyle	On site	£1.9m

Strule Shared Education Campus (Omagh)

Project / Scheme	Constituency	Timescale for Completion	Estimated Total Cost (£m)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Loreto Grammar School ■ Christian Brother Grammar School ■ Sacred Heart College ■ Omagh Academy Grammar School ■ Omagh High School 	West Tyrone	In Planning	£148.9m

The Department also has a Youth Capital Works Programme however many of the projects in planning involve multi-funding strands and it is therefore not possible to provide accurate timescales for completion or associated costs of individual projects. The following Voluntary Youth Capital schemes are currently ongoing (this includes schemes that are due to go on site, currently on site or in the retention period):

West Tyrone Constituency:

- Ardstraw Presbyterian Church Youth Council, Ardstraw
- 3rd Tyrone Scouts, Strabane

Foyle Constituency:

- St Mary's Youth Club, Derry
- Glenview Community Centre, Derry
- Londonderry YMCA, Newbuildings
- Ebrington Church Youth Council, Derry
- Pennyburn Youth Club, Derry

The Department launched a Voluntary Youth Capital Scheme in March 2016, which closed in September 2016. Applications are currently being assessed and the successful applications will be notified once this process has been completed.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education for an update on all planned capital expenditure in North Antrim, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4999/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' and youth estate funded from the Department's capital budget. In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The tables below provide a list of capital projects that have been selected to advance in planning under each of the various programmes. Those projects which have moved on site and are therefore contractually committed are likely to be completed within the next two years. Definitive timescales cannot be allocated to projects that remain in planning due to the number of uncertain influencing factors, such as the capital budget availability beyond 2016/17; the availability of a suitable site and the need to secure the relevant planning approvals. Where the total estimated cost of a project has been developed within an approved business cases this has been provided.

Major Capital Investment Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Estimated Total Cost (£m)
Castle Tower Special School	On site	£21m
Braidside Integrated Primary School	In planning	£5.27m
Mary Queen of Peace Primary School	In planning	£4.59m
Cullybackey College	In planning	Unknown
Dunclug High School	In planning	£18.6m

School Enhancement Programme

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Dalriada School, Ballymoney	On site	£2.19m
St Louis Grammar School, Ballymena	On site	£4m
Slemish College, Ballymoney	In planning	£3.8m
Ballymoney High School	On site	£3.8m

Shared Education Campus Programme (All now funded under FSA)

Project / Scheme	Timescale for Completion	Anticipated Cost (£m)
Ballycastle Shared Education Campus	In planning	£34m

The Department also has a Youth Capital Works Programme however many of the projects in planning involve multi-funding strands and it is therefore not possible to provide accurate timescales for completion or associated costs of individual projects. The following Voluntary schemes are currently ongoing (this includes schemes that are due to go on site, currently on site or in the retention period):

- Glarryford Young Farmers Club, Glarryford
- Loughgiel Community Association, Loughgiel

The Department launched a Voluntary Youth Capital Scheme in March 2016, which closed in September 2016. Applications are currently being assessed and the successful applications will be notified once this process has been completed.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of planned projects. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education how many hours per week of physical activity the Curriculum Sports Programme facilitates for participants.

(AQW 5000/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Curriculum Sports Programme is delivered in each school by the Irish Football Association and Gaelic Athletic Association who run the programme on behalf of my Department.

Their coaches provide between 30 and 60 minutes per week for each participating class, depending on the age group of the class. The sessions for younger children in Years 1 and 2 are about 30 to 45 minutes and 30 to 60 minutes for Year 3 and 4 classes, dependent on the school timetable.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education for an update on the (i) primary; (ii) post-primary; and (iii) special school area plans scheduled to have been sent to his Department in July 2016.
(AQW 5002/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) submitted a draft strategic Area Plan, which covers the period April 2017 to March 2020, to my Department in July 2016.

Since then my officials have scrutinised the draft Area Plan against the Area Planning Guidance and provided feedback to the EA in advance of its recent publication.

My 17 October statement to the Assembly, on the Sustainable Schools Policy and Area Planning process, signalled the beginning of an eight week consultation on the draft Area Plan. Information about the consultation is available on the EA's website. The consultation findings will inform a final Area Plan.

The Area Plan will be supplemented in each of the 3 years covered by an Annual Action Plan which will contain details of actions and Development Proposals (DP) to give effect to proposed changes at local school level to deliver the Area Plan. The statutory DP process will facilitate further consultation before final decisions are taken.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Education to detail the annual budget for music for each Education Authority region, broken down for each of the last five years.
(AQW 5009/16-21)

Mr Weir: Since its formation on 1 April 2015 the EA has operated as a single organisation and no longer reports on a regional basis. The annual music budget for the EA for the 2015-16 financial year was £3.986 million.

The table below details the final music budgets for the former Education and Library Boards (ELBs) between 2011 and 2015:

	2011-12 £'000	2012-13 £'000	2013-14 £'000	2014-15 £'000
BELB	865	745	866	841
NEELB	378	365	397	474
SEELB	376	414	420	380
SELB	1,322	1,123	1,150	1,220
WELB	786	895	968	1,354
Total	3,727	3,542	3,801	4,269

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Education to detail the maintenance budget for each Education Authority regions, for each of the last five years.
(AQW 5011/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) is responsible for undertaking maintenance work for the controlled and maintained schools estates. It is also responsible for the maintenance of other non-school premises within its estate.

Since its formation on 1 April 2015 the EA has operated as a single organisation and no longer reports on a regional basis. The final overall maintenance budget allocation made to the EA for the 2015/16 financial year was £28.081million.

Prior to the formation of the EA the following table details the final maintenance budget allocations made to the former Education and Library Boards (ELB) broken down by ELB and financial year.

	2011/12 £000	2012/13 £000	2013/14 £000	2014/15 £000
BELB	8,540	12,686	14,582	4,088
NEELB	3,381	7,568	8,504	4,854
SEELB	3,146	6,979	7,717	4,392
SELB	2,276	8,028	10,049	5,120
WELB	2,457	6,418	7,841	4,677
Total	19,800	41,679	48,693	23,131

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) what guidance his Department has on class sizes for Years 5 to 7; and (ii) each occasion when the guidance has not been followed.

(AQW 5029/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department does not have guidance on class sizes from Years 5 to 7.

In line with Departmental policy to give schools as much autonomy as possible, it is a school's Board of Governors that has responsibility for determining their school's staffing complement and for managing the school's budget which would include class sizes, taking account of parameters set for Years 1 to 4, where class sizes are restricted to a maximum of 30 pupils.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the level of educational underachievement in South Down, broken down for each year over the last ten years; and (ii) for his assessment of how this compares with the rest of Northern Ireland.

(AQW 5031/16-21)

Mr Weir: Underachievement is where an individual learner's performance is below what might be expected. At a system level, the department does not collect data from the diagnostic tests/formative assessments or observations that consider children's ability. This information is however used on an ongoing basis in schools where teachers are able to use their professional judgement to assess if a pupil is at risk of underachieving and to implement appropriate strategies to address that.

At a system level, summative data is collected which relates to pupils' achievements at the end of each key stage. On its own, this information is not a measure of underachievement but it does identify groups which are, on average, experiencing lower levels of achievement than other groups.

At a system level, one of our key academic indicators relates to the proportion of school leavers who achieve at least five GCSEs at A*-C (including equivalents) including GCSEs in English and maths. Our target, published in

Count, Read: Succeed – a strategy to improve literacy and numeracy, is that by 2020 70% of school leavers will achieve this threshold.

- (i) Over the ten year period from 2005 the proportion of school leavers resident in the South Down Assembly Area attaining at least 5 GCSEs at A*-C (including equivalent qualifications) including GCSE in English and mathematics has increased by 16.8 percentage points from 54.4% in 2005/06 to 71.2% in 2014/15.
- (ii) In the same period the overall proportion of school leavers achieving this academic threshold has increased by 13.4 percentage points from 52.6% in 2005/06 to 66% in 2014/15.

Qualifications of school leavers from South Down Assembly Area⁽¹⁾, 2005/06 - 2014/15⁽²⁾

Academic Year	Area	Achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C(3) inc. GCSE English and maths		Total Leavers
		Number	%	Number
2014/15	South Down	1111	71.2	1560
	Total Leavers NI	14753	66.0	22361
2013/14	South Down	1005	66.6	1509
	Total Leavers NI	14373	63.5	22636
2012/13	South Down	1015	66.6	1525
	Total Leavers NI	14303	62.2	23001
2011/12	South Down	992	67.4	1471
	Total Leavers NI	13990	62.0	22568
2010/11	South Down	979	63.2	1549
	Total Leavers NI	13791	59.5	23160
2009/10	South Down	919	61.9	1484
	Total Leavers NI	13475	59.0	22826
2008/09	South Down	903	62.1	1453
	Total Leavers NI	13596	58.4	23276
2007/08	South Down	957	61.0	1570
	Total Leavers NI	13575	56.3	24091
2006/07	South Down	883	54.6	1616
	Total Leavers NI	13438	54.2	24803

Academic Year	Area	Achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C(3) inc. GCSE English and maths		Total Leavers
		Number	%	Number
2005/06	South Down	937	54.4	1723
	Total Leavers NI	13416	52.6	25528

Source: School Leavers survey

Notes:

- 1 Assembly Area of pupil residence is based on the residential postcode of each individual pupil
- 2 Excludes special and independent schools
- 3 Includes equivalent qualifications

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of full time equivalent (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary teachers in South Down, broken down for each year over the last ten years.

(AQW 5032/16-21)

Mr Weir: The number of full-time equivalent teachers in primary and post-primary schools in the South Down Assembly Area for each of the last ten years are detailed in the table below.

Table 1. Full-time equivalent teachers in primary and post-primary schools in South Down, 2006/07 – 2015/16.

Year	Primary	Post-primary
2006/07	491.0	575.3
2007/08	504.8	572.7
2008/09	498.7	578.3
2009/10	492.3	564.3
2010/11	500.4	567.0
2011/12	500.2	550.8
2012/13	490.0	587.4
2013/14	502.0	581.4
2014/15	501.4	582.7
2015/16	501.3	564.3

Source: Teachers' Payroll and Pensions Administration System

- 1 Numbers are expressed as full-time equivalents, with part-time hours being converted on the basis that a full-time working week is 32.4 hours.
- 2 Primary includes preparatory departments of grammar schools.
- 3 South Down is defined as the current Assembly Area of South Down for each of the 10 years included in the table.
- 4 Location data is based on the postcode of the school in each year.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Education to detail each invitation he has (i) received; (ii) accepted; (iii) declined; and (iv) is yet to respond to in relation to visiting primary schools in South Down since coming into office.

(AQW 5033/16-21)

Mr Weir: Since coming into office, I have only received one invitation from a primary school in South Down.

On 2 June 2016 I was invited by the Principal of St Joseph's Primary School, Carnacaville to undertake a site visit to view the work being carried out under the School Enhancement Programme. I accepted this invite and visited the school on 15 June 2016.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of pupils suspended from (a) primary; and (b) post-primary schools in each of the last five years; and (ii) the strategies in place to address this issue.

(AQW 5117/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department collects information on suspensions annually from the Education Authority. Statistics are published on the Department's website. These figures can be accessed using the following link:

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/pupil-suspensions-and-expulsions>

The table below details the number of pupil suspensions in each of the last 5 years, broken down by Primary and Post Primary School.

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Primary	185	200	191	228	218
Post Primary	4055	3594	3296	3380	3355

Figures for 2015/16 are in the process of being analysed by DE Statistics Team and will be published on the Department's website in due course.

The Board of Governors (BoG) of every grant-aided school is under a duty to ensure that policies designed to promote good behaviour and discipline on the part of pupils attending the school are pursued at the school.

Each school must therefore have a discipline policy which details the required standards of behaviour expected of pupils and the sanctions, including suspension and expulsion, which may be imposed whenever a pupil contravenes these standards. It is a matter for the school to periodically review this policy and ensure it remains fit for purpose.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education to detail the ten highest mileages recorded within the current fleet of school buses. (AQW 5138/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that the ten highest mileages recorded within the current fleet of school buses are as follows:

	Mileage
1	267,123
2	232,044
3	224,979
4	223,023
5	213,498
6	212,144
7	204,137
8	200,907
9	200,292
10	199,957

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to detail how many of the fifteen advisory and administrative posts set out in his Department's business plan for shared education have been filled.

(AQW 5146/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project Business plan included fifteen Development officers at an annual budget of £540,000.

Following a subsequent grading exercise by Education and Library Board's (ELB) HR function these posts were graded at a higher level than originally planned. After discussion it was agreed that ten posts at Assistant Advisory Officer grade should be recruited across the 5 ELB areas. Of these, nine were filled by September 2015.

One of the appointed officers left their post in November 2015. The post was offered to the first reserve who has been on maternity leave and is due to join the team in February 2017. This post has been filled on a temporary basis by seconding teachers as appropriate.

The recruitment process for the tenth post, which will support the recently agreed Teacher Professional Learning strand, is in progress with appointment expected in the coming weeks.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education (i) for his assessment of the School Omnibus Survey 2015 finding that on average only 4 per cent of primary school children have access to the recommended 2 hours physical education per week; and (ii) to outline what action he is taking to address this matter.

(AQW 5175/16-21)

Mr Weir: Whilst I accept that the figures for Physical Education (PE) from the School Omnibus Survey 2015 show room for improvement, the Department of Education (DE) is prohibited by law from prescribing the amount of time that schools should allocate to any subject, including PE.

In recognition of the importance of physical activity, DE provides funding for the Curriculum Sports Programme in primary schools. This Programme, which is delivered on behalf of DE by coaches from the Irish Football Association and Gaelic Athletic Association, focuses on improving the generic physical literacy skills of our youngest pupils (Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1) through participation in enjoyable physical activities and also seeks to develop the skills of teachers to deliver PE.

I have no further plans to address the findings of the Omnibus Survey at this time.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education whether he is able to make Childcare Strategy funding available to meet the cost of VAT added to the Approved Home Childcare scheme.

(AQW 5253/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Delivering Social Change Central Fund, which incorporates the former Executive Childcare Fund, is being used to resource the Key First Actions of the Executive's Childcare Strategy, notably the Bright Start School Age Childcare Grant Scheme.

I am aware of the issue that has arisen regarding a home-based childcare service operating in Northern Ireland, and the calls to consider a form of subsidy to keep this service viable. This is something that I will need to consider in more detail. My officials are working with colleagues in the Department of Health to determine what can be done to help parents who wish to use this type of service.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education when his Department will have the Entitlement Framework audit database updated with the new qualification accreditation numbers, to enable schools to upload their school data before the 28 October deadline.

(AQW 5403/16-21)

Mr Weir: As this is an operational matter it is the responsibility of the Education Authority (EA).

The EA has informed the Department that, in order to assist schools, all codes for the new Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) Advanced Subsidiary (AS) specifications were updated on the Entitlement Framework Online Audit System (EFOAS) on 10 October 2016.

The EA has advised that, for approval and verification purposes, all other requests for new courses (from varying awarding organisations) to be added to the database will be dealt with in line with established processes on a case by case basis.

I understand that schools were invited to attend recent seminars jointly delivered by my Department and CCEA in September and October; each event included a brief presentation from the EF Audit Team as a reminder to schools of the agreed EF audit procedure, including the process for registering new courses.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 18/16-21, to detail the services provided to schools which constitute 13% of the overall budget.

(AQW 5409/16-21)

Mr Weir: The services provided to schools which constitute 13% of the 2016-17 Education Budget includes: Transport, C2K (managed ICT service), School Meals, Headquarters, Pupil Support, Schools Development Service, Music Service and School Library Service.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Area Based Planning process.

(AQW 5449/16-21)

Mr Weir: Revised Area Planning Guidance was published on the Department's website on 27 September 2016. The revised guidance provides a comprehensive guide to the Area Planning objectives, governance structures, roles and responsibilities, parameters, process and consultation.

I refer the member to my answer to his earlier question (AQW 5002/16-21 refers) published on 28 October in which I confirmed that my 17 October statement to the Assembly, on the Sustainable Schools Policy and Area Planning process, signalled the beginning of an eight week consultation on the draft Area Plan. Information about the consultation is available on the EA's website. The consultation findings will inform a final Area Plan.

The Area Plan will be supplemented in each of the 3 years covered by an Annual Action Plan which will contain details of actions and Development Proposals (DP) to give effect to proposed changes at local school level to deliver the Area Plan. The statutory DP process will facilitate further consultation before final decisions are taken.

Department of Finance

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Finance, in relation to the Unclaimed Assets Scheme under the Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Act 2008, (i) how much funding is currently available; (ii) what type of groups or organisations are eligible to apply for funding; (iii) what type of activities are funded; and (iv) how groups or organisations apply for the fund.

(AQW 598/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): Some £7.15m is available under the “Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Act 2008”.

My Department, as required under the Dormant Bank and Building Society Accounts Act 2008, will direct the Big Lottery to develop a Strategic Plan for the utilisation of the fund. Subject to the outcome of consultation with the Big Lottery, as required under the Act, it is expected that this Strategic Plan will be laid before the Assembly before the Christmas Recess. This Plan will include details of how the Fund will operate including eligibility criteria and the process for accessing the Fund.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Finance when AQW 598/16-21 will be answered.

(AQW 2742/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: AQW 598/16-21 was answered on 17 October 2016.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance (i) what are the insurance arrangements for his ministerial driver; (ii) who pays for the policy; and (iii) whether there are restrictions on who can be carried in the vehicle.

(AQW 3477/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Details of the insurance arrangements for the Ministerial car are as follows:

- (i) The Ministerial car is part of the fleet of vehicles insured under a collaborative contract for motor insurance held with RSA Northern Ireland Insurance Limited. Under the policy, vehicles are permitted to be driven by any authorised driver who holds a current driving licence suitable for the vehicle to be driven.
- (ii) The cost of the insurance is apportioned amongst departments.
- (iii) No restrictions apply, provided the vehicle is suitable to accommodate passengers.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Finance to outline what engagement his Department has had with Her Majesty's Treasury regarding compensation for victims of Libyan sponsored terrorism.

(AQW 3578/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: This area is a matter for the British Government rather than the Executive and Assembly. My Department has therefore had no such engagement.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Finance, in light of the comments by the deputy First Minister during Question Time on 19 September 2016, when he will present the (i) June monitoring round; and (ii) forthcoming October monitoring to the departmental committee.

(AQW 3788/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Executive has adopted a more efficient and effective approach to the monitoring round process.

This process no longer requires the submission of bids by departments. The submission of a wish list of bids did not give a good indication of real pressures and it led to a slow and cumbersome negotiation.

Instead key pressures are now identified through ongoing engagement between DoF and departments. The new process will allow the Executive to focus on, and react quickly to, the key emerging pressures.

The new approach is consistent with the position adopted in Scotland, Wales and the South where Parliamentary scrutiny takes place through the Estimates process and focuses upon in-year changes to budgets with no reference to bids.

In keeping with the practice in those jurisdictions, the Executive does not disclose its deliberations in reaching an agreed Monitoring round outcome. The focus of scrutiny is on the outcomes.

The swift conclusion of the June Monitoring Round demonstrates the efficiency on the new approach.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Finance to outline his Department's strategy for decentralising public sector jobs within the civil service, particularly to Omagh and Strabane.

(AQW 3832/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: There is no central strategy for decentralising public sector jobs. However individual Ministers, departments and public bodies are free to consider the relocation of their facilities and jobs, subject to the normal requirements of business need, value for money and affordability.

I have visited Omagh twice since my appointment and have engaged with Business Leaders around the revitalisation of the town.

I would welcome further representations from the Business Community about how best I can partner their job creation and regeneration efforts in the time ahead.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance for an update on his recent meeting with the Vice-President of the European Investment Bank.

(AQW 3845/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I had a very constructive meeting with European Investment Bank (EIB) Vice-President Jonathan Taylor on 30 August 2016. We discussed a range of issues including the proposed Investment Fund, framework loans for local councils and wider lending to the North of Ireland.

It is clear that there is much uncertainty about all of these issues in the context of the EU referendum result. In particular, the EIB may now not take a direct, active role in delivering non-core business, such as the innovative Investment Fund. However, the EIB continues to provide advisory services and is assisting my officials in re-assessing delivery options for the Fund. The Economy Minister Simon Hamilton and I have written to EIB in this regard to explore further co-operation.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance what guidelines or protocols exist in his Department governing Ministers holding meetings with third parties in the absence of officials; and whether any record is kept of such meetings having been held.

(AQW 3866/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Department does not have any guidelines or protocols governing such meetings. As part of their role, Ministers will regularly meet with a variety of people and organisations, both in a formal and informal setting. It would be overly bureaucratic, and indeed unrealistic, to keep a record of every such encounter.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance what driving qualifications are required for Ministerial drivers when employed by (i) Civil Service; and (ii) individual parties or Ministers.

(AQW 3943/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The provision of ministerial transport and drivers is the responsibility of each individual department. I am therefore responding for the Department of Finance only.

The last time the Department of Finance made an appointment to this role, applicants were required to have a current driving license entitling them to drive a Group A vehicle under the Road Traffic Act (Northern Ireland) 1970.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Finance whether he plans to introduce regulations for property management companies who manage multi-unit developments.

(AQW 3950/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Northern Ireland Law Commission has considered property management in relation to apartments and has recommended the regulation of managing agents, rather than additional regulation for property management companies. Such companies are already subject to regulation under general company law and the issue of additional regulation would not be a matter for my Department, as company law does not fall within its remit.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance to detail the business vacancy rates in town centres in each of the last three years, broken down by postcode area.

(AQW 4278/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance to outline any agreement or Memorandum of Understanding between his Department and Her Majesty's Treasury regarding how a deduction from the block grant will be calculated and agreed each year if corporation tax is devolved.

(AQW 4300/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The precise costs and mechanism for adjusting the Block Grant have yet to be agreed. My officials continue to engage with the British Treasury on this and I can assure you that I am determined to secure an outcome that is affordable, right for our budget, our economy, and our people.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance, pursuant to AQO 300/16-21 and AQO 206/16-21, whether he has sought a derogation from the Treasury regarding the reclassification of Northern Ireland's housing associations by the Office of National Statistics on 29 September 2016; and for an update on the progress of this request.

(AQW 4604/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Executive's agreement to progress these changes is an important first step in reversing this decision. My officials are currently working with their counterparts in the Department for the Communities to develop a timescale for the legislative changes. This work will form the basis of the formal request for a derogation.

In developing our response, both Minister Givan and I have worked closely with sector representatives as reflected in the statement by the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations, Cameron Watt, who commented "Having engaged extensively with ministers and civil servants in anticipation of this decision, we recognise they are fully aware of the issues. Following today's decision, we call on the NI Executive and NI Assembly to quickly legislate to reverse the decision."

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the implementation of the Legal Complaints and Regulation Act 2016. (AQW 4618/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Implementation of the Legal Complaints and Regulation Act (NI) 2016 has commenced with the first stage being the appointment of the Legal Services Oversight Commissioner. A recruitment exercise is underway and it is anticipated that the post will be filled by the end of 2016.

Once the Commissioner is in post, that individual will work closely with the Law Society, the Bar and the Department in relation to the implementation of the other provisions of the Act. It is expected that the Act will come fully into effect later in 2017.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance to detail the number of business properties in each ward that encompasses a town centre; and the value of the (i) actual business rates invoiced; (ii) business rates exemptions as a result of charity occupancy; and (iii) reduced rates calculated as a result of no occupancy, for each of the last three years. (AQW 4625/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Finance to detail (i) the cost to his Department in the 2015-16 financial year for answering Assembly Written Questions from Members; and (ii) how many Assembly Written Questions were answered in that same period by his Department. (AQW 4680/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I refer you to my previous answer to AQW 3544/16-21 on the cost of answering Assembly Questions. I can however confirm my Department answered 681 Assembly Written Questions due for answer during the period referred to.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Finance to detail the number of job losses in West Tyrone in each of the last five years. (AQW 4682/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: NISRA collects information on the number of employee jobs in the Business Register and Employment Survey. However, the survey is not designed to provide separate estimates of job losses (or gains) and robust estimates at the required level of disaggregation are only available biennially.

The table shows the number of employee jobs in the West Tyrone Assembly Area and net changes for the relevant years from September 2009 to September 2015.

Table: Employee jobs in the West Tyrone Assembly Area, September 2009 to September 2015¹

Period	Total employee jobs	Net change
September 2009	26,919	
September 2011	26,658	-261
September 2013	26,406	-252
September 2015	27,719	1,313

Source: NISRA, Business Register and Employment Survey

¹ The sample size and sampling methodology for BRES 2010, 2012 and 2014 are not designed to support disaggregation by Assembly Area. Thus only figures for 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2015 have been provided.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance to outline the delivery model for the Investment Fund. (AQW 4743/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: A final decision on the Investment Fund delivery model has not yet been taken. Given the EIB's reluctance in actively managing the Investment Fund, following the EU Referendum, my officials have prepared alternative delivery options. One of these options has been submitted to the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to seek their advice on the sector classification. I will make a final decision on the delivery model once the ONS has provided its response.

The option submitted to ONS involves my Department procuring an existing Fund to deliver our Investment Strategy. This Fund would then be overseen by an Investment Board. This is just one of several options currently being considered. The EIB continues to provide advisory services in the delivery of the Fund.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Finance to provide a statistical overview of Northern Ireland Civil Service employees broken down by (i) gender; (ii) age profile; (iii) community background; (iv) ethnicity and; (v) sexual orientation.
(AQW 4751/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Breakdowns by gender, age group, community background and ethnicity as at 1 July 2016 are provided in Tables 1-4 attached. Information on sexual orientation is only available for a small minority of employees and so is not provided.

Table 1: NICS staff by gender

Gender	Number of Staff	Percentage of Staff
Male	11,791	49.0
Female	12,253	51.0
Total	24,044	100.0

Table 2: NICS staff by age group

Age Group	Number of Staff	Percentage of Staff
16-24	65	0.3
25-34	4,415	18.4
35-49	10,935	45.5
50-59	7,531	31.3
60+	1,098	4.6
Total	24,044	100.0

Table 3: NICS staff by community background

Community Background	Number of Staff	Percentage of Staff
Protestant	11,905	49.5
Catholic	11,459	47.7
Not Determined	680	2.8
Total	24,044	100.0

Table 4: NICS staff by ethnic background

Ethnic Background	Number of Staff	Percentage of Staff (excluding Missing)
White	21,461	99.7
Other (including Travellers)	75	0.3
Total (excluding Missing)	21,536	100.0
Missing	2,508	
Total	24,044	

Notes on Tables 1 – 4

Data taken from HRConnect and other Department of Justice databases as at 1 July 2016.

Excludes temporary staff.

Includes staff on career break and staff on secondment to other organisations.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance to detail the work of the NI Procurement Board.
(AQW 4824/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Procurement Board is responsible for developing and disseminating public procurement policy. Public procurement policy applies to NI departments, their agencies, non-departmental public bodies and public corporations.

The Procurement Board has a key role to play in ensuring that procurement spending power is used to deliver the outcomes described in the Programme for Government.

The Board met most recently on 7 October 2016 to refocus its priorities to support the delivery of the new Programme for Government outcomes. Four early priorities will be:

- the prompt and sustainable development of construction projects, including the potential for such projects to further the arts;
- enabling SMEs to compete fully in public procurement, and government to benefit from their innovative solutions;
- social value and social impact, including how public projects engage with communities; and
- best practice policy in commissioning and procurement.

I chair the Board, membership of which includes the Permanent Secretaries of the nine departments, the Chief Executive of Central Procurement Directorate, and a new group of external advisors from the business community, community sector, trade unions and academia.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Finance for an update on equal pay for PSNI, Northern Ireland Office and Department of Justice staff.

(AQW 4843/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: As Minister Sammy Wilson said in 2013 “The arguments put forward by those lobbying on this issue do not change the fact that the position in terms of eligibility has been clear from the outset of the equal pay settlement and this has now been upheld in the County Court, which found that the settlement applied only to periods of service in the 11 NICS departments and did not apply to bodies such as the NIO and PANI/PSNI, who had lawfully received delegation for pay matters, which was still in effect during the relevant time period. No legal liability has been established upon which to base any rationale to approve payment of the settlement to PSNI staff.”

That said I have sympathy for those affected. At the time of the NICS equal pay settlement, and during the reckonable period on which the settlement was based, the British Government, through the NIO pay group, were responsible for the pay negotiations for many of those affected. I have therefore written to the British Secretary of State, urging him to take responsibility for this issue and to come forward with a resolution.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance how the UK exiting the EU and the potential EU funding lost will impact on children, with specific relation to PEACE and Investing in Children funding.

(AQW 4856/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The PEACE IV Programme (2014-20) is designed to have a significant impact on children. This was based on clearly identified need. The programme specifically allocates €67 million to a Children and Young People theme, and a further €35 million towards Shared Education. I am committed to full delivery of PEACE IV, along with all other EU Programmes.

At this stage it is not possible to assess the impact beyond the conclusion of the 2014-20 programmes.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Finance for his assessment of the compatibility of the budget process with section 64 of the Northern Ireland Act and paragraph 20 of Strand One of the Good Friday Agreement.

(AQW 4931/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I have sought legal advice and am satisfied that the approach I will take to the Budget process respects the intent of paragraph 20 to the Belfast Agreement and satisfies the requirements of Section 64 of the Northern Ireland Act.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance to publish, or place in the Assembly Library, a copy of the letter he received from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury outlining Treasury guarantees over EU funding.

(AQW 4986/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I am happy to place a copy of this letter in the Assembly Library.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance whether he plans to introduce a requirement for Departments to publish business cases for public scrutiny; and to outline the reasons for this position.

(AQW 4987/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Business cases belong to the department or organisation taking the spending decision and it is for the owner of each document to consider whether the information can be published.

The Freedom of Information Act already provides a mechanism by which interested parties can access information including information contained within business cases.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance whether he plans to create an independent body, similar to the Regulatory Policy Committee in Westminster, to scrutinise the quality of business cases produced by the Executive.

(AQW 5128/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The role of the Regulatory Policy Committee in Westminster is not to scrutinise the quality of business cases, but to provide the government with external, independent scrutiny of new regulatory and deregulatory proposals.

Executive departments are required to seek DoF Supply approval for any spend above delegated limits. The DoF Supply approval process provides independent scrutiny of business cases.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Finance to detail any Barnett Consequentials from the recently announced house building fund by the Conservative government in Westminster.

(AQW 5151/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Detail of Barnett consequentials arising from new funding announced by the British Government will not be known until the Autumn Statement.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance to detail the number of officials in the Public Prosecution Service that have been based in (i) Ballymena; (ii) Ballymoney; and (iii) North Antrim, as of 1 September for each of the last four years, for which his Department has provided funding.

(AQW 5272/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Department of Finance has provided no funding as of 1 September, in the last 4 years, to officials in the Public Prosecution Service that have been based in (i) Ballymena; (ii) Ballymoney; and (iii) North Antrim.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance how he ensures that fair payment and social clauses are adhered to in all government contracts.

(AQO 486/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy, which is developed and disseminated by CPD, requires that the implementation of fair payment and social clauses is monitored in Government contracts.

In Government construction works contracts, the monitoring of fair payment and the delivery of social clauses is undertaken by Project Managers at monthly progress meetings with the Contractor. Figures for 2014/15 indicate that these measures are having a positive impact. For example, during that period a sample of 556 subcontractor payments were validated from a total of 3093 payments made to subcontractors in Government construction contracts. From those checks, only 3 payment irregularities were found and these were followed up by the relevant Centre of Procurement Expertise.

There are serious repercussions for firms that habitually fail to comply with Government's fair payment and social clause requirements. These firms can be excluded from Government contracts for a period of up to 3 years.

CPD is currently streamlining the reporting arrangements for fair payment and social clauses via the eTendersNI system. This is to make it easier for this data to be obtained and reported on in these contracts.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister of Finance to outline the number of people aged 70 or over that live on their own and have applied for a 20 per cent reduction on their rates bill, since 2013.

(AQO 481/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Between April 2013 and September 2016 there have been 11,590 applications for Lone Pension Allowance (LPA) made to Land & Property Services (LPS). This figure relates to ratepayers who own their own home. LPA for tenants in the private rented and social housing sectors is administered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). LPS does not hold data for this period for the number of applications received by NIHE.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance to detail how his Department has implemented each of the recommendations made in the previous Committee for Finance and Personnel's report on the progress of the Review of the National Asset Management Agency property loan portfolio in Northern Ireland.

(AQO 482/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: As I have already said in this House, I accept the conclusions presented in the Committee's report and share the very serious concerns there are about the NAMA-Cerberus deal.

I can assure the Member that my Department will take on board the lessons identified in that report, be they in relation to how any future nominations are made; the importance of having expert advice where it is needed; or in terms of appropriate record keeping.

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Finance to outline his proposed timescale to release monitoring round information to the Assembly's statutory committees.

(AQO 483/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: My Statement to the Assembly on 14 June set out details of the June Monitoring Round. My officials engaged with the Committee for Finance before and after the monitoring round.

I will make a Statement to the Assembly on the October Monitoring round in due course.

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the first meeting of the Procurement Board on Friday 7 October. (AQO 484/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The new Procurement Board, strengthened by the appointment of seven external advisors, discussed the issues and opportunities in public procurement for government, business and the third sector. External advisors were tasked with bringing forward proposals to the Board in December on:

- the prompt and sustainable development of construction projects, including the potential for such projects to further the arts;
- enabling SMEs to compete fully in public procurement, and government to benefit from their innovative solutions;
- social value and social impact, including how public projects engage with communities; and
- best practice policy in commissioning and procurement.

There is considerable potential for public procurement – through which over £2bn is expended annually – to be an enabler for Programme for Government objectives, and the meeting was an important step in taking forward that agenda.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Finance whether he will reconsider his decision to move forward with a single-year Executive Budget after the announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer that multi-year European Union funding for projects will be guaranteed, even after the United Kingdom has left the European Union.

(AQO 485/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Chancellor's announcement only addresses one area of concern. There are still a number of significant public expenditure uncertainties going forward including a lack of clarity over the British Government's future fiscal targets, its approach to corporation tax rates and of course the wider outworking of the EU referendum on the economy going forward.

A single year Resource DEL Budget will allow the implications of these to crystallise and provide further opportunity for our departments to reflect upon resources required in future years to manage these issues and deliver Programme for Government priorities.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance what are the budgetary consequences of the Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme. (AQO 487/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I understand that the Department for the Economy has projected a funding deficit of circa £30m for the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme in this financial year.

It is of utmost importance that this issue is resolved and I am working closely with the Minister for the Economy in that regard.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance what discussions he or his Departmental officials have had with their counterparts at Westminster on the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. (AQO 488/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Both my officials and I have engaged extensively with our counterparts at Westminster since the Referendum on EU membership.

Following the initial announcement from Treasury on 13th August, confirming funds to the PEACE and INTERREG programmes approved prior to the Autumn Statement, I wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer reinforcing our entitlement to the full value of the Programmes.

I also met with the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU and the Secretary of State for the North in September where I reiterated my position that I expect we will benefit from the full amounts allocated to these programmes.

It is certainly a more positive development in that we now have a commitment from Treasury, made on 3rd October, that full amounts to projects approved prior to exit from the EU are now guaranteed.

Since the EU Referendum result my Departmental officials have engaged directly with Treasury, seeking clarification on its funding implications. My officials also participate at weekly meetings, led by the Department for Business Energy and Industry Strategy (BEIS) and involving counterparts in English Managing Authorities, Gibraltar and the Scottish and Welsh governments. The main purpose of these meetings is to clarify policy implications and issues arising from the EU Referendum.

My officials and I will be fully involved in further discussions with Westminster and I will continue to vigorously defend our local interests in those discussions to secure the maximum benefit from the funding that was allocated to these programmes at the outset.

Department of Health

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Health when her Department will introduce NICE Guidelines (CG156) on access to fertility, assessment and treatment.

(AQW 2876/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): The Department endorsed the (NICE) Clinical Guideline on Fertility (CG156) in 2013. However, unfortunately, due to budget pressures, it has not yet been possible for the Health and Social Care Board to implement the guideline or to increase the number of IVF cycles offered to patients. This is due to the significant cost implications of implementation which have to be carefully considered within the context of ongoing budget pressures and other competing HSC services requiring new investment in the years ahead. I can advise you that I intend to work towards implementing the optimum number of cycles as recommended by NICE guidelines.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Health to detail the total number of staff working within the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service within each of the last five years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 3442/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of staff working within the Ambulance Service (NIAS) HSC Trust at 31 March in each of the last five years is detailed in the table below.

Year	Headcount	Whole Time Equivalent
At 31 March 2012	1,138	1,122.2
At 31 March 2013	1,199	1,181.8
At 31 March 2014	1,181	1,159.5
At 31 March 2015	1,156	1,126.3
At 31 March 2016	1,210	1,184.4

Source: Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence Systems (HRPTS)

This information is published annually in the NI Health and Social Care Workforce Census which can be found on the DoH website at the following link: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/staff-numbers>

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of out-of-hours service provision at Craigavon Area Hospital.
(AQW 3443/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware that the Southern Health and Social Care Trust has been facing significant challenges in the provision of an out of hours service, including difficulty in securing sufficient numbers of GPs to deliver the out of hours service. The percentage rate of shifts filled at Craigavon Area Hospital each month over the period January to September 2016 ranges from 55% (February) to 86% (July).

The Trust seeks to ensure that a safe and sustainable out of hours service continues to be available. There have been occasions when the Southern Trust has had insufficient numbers of GPs and other staff available to deliver out of hours services from all five out of hours bases in the Trust area. In these circumstances the Trust has used contingency measures, which may require consolidating resources in those bases where patient demand is greatest. Where this is the case, all patients calling out of hours services will continue to receive telephone advice and will be offered an appointment at an alternative base or a home visit as deemed clinically appropriate following initial telephone triage.

A number of actions have been taken within the Southern Trust to support the out of hours service. These include the introduction of nurse practitioners and clinical pharmacists to support GPs in managing the service; ongoing recruitment campaigns for GPs; the provision of additional funding to boost capacity at busy times and supporting flexibility in shift hours and bases to work from. The Trust has also established a link with Dalriada Urgent Care which provides call triage support.

The out of hours service in the Southern area has also recently been subject to review. An action plan has subsequently been developed and the Trust is working with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) to address the issues highlighted, recommendations made and to implement actions to support the out of hours services across the Trust area.

The Trust has recently hosted a GP engagement event to provide local GPs with the opportunity to discuss issues about the service with the Trust, the HSCB and the Southern Area Local Medical Committee.

My Department and the HSCB have been working with out of hours providers across the North to address the challenges facing the service. In 2015/16 an additional £3.1m was made available to help build capacity in GP out of hours services with a further £1.1m made available to help out of hours providers meet increased demand for services over the winter months and the Easter 2016 period.

The report of the Departmental-led working group set up to review the pressures facing GP-led services also incorporated recommendations from a review of GP out of hours services. I am carefully considering the findings of the review group and am committed to ensuring that everyone here has access to high quality, sustainable GP services both in hours and out of hours.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health whether her Department and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust will work with the Department of Justice and the Prison Service to ensure that Sean Hackett receives medical treatment as was considered necessary by The Court of Appeal in September 2015.

(AQW 3463/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The South Eastern Trust is actively working with the Department of Justice and the Prison Service to address the Court of Appeal judgement. South Eastern Trust have advised they will continue to provide healthcare in response to the assessed clinical needs of this young man.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health whether the GP Exercise referral scheme is being used, or promoted, by any GP practices in West Tyrone; and if so, for an assessment of the take up and its contribution to health promotion.

(AQW 3466/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The PHA commissions a range of GP Exercise Referral Schemes, known as Physical Activity Referral Schemes (PARS), from local councils including the two that cover West Tyrone. Referrals to PARS can be made by any GP practice.

Council staff maintain regular contact with all GP practices to encourage them to refer onto the scheme. Sixteen GP practices in West Tyrone participated in the scheme in 2015/16 which resulted in 255 referrals. Physical activity helps to improve health and well-being both in terms of preventing ill health and in managing many health conditions and diseases.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health to outline the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust's proposals for intermediate care in North Down and Ards, including the future of the Bangor Hospital.

(AQW 3474/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Details of the outcome of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust's consultation on intermediate care in North Down and Ards are available on the Trust's website at: <http://www.setrust.hscni.net/about/2508.htm>.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Health why contract specifications for home care providers in the Western Health and Social Care Trust are based on a formula of 70 per cent attributed to price and 30 per cent attributed to quality compare to 60 per cent price 40 per cent quality in other Trusts.

(AQW 3496/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The criteria applied for the procurement process for domiciliary care is a matter for each individual Health and Social Care Trust. Procurements under the Public Contract Regulations (2015) must use the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) approach. For the Western Trust tenderers were required to progress through a number of stages in order to satisfy the Trust in respect of quality before any assessment of price was undertaken.

In addition, all tenderers must be registered with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, and must comply with the terms and conditions of contracts awarded where the focus is primarily on the quality of service delivered to the client.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Health how she proposes to deal with the challenges facing the home-care system resulting from a reduction in Health and Social Care Trust budgets being passed on to providers.

(AQW 3497/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: It is recognised that the independent domiciliary care sector is facing challenges. However, there has been no reduction in the hourly rate paid by Health and Social Care Trusts to independent domiciliary care providers in 2016/17, although service volumes may be subject to review.

In the longer term, the social care system will continue to face huge challenges due to an ageing population, increased demand and constrained resources, and it is important that we take action to put the system on a more sustainable footing. That is why my Department is taking forward a long term, strategic programme to reform adult care and support, which will consider how services are configured and funded, with the aim of ensuring the system of the future is fit for purpose, efficient and sustainable for years to come.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health to detail the current waiting times for spinal appointments from urgent referrals.

(AQW 3499/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of people waiting, in weeks, for a first consultant-led outpatient spinal appointment from an urgent referral, as at 27th September 2016, is shown in the table below.

	Weeks waiting							Total
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	> 52	
No. of patients waiting	74	58	26	38	47	528	228	999

Source: Belfast HSC Trust

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health to detail the current waiting times for spinal appointments from routine referrals. (AQW 3500/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of people waiting, in weeks, for a first consultant-led outpatient spinal appointment from a routine referral, as at 27th September 2016, is shown in the table below.

	Weeks waiting							Total
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 12	>12 - 15	>15 - 18	>18 - 52	> 52	
No. of patients waiting	328	199	179	256	197	2,502	4,250	7,911

Source: Belfast HSC Trust

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health to detail (i) the steps taken to improve patient compliance with their medications; and (ii) the support and assistance community pharmacies are receiving to pre-sort patient drugs. (AQW 3530/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) The reasons why patients do not adhere to their prescribed medication are multifaceted and influenced by factors such as the patient's age, physical and mental wellbeing, literacy, eyesight, dexterity, the type and number of medicines, their residential setting, their beliefs about their medication and their relationship with the health care professional. Non-adherence can be intentional or non-intentional and there is no single solution that can be recommended for everyone as individuals' needs differ.

To address this complex issue a number of different steps have been taken which include:

- Policy support for improving adherence in the 'Medicines Optimisation Quality Framework' and the 'Making it Better through Pharmacy in the Community' strategy;
- Endorsement of National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) for Medicines Optimisation for implementation in the Health and Social Care (HSC) Service;
- Development and testing of an adherence service which is being rolled out in all HSC Trusts;
- Investment in two Small Business Research Initiatives to develop and test new technology solutions to support improved medicines adherence;
- Commissioning of a Medicines Use Review and Manage Your Medicines Service in community pharmacy; and
- Completion of an Innovation Lab for medicines optimisation to support improved experience for patients taking medicines.

- (ii) Where patients are assessed as being at risk of abuse, misuse or life threatening non-compliance, compliance support can be provided by community pharmacies. This often involves multiple dispensing and the pre-sorting of medicines into monitored dosage systems (MDS). In 2015/16, £5.74 m was paid to community pharmacies in respect of multiple dispensing and an additional £4 m was provided for compliance support.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health why patients who wish to avail of the flu vaccine through a community pharmacy must pay for the vaccine. (AQW 3531/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: In the North of Ireland the annual seasonal flu vaccination programme is delivered mainly through GP Practices. The vaccine is offered free to those who are considered to be most at risk of developing serious complications if they are infected with an influenza virus, i.e. everyone aged 65 years and over; anyone under 65 years of age with certain medical conditions, and all pregnant women. In addition, all pre-school children aged two or more can now receive the vaccine via their GP, and the vaccine is also offered to all primary school children via the school health service.

The annual flu vaccination programme is well established and achieves high uptake rates. It is not considered necessary or cost-effective to put in place arrangements to enable eligible patients to receive the vaccine via a community pharmacy instead of their local GP practice or the school health service.

Any person who wishes to have the flu vaccine but who is not eligible to receive the flu vaccine as part of the annual programme may purchase the vaccine from a community pharmacy or private provider, as they would do for any other vaccine.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister of Health whether the clinics and services available at the Mid Ulster Hospital will be retained over the next five years; and whether her Department intends to increase services during this period. (AQW 3534/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The provision of services at the Mid Ulster Hospital is a matter for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in the first instance.

I am currently considering the Expert Panel's report on Health and Social Care in the North. The reconfiguration of services is an important and complex matter that goes beyond individual Trusts and hospitals. It is about the radical transformation of

health and social care. I am therefore taking time to consider fully the implications of the recommendations made throughout the report. Alongside the Panel's report I will publish my vision for transforming Health and Social Care in the coming weeks.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health for an update on the development of Omagh Hospital.
(AQW 3546/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Construction work continues on site and internal fit out works are progressing with some blocks at an advanced state. Completion is programmed for December 2016 followed by a further period of post-completion engineering services commissioning. This will result in the Omagh Hospital and Primary Care Complex being handed over to the Trust on a phased basis from late January 2017 with Operational Commissioning and occupation between February and May 2017

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health to detail the percentage of GPs in each Health and Social Care Trust that are registered with the out-of-hours GP service, in each month of the last three years.
(AQW 3550/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the percentage of GPs in each Health and Social Care Trust who are registered with an out of hours service is not readily available in the format requested.

Information on the number of GPs working for each out of hours provider at September 2014, September 2015 and September 2016 is set out in the table below. The percentage of GPs working in out of hours in the North has been calculated based on the number of GPs (principal, salaried and locum) on the NI primary medical services performers list at these dates.

OOH Provider	Number of GPs Working in OOHs		
	Sept'14	Sept'15	Sept'16
Southern HSCT	91	77	63
Belfast HSCT	98	100	95
Dalriada Urgent Care	223	217	186
South Eastern HSCT	128	113	110
Western Urgent Care	80	77	80
Total	620	584	534
Percentage of GPs working in OOH	37.3%	34.8%	31.3%

It should be noted that GPs come into and leave the out of hours service on a regular basis. A small number of GPs working in out of hours will work for more than one out of hours provider and there may therefore be an element of double counting in the table above. Locum GPs will work across a number of OOH providers.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health for an update on the implementation of the (i) Autism Act; (ii) Autism Strategy; (iii) Autism Strategy Action Plan 2011-2016; and on the publication of a new Autism Strategy Action Plan.
(AQW 3554/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Good progress has been made on the implementation of the current cross-departmental Autism Strategy and the Action Plan as reflected in the report laid before the Assembly in November 2015.

The Action Plan was extended last year to allow it to be reviewed in partnership with all stakeholders. It is intended that this review will produce an agreed set of effective interventions to plug the gaps, informed by the views of people with autism. It is anticipated that this work will be progressed in conjunction with other Executive Departments later this year.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Health to outline (i) how many departmental bids have been made to the EU Investment Bank; (ii) how many bids are currently being prepared; and (iii) how many ongoing departmental projects are reliant on EU funding.
(AQW 3574/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: No departmental bids have been made to the European Investment Bank and none is currently being prepared.

With regard to EU funding in general, the key structural funds programme for the department in the period 2014-20 is Interreg VA. This programme has allocated €53m to support health and social care projects across the North of Ireland, the border area of the South and western Scotland. The North would expect to receive €31.8m from the programme in the period to 2020 and applications for funding are currently undergoing assessment. The Treasury has given an assurance that all EU structural and investment fund projects signed off by the devolved administrations in advance of the UK's departure from the EU will be fully funded.

As regards competitive EU funding programmes, the Health and Social Care service (HSC) is currently participating in 11 projects, funded primarily under FP7, Horizon 2020 and the 3rd Health Call. The value of these projects to the HSC is approximately €5m. It has been successful in a further 2 Horizon 2020 projects which have not yet commenced, with an

anticipated value to the HSC of some €200k. The Treasury has advised that bids for competitive EU funds should continue while the UK remains a member of the EU and that they will work with the Commission to ensure payment when funds are awarded, even when specific projects continue beyond the UK's departure from the EU.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of Health Service nursing staff employed in each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4045/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of qualified nursing and midwifery staff employed in each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust at 31 March in each of the last five years is detailed in the table below.

Qualified Nursing & Midwifery Staff 1 Headcount (HC) and Whole Time Equivalent (WTE)

HSC Trust		At 31 March				
		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Belfast	HC	5,390	5,334	5,533	5,574	5,619
	WTE	4,623.3	4,593.9	4,776.1	4,851.8	4,917.1
Northern	HC	2,812	2,873	2,877	2,893	2,879
	WTE	2,356.0	2,425.2	2,440.5	2,460.0	2,465.0
South Eastern	HC	2,468	2,599	2,657	2,609	2,637
	WTE	2,077.8	2,207.3	2,262.9	2,238.0	2,288.8
Southern	HC	2,721	2,814	2,788	2,882	2,993
	WTE	2,274.0	2,368.1	2,337.7	2,446.7	2,574.5
Western	HC	2,714	2,763	2,826	2,832	2,901
	WTE	2,434.7	2,484.7	2,546.7	2,543.5	2,604.0

Source: Human Resources Management System (HRMS) / Human Resources, Payroll, Travel & Subsistence (HRPTS)

1 Figures exclude staff on career breaks, bank staff, and staff with a whole-time equivalent of less than or equal to 0.03. This information and further analysis is published annually in the 'NI Health and Social Care Workforce Census' which can be found on the DoH website at the following link: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/staff-numbers>

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health to outline the rationale for the postponement of the pilot scheme to reduce hearing test waiting lists.

(AQW 4070/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: In their initial preparation for a market sounding exercise, the HSCB engaged with HSC Trust Service Managers on their audiology service requirements and workforce plans to address the current backlog and future targets. This included, for example, that no patient over 55 years old is waiting longer than 9 weeks for assessment and 13 weeks to have a hearing aid fitted, once diagnosed, by 31 March 2017.

These plans were developed further at a HSC Trust workforce strategy and planning workshop in September 2016. As an outcome, priority has been given in the short term to the development of plans to reduce waiting times by March 2017.

The HSCB has advised that it has reprioritised the resources for the hearing loss pilot to fund delivery of the HSC Trusts' waiting list backlog plans. It is now working with the Trusts, my Department and the British Academy of Audiology to review the current workforce and produce a workforce plan to ensure the future sustainability of HSC services. In consequence, the pilot is now on hold

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health whether NICE guideline CG180 and a clear regional pathway for atrial fibrillation are being implemented.

(AQW 4072/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: NICE Clinical Guideline CG180 was endorsed by DHSSPS on 7th August 2014.

The Health and Social Care Board is responsible for the monitoring and assurance of NICE guidance and has advised that CG180 has been fully implemented in three Trust areas, with Northern and South Eastern Trusts still to achieve compliance with one recommendation. The HSC Board and Public Health Agency are working with the Trusts to resolve the outstanding issues and secure compliance.

In respect of a regional pathway, the NICE guidance recommends that a personalised package of care is offered to people with atrial fibrillation.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health whether her Department has an ongoing commitment for the provision of a Helicopter Emergency Medical Service.

(AQW 4082/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is working closely with the Ambulance Service and health commissioners to fulfil our stated commitment to the provision of the Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS). In terms of my Department's financial commitment, I have said that the medical staff and equipment will be provided and funded by Health and Social Care services, subject to business case approval. The charity AANI will provide the aviation side of the service and fund the non-medical costs of HEMS, and has secured significant start-up funding from the Chancellor's banking fines fund for this. I refer the Member to my announcement of 23 August 2016 regarding the HEMS funding model for further information.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Health to outline how many people access self directed help in each Health and Social Care Trust; and what efforts are being made to raise its awareness.

(AQW 4085/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Self directed support gives individuals as much control as they want over their personal budget, the amount of money identified and allocated by the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust to meet assessed needs. Individuals can choose to opt for a direct payment and currently all individuals have a statutory right to receive a direct payment, where the HSC Trust is content that their eligible needs can be met by the provision of the payment.

The table below sets out the number of direct payments paid by each HSC Trust over the quarter ending 30th June 2016.

HSC Trust	Quarter ending 30 June 2016
Belfast	577
Northern	671
South Eastern	836
Southern	740
Western	569
Total	3,393

Source: HSCB Direct Payment Return

The roll-out of the Self Directed Support project which introduces another form of self directed support, the managed budget, is continuing across all HSC Trusts, via a phased approach. Overall data collection mechanisms are still undergoing development and verification.

Frontline staff and managers across all programmes of care are receiving training to allow them to offer self directed support, and to advise and assist service users in accessing appropriate support services. Information and engagement events have been held in all HSC Trust areas with new information guides being produced by the HSC Board for dissemination to service users, staff and potential service providers. In addition, a number of promotional campaigns have been launched via social media and across HSC websites.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health to detail the Health Visitor staffing levels in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 4090/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of Health Visitors in the Western Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust is detailed in the table below.

Health Visitors	Headcount	Whole Time Equivalent
Band 6	73	63.09 WTE
Band 7	6	6.00 WTE
Total	79	69.09 WTE

Source: Western HSC Trust

The Western HSC Trust is actively recruiting 5.00 WTE Band 6 Health Visitors.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health to detail the backlog in the Western Health and Social Care Trust for (i) six weekly; (ii) annual; and (iii) two year Health Visitor assessments for children.

(AQW 4092/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Public Health Agency (PHA) provides my Department with Regional Indicators of Performance (IOPs) on a quarterly basis. The most recent figures relating to Health Visiting assessments at (i) six weekly; (ii) annually; and (iii) two yearly across the Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCCT) are detailed below.

IOP for 'Healthy Child, Healthy Future' Reviews Western HSC Trust - March 2016

	Children in Cohort	Contact Undertaken	Contact not Undertaken
6-8 Week Review	978	953 (97.4%)	25 (3%)
1 Year Review	962	752 (78.2)	210 (21.8%)
2-2½ Year Review	966	699 (72.4%)	267 (27.6%)

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health whether she will ensure that hearing services will be delivered in a community setting.

(AQW 4226/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Options for any mixed economy provision of hearing loss services would be considered as part of the Health and Social Care Board's market sounding process for the hearing loss pilot.

However, the Board has advised it is now using in-year resources earmarked for the hearing loss pilot to fund delivery of the HSC Trusts' waiting list backlog plans, it has therefore not yet been possible to assess the potential benefits of delivering hearing loss services in a community setting.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what assessment has been made of the benefits of delivering hearing loss services in a primary care setting.

(AQW 4227/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Health and Social Care Board and Trusts are currently reviewing the existing workforce and developing a workforce plan designed to address the issues of rising demand from an aging population coupled with significant Trust recruitment, training and retention issues. This work will include an assessment of delivering hearing loss services in a primary care/community setting.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health why the pilot aimed at reducing waiting times for hearing loss appointments has been suspended.

(AQW 4228/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: In their initial preparation for a market sounding exercise, the HSCB engaged with HSC Trust Service Managers on their audiology service requirements and workforce plans to address the current backlog and future targets. This included, for example, that no patient over 55 years old is waiting longer than 9 weeks for assessment and 13 weeks to have a hearing aid fitted, once diagnosed, by 31 March 2017.

These plans were developed further at a HSC Trust workforce strategy and planning workshop in September 2016. As an outcome, priority has been given in the short term to the development of plans to reduce waiting times by March 2017.

The HSCB has advised that it has reprioritised the resources for the hearing loss pilot to fund delivery of the HSC Trusts' waiting list backlog plans. It is now working with the Trusts, my Department and British Academy of Audiology to review the current workforce and produce a workforce plan to ensure the future sustainability of HSC services. In consequence, pilot is now on hold.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the Pensioners Parliament survey which found that 60 per cent of their members would prefer to receive routine hearing aid services at a community provider of their choice.

(AQW 4229/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I welcome this feedback from the Pensioners Parliament survey and the helpful contribution that such work makes to future decision-making regarding the provision of services in the north of Ireland.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what consultation has taken place with older people and organisations such as Age Sector Platform and the Pensioners Parliament, on how and where they would prefer to receive routine hearing aid services.

(AQW 4230/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: While no formal consultation regarding these matters has been undertaken by the Health and Social Care Board or the Public Health Agency with older people or representative groups; I understand that the Pensioners Parliament has recently reported that individuals expressed their preference to have routine health and social care services delivered in their communities as close to their own homes as possible. I welcome such feedback from the Pensioners Parliament and other representative groups and forums and the contribution that such work makes to future decision-making.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Health for an update on the Northern Health and Social Care Trust recruitment process for paediatric autism spectrum disorder services.

(AQW 4234/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: In April this year my Department announced an additional investment of £2million for regional children's autism services. The current position in respect of recruitment for new posts created as a result is set out in the table below:

Grade	WTE	Position
Speech and Language Therapist Band 6	2	1 post offered, awaiting pre employment checks. 1 post advertised on 27 September 2016, closing date 12 October 2016.
Specialist Occupational Therapist Band 7	1	Start date of appointment 1 December 2016.
Band 4 Psychology Assistants	2	Start date of appointment 17 October 2016. 1 post offered, awaiting pre employment checks.
Band 8a Clinical Psychologist	1	Advertised, no applicants.
Band 4 ICT Project	1	To be appointed.
Band 8b Head of Service	1	To commence 1 January 2017.
Band 8a Project Manager	1	To commence 7 October 2016.
Band 5 ASD Therapist	4	Job descriptions written and sent for desktop matching under Agenda for Change.
Total	13	

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Health for an update on the progress of the action and recovery plan to reduce paediatric autism spectrum disorder assessment waiting times.

(AQW 4235/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The HSC Trusts are continuing to progress their recovery plans to reduce the number of children waiting for an autism assessment. However, the demand for autism assessments continues to increase, projected to be in the region of 14% for 2016/17. This has significant implications on the HSC Trusts' ability to bring their waiting lists down. The Trusts have also reported that recruitment process has been slow which is impacting on the timeframe for permanent positions to be filled.

It is hoped that the new regional model being developed by the HSC Board will be agreed soon and that this will improve the diagnostic process and access to early intervention. It will also optimise the scope for the integration of child development, emotional and mental health services, as well as closer working with the education sector to ensure the provision of coordinated and appropriate support for children with autism.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Health what steps have been taken to implement the recommendations from the GP-led primary care review, published in March 2016.

(AQW 4236/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I fully appreciate the challenges facing GP-led services and I am committed to developing a plan that will ensure their long-term sustainability. I am currently considering the findings and recommendations of the GP-led care working group's report within the context of the development of my vision for the future of health and social care and future funding priorities for my Department.

A number of investments have already been made in recent years in the areas identified by the working group's report. The number of GP training places has been increased from 65 per year to 85, the biggest increase in more than ten years, and a new scheme has been put in place to retain GPs in general practice.

In addition my Department is investing up to £14m by 2020/21 to put almost 300 pharmacists into practices to see patients, improve care and ease the workload on GPs. I also recently announced an additional £900k to support the work of GP Federations. GP Federations will help practices work together to increase their resilience and meet rising demand.

There have also been significant developments in information technology aimed at reducing GPs' administrative workload, freeing up GP time for those patients who most need to see them, and making it easier for patients to access their GP practice.

I am determined to build on these investments to ensure everyone here continues to have access to sustainable, high quality GP services.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Health how her Department can help reduce the number of attacks on Northern Ireland Ambulance Service personnel responding to emergency situations.

(AQW 4237/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: It is appalling to think that people who dedicate themselves to saving lives and to public service are still being subjected to verbal or physical abuse within the confines of our health service. I find any form of attack on our healthcare staff as inexcusable and unacceptable.

The Ambulance Service Trust has a robust Zero Tolerance policy in place with a Senior Director responsible for ensuring staff safety and support is properly and consistently managed across the Trust. This is underpinned by health and safety legislation, which places a duty on Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts to provide a safe and secure environment for staff and others.

In order to help reduce attacks a number of measures have been put in place, including major publicity campaigns, both poster and badges within the HSC, and a leaflet drop in rates bills to all homes detailing the Department's policy on abuse of HSC staff.

There is also a joint Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the PSNI, Public Prosecution Service and the Department, which is aimed at promoting communication and establishing a framework for the exchange of information at local level and to provide a clear statement on prosecution policy.

Section 54 of the recently introduced Justice Act (NI) 2016 makes it an offence to assault an ambulance worker in the execution of their duty and can result in a fine and imprisonment of up to two years.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Health (i) whether any adverse side effects have been reported by patients using Amiodarone in the last five years; (ii) how many patients have had to be taken off this drug in that period because of side effects; and (iii) whether any legal action was instigated on behalf of any patient because of any damage to health as a result of side effects.

(AQW 4239/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts do not routinely collect this information centrally. However, individual health professionals and patients can report adverse incidents using the Yellow Card Scheme to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

Reports via the Yellow Card Scheme can be made for all medicines including vaccines, blood factors and immunoglobulins, herbal medicines and homeopathic remedies, as well as all medical devices available. Information is collected on suspected problems or incidents, including side effects of medication. In the five years from 2011 to 2015, there were 253 adverse incidents suspected of being caused by amiodarone that were reported via the scheme to the MHRA.

- (ii) This information is not collected centrally by the HSC Trusts and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.
- (iii) The Department and the HSC Trusts are not aware of any legal action taken on behalf of any patient as a result of side effects reported by patients using Amiodarone in the last five years.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health what is the average waiting time for hip and knee operations for patients in West Belfast, compared with the other constituencies.

(AQW 4260/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the average waiting time for hip and knee replacement operations as at 30th June 2016, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available, is shown in the following table.

Patient Constituency of Residence	Average weeks waiting	
	Hip replacement operations	Knee replacement operations
Belfast West	31.8	29.2
Belfast East	30.0	27.4
Belfast North	28.8	28.9
Belfast South	26.6	26.6
East Antrim	31.5	32.5
East Derry	35.0	38.9
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	36.3	42.6
Foyle	36.0	42.8
Lagan Valley	26.3	27.3
Mid Ulster	29.0	28.7

Patient Constituency of Residence	Average weeks waiting	
	Hip replacement operations	Knee replacement operations
Newry and Armagh	27.0	26.6
North Antrim	28.7	30.3
North down	26.7	27.6
South Antrim	28.7	29.0
South Down	31.0	27.2
Strangford	28.1	31.2
Upper Bann	22.7	25.9
West Tyrone	41.5	45.7

Source: DoH Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health whether she plans to intervene on the closure of Pine Lodge residential home.
(AQW 4261/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I have not yet made final decisions on proposals for any of the residential care homes under review, including Pine Lodge.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health how many women eligible and waiting for IVF treatment were denied treatment because they became 40 years old during the time they spent on waiting lists.
(AQW 4262/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: During the current financial year (2016/17), less than 5 patients were removed from the IVF waiting list due to not meeting the age criteria.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Health whether GPs and other medical professionals were instructed to reduce referrals to NHS residential homes in Belfast since 2010; and if so, to what extent.
(AQW 4263/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: General Practitioners and other medical professionals have not been instructed at any time to reduce referrals to statutory residential care homes in Belfast.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health whether sedation was considered to alleviate the mental and physical distress of Sean Lynch prior to him sustaining his injuries.
(AQW 4279/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The prison environment is not an appropriate setting in which to provide sedation and the clinical monitoring this necessitates. For this reason prisoners are not sedated by healthcare staff in the prison setting.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, who has responsibility for delivering healthcare in prisons, is continuing to work in partnership with the Prison Service to support vulnerable prisoners.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how many people are awaiting a hearing aid.
(AQW 4284/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The information requested is not held centrally and has been provided by Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts. Their responses can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Number of people waiting for a hearing aid to be fitted at 30th September 2016.

HSC Trust	People waiting for a hearing aid to be fitted
Belfast	228
Northern	674
South Eastern	908
Southern	195
Western	317

HSC Trust	People waiting for a hearing aid to be fitted
Total	2,322

Note: Information for Belfast HSC Trust is as at 3rd October, information for Northern HSC Trust is as at 5th October and information for Western HSC Trust is as at 4th October.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health why a pilot scheme aimed at cutting waiting times for hearing loss appointments has been put on hold.

(AQW 4285/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: In their initial preparation for a market sounding exercise, the HSCB engaged with HSC Trust Service Managers on their audiology service requirements and workforce plans to address the current backlog and future targets. This included, for example, that no patient over 55 years old is waiting longer than 9 weeks for assessment and 13 weeks to have a hearing aid fitted, once diagnosed, by 31 March 2017.

These plans were developed further at a HSC Trust workforce strategy and planning workshop in September 2016. As an outcome, priority has been given in the short term to the development of plans to reduce waiting times by March 2017.

The HSCB has advised that it has reprioritised the resources for the hearing loss pilot to fund delivery of the HSC Trusts' waiting list backlog plans. It is now working with the Trusts, my Department and the British Academy of Audiology to review the current workforce and produce a workforce plan to ensure the future sustainability of HSC services. In consequence, the pilot is now on hold.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health to detail the progress on implementing the recommendations from the review of GP-led primary care services.

(AQW 4293/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I fully appreciate the challenges facing GP-led services and I am committed to developing a plan that will ensure their long-term sustainability. I am currently considering the findings and recommendations of the GP-led care working group's report within the context of the development of my vision for the future of health and social care and future funding priorities for my Department.

A number of investments have already been made in recent years in the areas identified by the working group's report. The number of GP training places has been increased from 65 per year to 85, the biggest increase in more than ten years, and a new scheme has been put in place to retain GPs in general practice.

In addition my Department is investing up to £14m by 2020/21 to put almost 300 pharmacists into practices to see patients, improve care and ease the workload on GPs. I also recently announced an additional £900k to support the work of GP Federations. GP Federations will help practices work together to increase their resilience and meet rising demand.

There have also been significant developments in information technology aimed at reducing GPs' administrative workload, freeing up GP time for those patients who most need to see them, and making it easier for patients to access their GP practice.

I am determined to build on these investments to ensure everyone here continues to have access to sustainable, high quality GP services.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health whether Ear, Nose, and Throat staff in Tyrone County Hospital can access patient files at Altnagelvin Hospital when treating a patient.

(AQW 4297/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Western Health and Social Care Trust has confirmed that Ear, Nose and Throat staff have access to Altnagelvin Area Hospital patient files when treating patients at Tyrone County Hospital.

Mr Attwood asked the Minister of Health how many people were assessed as eligible for NHS Continuing Healthcare in the past five years.

(AQW 4312/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) The table below sets out the number of people assessed as eligible for NHS Continuing Healthcare in each of the HSC Trust areas for the past five years.

Continuing Healthcare Individual Eligible	1/4/11 to 31/3/12	1/4/12 to 31/03/13	1/4/13 to 31/3/14	1/4/14 to 30/9/14	1/10/14 to 30/09/15	1/10/15 to 30/09/16
Northern HSC Trust	5	6	6	1	1	5
Southern HSC Trust	0	0	0	0	0	0

Continuing Healthcare Individual Eligible	1/4/11 to 31/3/12	1/4/12 to 31/03/13	1/4/13 to 31/3/14	1/4/14 to 30/9/14	1/10/14 to 30/09/15	1/10/15 to 30/09/16
South Eastern HSC Trust	0	0	0	0	2	0
Western HSC Trust	0	0	13	2	1	1
Belfast HSC Trust	0	0	0	0	0	0

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health whether she will consider providing defibrillator training to community and voluntary groups that install units in towns and villages and in community sports facilities.

(AQW 4316/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's Community Resuscitation Strategy is aimed at improving survival rates for those who suffer an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest. A key element of the strategy is to increase the number of people who have received training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and the use of a defibrillator. My Department has provided funding to the Health and Social Care Board for the recruitment of six Community Resuscitation Development Officers who will work with a wide range of local community organisations to increase the number of people who are trained and willing to intervene in an emergency situation.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health why the pilot scheme aimed at clearing a backlog of people waiting for hearing loss appointments by allowing patients access to audiology appointments in the community has been put on hold.

(AQW 4330/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: In their initial preparation for a market sounding exercise, the HSCB engaged with HSC Trust Service Managers on their audiology service requirements and workforce plans to address the current backlog and future targets. This included, for example, that no patient over 55 years old is waiting longer than 9 weeks for assessment and 13 weeks to have a hearing aid fitted, once diagnosed, by 31 March 2017.

These plans were developed further at a HSC Trust workforce strategy and planning workshop in September 2016. As an outcome, priority has been given in the short term to the development of plans to reduce waiting times by March 2017.

The HSCB has advised that it has reprioritised the resources for the hearing loss pilot to fund delivery of the HSC Trusts' waiting list backlog plans. It is now working with the Trusts, my Department and the British Academy of Audiology to review the current workforce and produce a workforce plan to ensure the future sustainability of HSC services. In consequence, the pilot is now on hold.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what investment she will provide for health and social services within the new homelessness strategy.

(AQW 4331/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The statutory duty to take the homelessness strategy into account in the implementation of my Department's functions is one I take very seriously. Health and social care is available on the basis of clinical need, to everyone equally, including homeless people and rough sleepers. Care and treatment are delivered in the appropriate primary, community and secondary settings when required. All users of the Health and Social Care service therefore benefit from the range of investment applied.

My Department's inputs to the new homelessness strategy are still under consideration. Key areas for consideration include developing arrangements to ensure that people discharged from hospital who do not have access to accommodation are sign-posted effectively to existing services; and assessing the services available in relation to alcohol and drug early intervention, harm reduction and treatment and support services for homeless people with complex needs.

At present, I consider that achieving improvements in these areas is a matter of service reform, with a focus on spending existing allocations more effectively, rather than a need for additional investment, but I will be happy to look at this again following the next meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Group on Rough Sleeping and Homelessness, to be convened shortly by the Minister for Communities.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health how many people were screened for atrial fibrillation in each Health and Social Care Trust in (i) 2013-14; (ii) 2014-15; and (iii) 2015-16 financial years.

(AQW 4332/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Screening for atrial fibrillation has been considered by National Screening Committee (NSC), an expert body that advises on screening programmes.

In July 2014, the NSC recommended that screening for atrial fibrillation should not be offered. This is because:

- the treatment and care for people with atrial fibrillation is not optimal;
- better evidence is needed about whether atrial fibrillation, detected at screening, carries the same long term risk of stroke as atrial fibrillation found in the context of other conditions; and
- the test needs to be improved and standardised.

NSC will be commissioning an update review of any new evidence in 2017/2018.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health for an update on implementation of the Child Deaths Overview Panel, as proposed in the Why Children Die policy launch of March 2015.

(AQW 4333/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Article 3(5) of the Safeguarding Board (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 requires the SBNI to establish processes to review child deaths in north of Ireland. This function was not commenced by my Department, as the Jay Report published in August 2016 suggested that the function could be located within the Public Health Agency (PHA). My officials are currently in discussions with the PHA to determine how best to take forward the review of child deaths in the north. Account will need to be taken of new Mortality and Morbidity arrangements, which were put in place in February 2016.

Under those arrangements, all child deaths in the north are reviewed at multi-disciplinary Mortality and Morbidity meetings and reported to the Health and Social Care Board and Public Health Agency, detailing any lessons learned and actions agreed.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health, in the light of the establishment of the Strategic Health Partnership to hear the vision of service providers, how she will ensure the views and vision of service users are heard.

(AQW 4335/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: There are currently a number of ways in which the views and vision of service users are already heard, for example, through: the role of the Patient and Client Council (established in 2009 as a powerful independent voice for people); Personal and Public Involvement (PPI) (the active involvement of service users, carers and the public in the planning, commissioning and delivery of services); Patient Experience surveys; HSC complaints; and so on. However, I am committed to ensuring that the future transformation of the health and social care services is underpinned by the principle of co-production and co-design with those that use and those that provide those services. Only then will we achieve lasting change and improvement to the health of our population.

In the coming weeks, I will be setting the approach and actions I will take to lead on the transformational changes to our health and social care system, and this will include a range of actions in relation to the voice of patients and service users.

Mr Lyons asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 1313/16-21, for an update on the physiotherapy direct access scheme pilot project.

(AQW 4339/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: A pilot scheme for direct access physiotherapy was introduced in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust on 15 June 2015, which was scheduled to run until 31 March 2016.

An evaluation of the pilot has demonstrated positive outcomes, however, anticipated patterns of demand have not materialised in line with those seen in Britain, as demand has remained higher than prior to the pilot. On that basis the pilot project was extended until the end of June 2016.

Data has continued to be measured against the evaluation framework and the evaluation report is currently being finalised. This will determine the extent to which the pilot has met the aims set out at the outset and the way forward with regard to potential regional roll out.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 3170/16-21, how many staff were on duty, broken down by grade.

(AQW 4357/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: It is assumed that this question refers to the number of medical surgery staff on duty in Antrim Area Hospital on Sunday 19th June 2016 between 08.00 and 20.00.

Six medical surgery staff were on duty at this time, details of which are detailed below:

- 1 x Consultant Surgeon on-call
- 1 x ENT Consultant on-call
- 1 x Surgical Specialist Registrar (SpR) on-call
- 1 x Surgical/ENT Senior House Officer (SHO) on long day shift
- 1 x Surgical/ENT F1 on long day shift
- 1 x Surgical/ENT F1 on 8.00am - 1.00pm shift

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health whether her Department would consider establishing a model of care and support in Omagh for mental health problems similar to services provided in Londonderry by Zest.

(AQW 4359/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Zest is funded by the Public Health Agency to provide the Self-Harm Intervention Programme (SHIP) in the Western and Northern Trust areas. This service is available, by appointment, at Omagh library.

I understand that Zest also plays a valued role in providing self-referral counselling and complementary therapy, although there are no plans at present for this model to be commissioned or funded by the Health and Social Care Service.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health what impact the presence of a nurse at each out-of-hours GP base would have on service delivery and support.

(AQW 4380/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: It is recognised that nurses and other healthcare professionals working alongside GPs in out of hours services can have a positive impact on patients' experience of the service, as well as on the capacity of the service to meet demand.

The structure and make-up of out of hours services, including the skills mix utilised within those services, will be determined by local circumstances and need. However, nurses already play a key role in the provision of GP out of hours services across the North. The nurse triage model is already well embedded in Western Urgent Care, Dalriada Urgent Care and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust's out of hours service. Western Urgent Care and Dalriada Urgent Care also employ nurse practitioners. Both the Belfast and South Eastern Trusts are currently exploring options to utilise a mix of skilled professionals, including nurses, in their GP out of hours service.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 2875/16-21, to provide this information broken down for each year since 2006.

(AQW 4381/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Belfast Trust has provided the following information on referrals to Gender Identity and Psychosexual services, broken down for each year since 2006. The Trust advises that this information cannot be disaggregated further.

Calendar Year	Age-Band	Number of referrals
2006	16-64	13
2007	16-64	38
2008	16-64	46
	65+	01
2009	16-64	86
	65+	03
2010	16-64	183
	65+	03
2011	16-64	206
	65+	06
2012	16-64	161
	65+	07
2013	16-64	130
	65+	02
2014	16-64	168
	65+	03
2015	05-15	01
	16-64	224
	65+	04

Referrals broken down for each year since August 2014 for the Knowing Our Identity service as follows:

2014	19 referrals
2015	66 referrals
2016	50 to date

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Health whether her Department has any plans for a new hospital build at Craigavon.

(AQW 4416/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Southern Trust has presented a business case to the Department of Health for a new hospital build on the Craigavon Area Hospital site; the business case will require both Department of Finance and Departmental approval. Decisions on this plan will be considered alongside other capital investment priorities and will be dependent on future budget availability, value for money and affordability.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health for her assessment why there is no facility for local mentally unwell prisoners that may pose a risk similar to those provided at the State Hospital, Carstairs.

(AQW 4419/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The State Hospital, Carstairs, Scotland, provides most of the care and treatment in conditions of high security for male adults from the north of Ireland with mental illness or severe mental impairment who, because of their dangerous, violent or criminal propensities, cannot be cared for in any other setting locally.

The provision of care through the State Hospital, Carstairs is delivered as part of a service for both Scotland and the North of Ireland.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health what support exists for people diagnosed with dementia.

(AQW 4439/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: A range of support services exist for people diagnosed with dementia. These include the provision of memory clinics in each of the five Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, to provide timely diagnosis for people with dementia, and information and support to inform decisions about future care and treatment. In addition the Delivering Social Change Dementia initiative is recruiting dementia navigators across the five HSC Trusts (two per Trust). Dementia navigators will act as a single point of contact for people living with dementia and their carers to provide support and advice throughout the entire dementia journey. The initiative is also training 300 dementia champions across HSC Trusts. These champions will advocate for people with dementia, provide information and support, and will promote best practice in dementia care.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health how many people are diagnosed with dementia in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 4440/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Dementia is one of the disease registers in the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF), the purpose of which is to reward contractors for the provision of quality care. Further information on QOF may be found at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/about-quality-and-outcomes-framework-qof>, and QOF data can be accessed at:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/quality-and-outcomes-framework-qof-statistics-annual-report>.

In relation to dementia, the contractor 'establishes and maintains a register of patients diagnosed with dementia'. The total number of people on the dementia register at 31st March 2016 was 13,617.

QOF data is not reported on by Health and Social Care Trust, but by Local Commissioning Group (LCG); table 1 presents the requested data according to these groups.

Table 1. Number of people on the QOF dementia register in each LCG in NI, at 31st March 2016

LCG	Number of people on the dementia register
Belfast	3,125
Northern	3,131
Southern	2,367
South Eastern	2,712
Western	2,282
Total	13,617

Source: Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF)

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health what is the capacity for residential and nursing care for people diagnosed with dementia in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 4441/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Western Health and Social Care Trust has one statutory residential care home with capacity for 26 beds for people with dementia. The Trust does not routinely record information on the capacity of private nursing and residential care homes. Details of capacity in each of these privately operated care homes can be sourced from the RQIA's website at www.rqia.org.uk

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health to detail the (i) location; and (ii) number of dementia care beds in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 4442/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) holds information on all registered residential and nursing care homes. The RQIA publish a register of these services, including the location, maximum approved places and categories of care, online.

The latest available information (as at 30 September 2016) can be found at the web link below.

<https://www.rqia.org.uk/what-we-do/register/services-registered-with-rqia/>

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health how many people diagnosed with dementia in the Derry city area have had to go to Omagh for residential care in the last five years.

(AQW 4443/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The information requested is not available. This information is not routinely collected by the Western Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust and could only be obtained through a manual trawl of patient case files at a disproportionate cost.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health what guidelines exist on adoption by two parents of different religious backgrounds.

(AQW 4444/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: As prospective adoptive parents of different religious backgrounds are not prevented from applying to adopt children, adoption legislation and guidelines do not contain any reference to that particular circumstance.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister of Health for a breakdown of the number of retailers given fixed penalties under the Tobacco Retailers Act 2014 during the 2015/16 financial year.

(AQW 4446/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Regulations introducing fixed penalty notices for a number of tobacco-related offences under the Tobacco Retailers Act (NI) 2014 came into operation on 1 July 2016.

Therefore, no tobacco retailers were issued with fixed penalty notices during the 2015/16 financial year.

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of geriatrician consultants employed in each Health and Social Care Trust, broken down by length of service.

(AQW 4449/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of geriatrician consultants employed in each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust, broken down by length of service is detailed in the tables below.

Belfast HSC Trust

Length of Service (as a Consultant in the Trust)	Headcount	Whole Time Equivalent
0 – 3.9 years	5	4.50
4 – 7.9 years	4	3.60
8 – 11.9 years	1	1.00
12 – 15.9 years	1	0.60
16 years or more	2	1.10
Total	13	10.80

Northern HSC Trust

Length of Service	Headcount	Whole Time Equivalent
0 – 3.9 years	3	3.00
4 years or more	5	4.80
Total	8	7.80

South Eastern HSC Trust

Length of Service (as a Consultant in the Trust)	Headcount	Whole Time Equivalent
0 – 3.9 years	4	4.00

Length of Service (as a Consultant in the Trust)	Headcount	Whole Time Equivalent
4 – 7.9 years	3	3.00
8 – 11.9 years	1	1.00
12 – 15.9 years	2	2.00
16 years or more	2	2.00
Total	12	12.00

Southern HSC Trust

Length of Service (as a Consultant in the Trust)	Headcount	Whole Time Equivalent
0 – 3.9 years	2	2.00
4 – 7.9 years	2	2.00
8 – 11.9 years	2	1.60
12 – 15.9 years	1	1.00
16 years or more	1	1.00
Total	8	7.60

Western HSC Trust

Length of Service (as a Consultant in the Trust)	Headcount	Whole Time Equivalent
0 – 3.9 years	2	2.00
4 – 7.9 years	2	2.00
8 – 11.9 years	1	1.00
12 – 15.9 years	0	0.00
16 years or more	2	2.00
Total	7	7.00

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health how many geriatrician consultants posts in each Health and Social Care Trust are vacant.

(AQW 4450/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of vacant geriatrician consultant posts in each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust is detailed in the table below.

HSC Trust	Headcount	Whole Time Equivalent
Belfast	4	4.00
Northern	3	3.00
South Eastern	0	0.00
Southern	1	1.00
Western	4	4.00
Total	12	12.00

Source: HSC Trusts

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health what is the salary for each geriatrician consultant in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 4452/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Geriatrician consultants working in the north are all paid on the basic consultant salary scale of £76,001 - £102,466 (2016/17 rates).

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health to outline the advertisements placed for the vacant geriatrician consultant posts in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 4453/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Vacant posts have been advertised by HSC Trusts as follows:

Trust	Number of posts currently vacant	Methods used to recruit to these posts	Advertising dates
Belfast	4	British Medical Journal HSC Recruit	5 April 2016 3 September 2016
Northern	3	Belfast Telegraph British Medical Journal HSC Recruit Irish Medical Times	12 January 2016 12 April 2016 17 May 2016
Southern	1	British Medical Journal HSC Recruit Website NHS Jobs Website Job Centre NI (& EURES) Facebook	13 September 2016
South Eastern	0	N/A	N/A
Western	4	British Medical Journal Irish Medical Times Belfast Telegraph Trusts Website HSC Recruit	28th October 2011 4th May 2012 19th October 2012 7th December 2012 22nd November 2013 18th April 2014 1st May 2015 19th February 2016 14th October 2016

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health to detail the range of support services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust for adults with cerebral palsy.

(AQW 4454/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Western Trust provides a range of services for adults with cerebral palsy based on a client's assessed need and details are provided below:

- i. A range of domiciliary care options in the provision of personal care and other tasks.
- ii. User/carer support via social work staff.
- iii. A Carers Assessment.
- iv. Direct Payments/Self Directed Support.
- v. Short breaks.
- vi. Daycare services/Day opportunities.
- vii. Provision of a range of equipment following assessment by District Nursing staff and Allied Health Professionals.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health to outline her Department's plans for capital and resource investment in Carrickmore Health Centre.

(AQW 4455/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: As you are aware, plans for a new Health and Care Centre in Carrickmore are included in the Health and Social Care Board's Strategic Implementation Plan for primary care. Future investment in new primary care facilities cannot be progressed until the pilot projects for health and care centres in Lisburn and Newry are evaluated. This evaluation is expected to be completed before the end of the year.

Delivery of the implementation plan, including plans for a new health centre in Carrickmore will be considered alongside other capital investment priorities and will be dependent on future budget availability, value for money and affordability.

Any development in premises would also require a review of the existing services which are provided from the current Health Centre in order to ensure that the needs of the local population are addressed appropriately.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health for an update on the addition of the key information summary to the electronic care record. (AQW 4457/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Key Information Summary (KIS) is a synopsis of medical history and patient wishes, intended to support patients with long term conditions and those in the possible last year of life. The KIS will be extracted from a patient's general practice record and transmitted to the NI Electronic Care Record (ECR), with patient consent.

It is anticipated that GP practices will begin transmitting KIS to the ECR from the first quarter of 2017. The first phase of implementation will involve approximately 150 GP practices.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health whether there are any plans to introduce an online appointment system for hospital appointments, similar to that at GP practices.

(AQW 4458/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The current hospital information systems do not have the flexibility of the information systems which support GPs. The replacement of these systems will be necessary by 2021, and is proposed as part of the implementation of an integrated Electronic Health and Care Record system for which a business case is currently under development.

The Health and Social Care service (HSC) is currently exploring the development of a 'patient portal' to support citizens to access elements of their health and care record, including viewing appointments. The portal, which is expected to be introduced during 2017, will initially focus on patients with a diagnosis of dementia and their carers. Lessons learned from this work will be applied across the HSC.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health whether there are any plans to allow patients to self-refer to mental health units.

(AQW 4459/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: There are no plans to allow patients to self refer to mental health units. When a person becomes mentally unwell it is important that they are assessed by their GP or a mental health professional to ensure they receive the right level of treatment, in the right place, at the right time.

In line with the Mental Health Care Pathway a stepped care approach is used to match the needs of the individual with the right level of support. Community-based care is the first line of treatment, only "stepping up" to intensive/specialist services when required.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health how she plans to increase the retention and the recruitment of GP's over the next five years.

(AQW 4460/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: It is widely recognised that GP-led services are facing significant pressures. I am currently considering the findings of the review of GP-led services in the North and am committed to working with GPs to ensure everyone here has access to sustainable, high quality GP services. The review group's report identified a range of actions. It recognises the need to increase the number of GPs working in the North, although it does not set specific targets.

The number of annual GP training places commissioned by my Department was increased by 20 to 85 effective from 1 August 2016. This represents the biggest increase in more than ten years. In addition, consideration will be given to the widening of roles in Primary Care, for example the potential of Physician Associates, Advanced Nurse Practitioners and Pharmacists embedded within practices to relieve the burden on GPs.

To assist with the retention of GPs, the Retainer Scheme was re-issued to all GPs in February 2016. All 25 places on the scheme have been filled and a waiting list has been compiled.

Five individuals have also availed of the GP Induction and Refresher Scheme. This provides an opportunity to return to General Practice following a career break or time spent working abroad.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health to detail the waiting times for physiotherapy services in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust; and what actions are being taken to reduce these waiting times.

(AQW 4461/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Latest provisional waiting times for physiotherapy services in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust are provided in the table below.

No. of patients	Waiting time (weeks)					Total
	0 - 3	>3 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13	
	1,307	1,211	864	1,264	7,068	11,714

I have stated on many occasions that long waiting times for patients are not acceptable to me.

My Department will soon commence a workforce review which will assess the staffing and training requirements to allow us deliver the high level of physiotherapy service our people deserve.

In addition, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and Public Health Agency (PHA) have been working with Trusts to agree regional evidenced based care pathways across elective Allied Health Professionals (AHP) services, including Physiotherapy. This will help reduce variation in practice across the region and will assist in the delivery of more efficient, timely and consistent approaches to care.

Long waits in this area are further evidence of the need to do things differently. That is why I will set out a vision for health and social care on the 25 October, which will include specific actions to reduce waiting times and deliver sustainable improvement across the Health and Social Care Service.

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Health whether she will provide training in domestic violence, domestic abuse and coercive control for health visitors and social workers to help with an introduction of Donna's law.
(AQW 4464/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I fully support the work of the Department of Justice as it continues to consider a number of additional provisions to improve the protection available to victims of domestic violence under the Justice Act 2015. Should new laws in relation to domestic violence, domestic abuse and coercive control be introduced, my Department will continue to seek to identify all opportunities, including staff training, to improve front line services to protect victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health (i) to detail the collaborative work being undertaken by the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency to address the shortfall in trauma and orthopaedic surgeons; (ii) whether their work has included an evaluation of the possibility of appointing consultants and surgeons from overseas, and (iii) and what such an evaluation concluded.

(AQW 4473/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency chair the Regional Trauma and Orthopaedic Clinical Engagement Group, which aims to improve the quality and capacity of orthopaedic service across the north. Both organisations have recently worked together to complete a Workforce Plan, as a result of which two additional Trauma & Orthopaedic training places were added to the 2016/17 intake of medical trainees.

There are currently no vacant funded orthopaedic consultant posts in the north of Ireland.

A recent international recruitment initiative for orthopaedic surgeons was unsuccessful.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health (i) what plans she has to reduce orthopaedic waiting times and the shortfall in capacity in 2016; (ii) what additional funds have been allocated for this purpose; and (iii) how much of this has been spent.

(AQW 4474/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is engaged in ongoing work with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) on a range of options aimed at arresting the decline in elective waiting times and delivering sustainable improvements in the medium to longer term across all specialities.

Initiatives specific to orthopaedics include:

- The expansion of the orthopaedic ICATs teams in the South Eastern, Belfast and the Northern Trusts. This increased capacity will allow the full implementation of the new back/spinal pathway which will streamline patient access and reduce the demand on consultant led services;
- The roll out of regional agreed outpatient referral guidance using the British Orthopaedic Association Clinical Commissioning Guidelines for hip, knee, shoulder, elbow, hand, ankle & feet, paediatric and spinal conditions;
- Increased investment to help reduce waiting times for spinal surgery;
- Continued rollout of E-triage to support medically led triage for orthopaedic referrals;
- The appointment of three new Orthopaedic consultants for Belfast Trust to help reduce the current elective capacity gap;
- Increased investment in the Regional Orthopaedic Spinal Service to help reduce the waiting times for spinal surgery;
- The appointment of four new Orthopaedic consultants for the Southern Trust to address the needs for the Craigavon and Newry and Mourne population;

- The appointment of a locum Orthopaedic consultant post in the Western Trust;
- The planned recruitment of an orthopaedic theatre co-ordinator;
- The continued validation of waiting lists.

During 2016/17 an additional £2.7million has been allocated non-recurrently to Trusts for additional activity in trauma and orthopaedics services.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health (i) what additional funding has been allocated to the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust for treatment in specialist spinal surgery centres; (ii) whether the Trust will use this funding to introduce extra in-house clinics; and if not (iii) what improvements the Trust will deliver with this additional funding.

(AQW 4476/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Since April 2016 the Health and Social Care Board has made approximately £1.3 million available for additional elective spinal services. The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust have advised that this funding will be used to deliver 49 additional spinal bracing clinics by December with a further 27 clinics planned between January and March 2017. The Trust has also accessed services for 22 scoliosis patients from a recognised spinal Hospital in England.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Health what action her Department is taking to assist those diagnosed with Huntington's Disease.

(AQW 4488/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Those diagnosed with Huntington's Disease (HD) have access to the full range of core community health and social care services across the north of Ireland including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, community nursing, speech and language therapy, dietetics, social work / social care, domiciliary care, day care and day time opportunities and respite, including specialist respite.

In addition, for those with HD in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) area, the main referral pathway to access specialist services is through its genetics department. This service also takes referrals from a range of sources including community mental health teams, community physical and sensory disability teams, speech and language services, and from inpatient wards. Families can also contact the service directly or ask their GP to refer them.

Patients with HD in other HSC Trust areas can also be referred to this service via their Trust's neurology service.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Health what discussions on workforce planning are being held with universities and regional colleges.

(AQW 4502/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Workforce planning is undertaken within the Health and Social Care sector and provides the evidence base for the commissioning of education and training from universities and regional colleges.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health what plans she has to increase GP training places.

(AQW 4508/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The number of places on the GP training programme commissioned each year by my Department has been increased by 20 to 85 from 2016/17.

Further expansion of the programme will require significant additional investment which I will consider against my Department's overall financial position.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 1196/16-21, for an update following her summer report.

(AQW 4509/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: A clinically led Task and Finish Group was established to take forward work to revise the IFR process under formal project management structures and arrangements.

The Project Board tasked a working group to develop new policy, including governance and procedures. The work is well advanced and the group reported to the Project Board in early October. I will publish the new IFR policy as soon as possible and I aim to introduce the new arrangements during 2016/17 on a phased basis subject to available funding.

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Health why the Emergency Department waiting area, rather than the designated paediatric waiting area, is used for paediatric cases at Craigavon Area Hospital.

(AQW 4898/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The significant increase in the number of patients attending the emergency department in Craigavon Area Hospital in recent years has reduced capacity within the emergency department and it became necessary for the Southern Health and Social Care Trust to step down the dedicated paediatric waiting area in 2014.

Every precaution is taken to ensure the comfort, security and safety of everyone waiting in the emergency department. Children attending the emergency department are prioritised at triage and some are redirected to be seen in the Paediatric Ambulatory Unit based in the Children's Ward.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 43503/11-16 and AQW 2863/16-21, (i) to explain the delay in completion of the business case; (ii) for a timeline for its completion; and (iii) when a decision will be made on the proposed redevelopment.

(AQW 5350/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) This business case is one of a number of similar new projects which have not been progressed due to financial constraints.
- (ii) All business cases must demonstrate value for money and include a detailed analysis of need, risk, monetary costs and benefits, as well as an affordability assessment. This must be up to date and business cases are not finalised until the point where there is a realistic prospect of securing funding. The question of when funding is likely to be available for this project will be considered again alongside other capital investment priorities when the outcome of the Executive's budget process for 2017-18 and future years is known.
- (iii) Until funding has been identified I cannot confirm a timeline for completion of the business case or when a decision will be made on the proposed redevelopment.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health what plans she has to invest in general practice centres in Carrickfergus and Larne, to enable more patients to be treated locally.

(AQO 495/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Investment in General Practice has increased in recent years with an investment package of up to £5.1 million in 2015/16 and up to a further £7 million in 2016/17.

In addition we are investing up to £14m by 2020/21 to put almost 300 pharmacists into practices to see patients, improve care and ease the workload on GPs.

Furthermore, I recently announced an additional £900k to support the work of GP Federations. GP Federations will help practices work together to increase their resilience and meet rising demand.

Up to £10m has been made available in financial transactions capital for improving premises.

Both Carrickfergus and Larne have also been identified as possible hubs within the Northern Trust area and are included in the Health and Social Care Board's draft Strategic Implementation Plan which sets out proposals for future investment in primary care infrastructure.

Delivery of these facilities will have to be considered alongside other capital investment priorities and will be dependent on future budget availability, confirmation of value for money, and affordability.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the contribution of the South West Acute Hospital to a transformed health and social care service.

(AQO 496/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The reconfiguration of services is an important and complex matter that goes beyond individual Trusts and hospitals. I have given careful consideration to the implications of the Expert Panel's report and will publish it and my response to it next week, on the 25th of October 2016.

Like all hospitals across Northern Ireland, I have no doubt that the South West Acute Hospital will continue to play an important role in the provision of healthcare in the North.

The hospital currently provides its local population with a wide range of general hospital services including 24/7 emergency care, critical care, inpatient medicine, emergency surgery, maternity and paediatric services, day case surgery, stroke services and a comprehensive range of outpatient, Allied Health Professional, and social services.

There is also potential for the South West Acute Hospital to participate in all-island collaborative healthcare provision. I have asked my officials to work with their counterparts in the south to carry out a scoping study to identify areas of healthcare where increased collaboration would bring real benefits for patients across this island. The Western Health and Social Care Trust and the South West Acute Hospital have over the years engaged positively with health service colleagues in the south to design and deliver innovative services for the benefit of people living in the border region and this is something which can be built upon in the future.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Health for an update on the publication of the Bengoa Report into the future of the Health and Social Care system.

(AQO 497/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The reconfiguration of Health and Social Care in the North is an important and complex matter. I have given careful consideration to transformation over the summer and I will publish the Expert Panel's report and my response to it next week, on the 25 October 2016.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Health how many operations in the Ulster Hospital were cancelled for non-clinical reasons, in each of the last four years.

(AQO 498/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The number of operations cancelled in the Ulster Hospital in each of the last four years is provided in the table below.

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Hospital Cancellations due to Non-Clinical Reasons	329	274	291	281
Scheduled Elective Admissions for an operation	14,087	14,896	14,355	13,771
Percentage of Operations Cancelled for Non-clinical reasons	2.3%	1.8%	2.0%	2.0%

It is regrettable that any planned elective operations have to be cancelled however, there will always be occasions when short notice hospital cancellations for non-clinical reasons are unavoidable, e.g. equipment failure; emergencies/trauma; ED pressures; the surgeon, anaesthetist or other theatre staff become unavailable due to sickness, bereavement etc.

I look to both the HSC Board and Trusts to continue to focus on this issue to secure improvements in performance.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Health for an update on the implementation of the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(AQO 500/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Under the Autism Act (NI) 2011, the Department of Health has a statutory obligation to prepare, review and monitor the implementation of a cross departmental strategy to improve services and supports for people with autism and their families. The current cross-departmental Autism Strategy was published in 2014, together with an Action Plan for 2013-16, extended last year to 2017.

Good progress has been made on the implementation of the cross-departmental strategy and the action plan as reflected in the report laid before the Assembly in November 2015. Some of the notable achievements include:

- autism training for front line staff, education professionals, youth workers and parents of children with autism has been provided;
- 'One-Stop' shops developed in the Northern and Belfast Trust areas for adults to obtain employment, careers and benefit advice;
- adjustments made to the theory and practical driving test;
- a free Access Travel Wallet to encourage people with autism to travel independently and with confidence;
- the Assured Skills Project helping participants with autism secure employment;
- tailored support offered to Further Education Colleges and Universities;
- improved support for those detained by police; and
- the introduction of regular programmes by the Arts Council, Museums sector and the Inland Fisheries Group.

While I think it is important that these successes are highlighted, I am also clear that there is more we in the Executive can and need to do to improve outcomes for people with autism and their carers. I intend therefore to write to my Executive colleagues later this year with details of my plan for further work which, in the first instance, will include a review of the current action plan. The aim of that review will be to identify where the gaps are in current service provision and produce an agreed set of effective interventions to address those gaps, informed by the views of people with autism and other key stakeholders.

Department for Infrastructure

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the assurances he has received that the Environmental Impact Assessment is fully up to date with regard to the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson road construction project.

(AQW 2880/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): The Environmental Statement was published in March 2007, and subject to examination at Public Local Inquiry in November 2007. The Independent Inspectors appointed to chair the Inquiry submitted their Report in April 2008 and were satisfied with the Environmental Impact Assessment undertaken. Since then, my Department has reviewed the contents of the Environmental Statement and updated baseline survey information where deemed appropriate. I am content that the Environmental Impact Assessment is fully up to date and reflects the scheme design. Furthermore I am content appropriate mitigation will be implemented as part of the construction contract.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline who owns Lough Neagh.
(AQW 3088/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has no responsibility for Lough Neagh, however I can confirm that the bed of Lough Neagh is currently in the ownership of the Shaftesbury Estate.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has any plans to consider the introduction of countdown markers on the approach to 30mph limits.
(AQW 3381/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am aware that this type of system has been frequently used on Trunk Roads in Scotland. My officials considered introducing something similar here when a speed management strategy was being developed for the north. This was rejected as an advanced warning measure since research advice from the Department for Transport in England had indicated that they were ineffective at affecting driver behaviour in advance of the 30mph speed limit.

If approach speeds are high, TransportNI traffic engineers would normally introduce an intermediate 40mph speed limit in advance of the urban area. Sometimes alternative solutions such as red transverse rumble strips or additional road markings have been deployed to warn of the approaching reduced speed limit.

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) how many departmental bids have been made to the EU Investment Bank; (ii) how many bids are currently being prepared; and (iii) how many ongoing departmental projects are reliant on EU funding.
(AQW 3570/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) My Department has not made any bids to the EU Investment Bank;
- (ii) my Department is currently not in the process of preparing any bids to the EU Investment Bank indeed, Government departments do not have the power to borrow from the EU Investment Bank; and
- (iii) my Department currently has two ongoing projects, the Knockmore to Lurgan and Coleraine to Derry rail improvement projects, which are benefiting from EU co-financing secured through the European Commission's Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), one of its competitive funding programmes. The maturity of both projects and their current projected completion dates effectively removes a reliance on EU funding for their delivery.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether is would consider the introduction of free bus travel passes for people with a recognised disability, bringing Northern Ireland in line with the rest of the United Kingdom.
(AQW 3659/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: You will be aware that the existing Concessionary Fares Scheme offers free travel to those who are Registered Blind or in receipt of a War Disablement Pension. I am sympathetic to the introduction of free bus travel for all those with a recognised disability. However the position is that the concessionary fares budget remains under pressure and there is currently no provision within the budget to support any further extension of the scheme.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline any plans to extend free travel concessions for disabled people on bus and rail services.
(AQW 3675/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: You will be aware that the existing Concessionary Fares Scheme offers free travel to those who are Registered Blind or in receipt of a War Disablement Pension. I am sympathetic to the idea of extending the Concessionary Fares Scheme to free travel for all disabled people. However the position is that the concessionary fares budget remains under pressure and there is currently no provision within the budget to support any further extension of the scheme.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many managers does Translink currently employ.
(AQW 3710/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink advises that its Senior Management structure consists of 11 people in total. This is set out in the answer to AQW 3711/16-21. It employs a further 99 managers in total across its business areas.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the current management structure for Translink.
(AQW 3711/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink's current management structure is as follows: Tier one (Senior Management) details those individuals who report direct to the Group Chief Executive. The second tier shows those managers who because of the critical nature of the areas covered report direct to the Chief Operating Officer.

Group Chief Executive Chris Conway					
P O'Neill Chief Operating Officer		P Anderson Chief Financial Officer		G Milligan Chief HR & Corporate Services Officer	
J P Irvine Legal Counsel		Ciaran Doherty General Manager Bus Operations		Ian Campbell General Manager Engineering	
Clive Bradberry General Manager Infrastructure		John Glass Head of Project Delivery		Billy Gilpin Head of Rail Operations	
Frank Clegg Project Support					

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in light of the comments by the deputy First Minister during Question Time on 19 September 2016, when he will present the (i) June monitoring round; and (ii) forthcoming October monitoring to the departmental committee.

(AQW 3789/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I fully respect and support the important work carried out by Assembly committees and seek to ensure they are kept abreast on all issues impacting on my Department. Indeed, I have already met with the Committee for Infrastructure twice this year to discuss a range of issues, with senior officials also briefing the Committee on numerous occasions.

In respect of monitoring specifically, officials from my Department briefed the Committee on June Monitoring on 15 June 2016 and will be providing similar briefing, in respect of October Monitoring.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline any discussions he has had with departmental officials to address discontentment of LED street lights throughout Upper Bann.

(AQW 3814/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Whilst I have had no direct discussions with Departmental officials about the discontentment of the LED street lighting project in Craigavon and Banbridge, I have been briefed on many of the issues. All correspondence regarding the LED street lights, which were installed as part of the retrofit project, is individually assessed by my officials to ensure that the lighting complies with my Department's policy for street lighting.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to outline the criteria, if any, for the placement of vertical deflection mechanisms for traffic calming; and (ii) whether there is any prohibition against such measures on main roads through towns and villages.

(AQW 3828/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's TransportNI has produced a policy and procedure guide to help reduce the number and severity of collisions, improve driver behaviour and control traffic speed by using appropriate road safety engineering measures. This document, which can be accessed at www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/road-safety-engineering-procedures-rsppg-e027 outlines the criteria for prioritising traffic calming schemes and includes the Traffic calming assessment sheet. No road hump shall be constructed on a road having a speed limit greater than 30mph.

The policy stipulates that the use of vertical measures should not be considered on motorways, dual carriageways, A Class roads and other roads with more than 5,000 vehicles per day. The use of traffic calming deflection measures is generally restricted to residential streets/developments/estates and not used on roads whose primary function is to facilitate through traffic and where there is no convenient alternative route available.

Providing that any proposed scheme in a town or village meets the necessary criteria in the policy, there is no prohibition on these measures being installed in those areas.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure what guidelines or protocols exist in his Department governing Ministers holding meetings with third parties in the absence of officials; and whether any record is kept of such meetings having been held.

(AQW 3865/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: In all the meetings I have had with third parties in my capacity as Minister for Infrastructure, I have been supported by at least one Departmental official and a record has been kept of the meeting.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what assessments of due diligence, including a fit and proper person test, has his Department carried out on the proposed operator of the gasification plant for Airport Road, Belfast. (AQW 3884/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The planning application for the gasification plant for Airport Road, Belfast was considered by the then, Department of the Environment's Planning Group, however its role did not include any assessment of due diligence on any proposed operator.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether (i) staffing levels in the Blue Badge unit have decreased in the last five years; and (ii) the Minister for Regional Development was involved in this decision. (AQW 3915/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) The full complement of staff for the Blue Badge Unit is 11 staff – one manager at Executive Officer 2 (EO2) grade and 10 Administrative Officers (AO) grade. The staffing complement has been 11 staff for the past five years.

At present the Unit has six AOs and six agency staff.

- (ii) The decision to cancel the vast majority of temporary staff contracts was taken in 2014 at a time when the then Department for Regional Development was facing an overspend and a Ministerial Direction had been issued to continue provision of safety-critical front line services. The decision was taken by senior management in the Department. This led to a backlog and agency staff were recruited in July 2015 once the overspend situation had ended.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the performance of Belfast bus lanes. (AQW 3942/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Bus speeds on five corridors into Belfast have been monitored since 2001 as part of the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) monitoring exercise. Monitoring on all other corridors has only been undertaken since 2013. Monitoring is undertaken every October as this is regarded as the most representative month.

Bus speeds for 2015 show a significant increase on 2013 and 2014 speeds across all corridors. In addition, on the five corridors which have been monitored since 2001, there is an increase from 2001 to 2015 on all BMTP monitored corridors, except the Lisburn Road.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Infrastructure, out of the ten planning enforcement notices served in relation to Mobuoy Road Waste Site, how many remain valid and enforceable. (AQW 3968/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A total of eight relevant notices affect the Mobuoy Road site. While one of the notices is of no effect pending an appeal, the other seven are effective.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for Infrastructure, given the use of the Proceeds of Crime Act by planning authorities in other parts of the United Kingdom against planning crimes, whether this legislation could be used in Northern Ireland for similar planning offences. (AQW 3978/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am aware that following successful prosecutions a number of authorities in England have used confiscation orders under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to recover monies following convictions for planning offences. Similar powers are available in the north.

Where a person has been convicted of a planning offence in the north and the Court decides that the offender has benefited from his particular criminal conduct, a confiscation order under Part 4 of that Act could, if appropriate, be made requiring the offender to pay a monetary amount equal to the offender's benefit from the conduct concerned. To date this power has not been used in the north in relation to planning offences but that does not preclude its use in future.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the disposal and/or future use of the St. Lucia site, Omagh. (AQW 4014/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Only part of the St Lucia site is owned by the Department for Infrastructure. The British Ministry of Defence (MOD) currently retains the Historic Core and is working to resolve legal formalities that prevent its transfer.

My officials have discussed with key stakeholders the process for identifying potential options for the future of the site. Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (FODC), supported by the Department for Communities (DfC) are refreshing the St. Lucia 2010 Masterplan to identify potential options for regenerating the entire site.

It is anticipated that the Masterplan is to be presented to the Council by April 2017.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there will be any differentiation in the ticketing system for use on Metro buses and Belfast Rapid Transit buses from 1 October 2018.

(AQW 4023/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: When the Belfast Rapid Transit Ticketing (BRT) System is introduced, customers on both Metro and BRT services will be able to purchase and use common paper tickets and smartcards.

When the BRT services are introduced in 2018, customers who use either Metro or BRT services (or both), will be able to purchase and use the following methods to access those services:

- Paper single tickets
- Paper day tickets
- Metro Multi-Journey Smartlink cards
- Metro Travelcards
- Metro DayLink smartcards
- iLink Travelcards
- Free Concessionary Smartpasses
- Half-fare Concessionary Smartpasses
- yLink cards

That is customers will be able to use all of the paper tickets and smartcards which can be currently purchased and used on Metro services.

Translink has advised that ePurse smartcards will be introduced in August 2020.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline why the Northern Ireland Transport Statistics published on the Department's website on 29 September cites exact figures for the numbers of passengers that used Belfast International Airport and George Best City Airport, but not for the City of Derry Airport.

(AQW 4402/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Table 7.4 of the 'Northern Ireland Transport Statistics 2015-16' publication ranks the top 20 Britain and the north of Ireland airports by the number of terminal passengers in 2015. The City of Derry airport had 0.28 million terminal passengers and was ranked outside of the top 20 Britain and the north of Ireland airports (27th). Therefore, it does not appear in the table.

All other air transport tables in the publication detail equivalent information for Belfast International, George Best Belfast City and City of Derry airports.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the abandonment of a section of the Carrickmore Road, Ballycastle.

(AQW 4413/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department received an application to abandon a section of road at Carrickmore Road, Ballycastle from an owner of a property on that road. During my Department's consultation process objections to the proposed abandonment have been received. I am presently considering the application and the objections.

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there are plans in place for a more coordinated approach to grass cutting between his Department, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and local councils.

(AQW 4543/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's objective in cutting grass on its lands is to prevent overgrowth onto footway and carriageway surfaces and the obstruction of sightlines and traffic signs. Therefore grass cutting operations are carried out by my Department for road safety reasons and not for cosmetic or amenity purposes.

However, some District Councils wish to have a higher standard of grass maintenance within their boundary than is provided by my Department. This is usually for aesthetic and amenity reasons. In previous years, some councils have accepted responsibility for grass cutting in certain areas and have been reimbursed by my Department for the value of the work my Department would have undertaken.

As a result of the Resource budget pressures over past two years my Department has not been in a position to reimburse councils for this work. However, I understand that some councils are continuing with grass maintenance and I welcome this.

My Department normally utilises its internal workforce and external contractors to carry out its grass cutting operations. However, this is an area where I would wish to engage further with councils and other bodies to ascertain whether there is scope for a more joined up approach to deal with grass cutting and other quality of life issues.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many managers are employed by NI Water.

(AQW 4546/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Water has advised that it employs 69 managers who are, by definition, accountable for leading a function and delivering a defined set of management objectives.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many staff are employed by NI Water.
(AQW 4547/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Water has advised that the number of employees in post on 30 September 2016 was 1,243.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much funding is contributed to NI Water by the European Union.
(AQW 4548/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Since the inception of NI Water on 1st April 2007, it has received £139,000 from the European Union. This grant was received during financial year 2014/15.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what other funding does NI Water receive apart from the NI Executive and the European Union.
(AQW 4549/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Apart from NI Executive and European Union funding, NI Water receives funding in the form of non-domestic revenue raised from the business sector for water, sewerage and trade effluent services. Other revenue sources include contributions from developers for work carried out by NI Water, disposal of surplus assets and small miscellaneous items as such as bank interest.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what funding streams or community grants are available through NI Water for community projects.
(AQW 4550/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Water has advised that it does not provide any funding or community grants to third parties for community projects.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to LT1400 taxi meters, to outline (i) why they are being rejected at Test Centres; (ii) from when they have been deemed unsuitable; (iii) who deemed them unsuitable and why; and (iv) what discussions have been held with the manufacturer following this decision.
(AQW 4553/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: On 31 May 2016 my Department introduced a new taximeter approval and testing service. From that date, taximeters have been approved for use on the basis of the particular make and model being certified in compliance with the Measuring Instruments Directive (MID) 2004/22/EC.

On 5 October 2016 the manufacturer of the LT1400 taximeter advised the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA), who are responsible for the statutory approval and testing of taximeters, that this particular make and model of taximeter is not certified in compliance with the MID and, because the LT1400 is no longer being manufactured or sold, cannot be MID certified.

Consequently, the LT1400 is not subject to testing by the DVA and has been determined as unsuitable from 5 October 2016.

No further contact has been made with the taximeter manufacturer.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the process and timeline for the consultation and publication of a new Area Plan which will supersede the current Omagh Area Plan.
(AQW 4554/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Fermanagh and Omagh District Council are bringing forward a new Local Development Plan in accordance with the Plan Timetable and Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which were agreed with officials in the former Department of the Environment on 5 May 2016.

The Plan Timetable will set out a Council's programme for the production of the Plan Strategy and Local Policies Plan (which together form the Local Development Plan) including key milestones and timelines for their production, covering all elements of the process through to adoption. The Council's SCI sets out how the Council propose to engage with the community in the delivery of its planning functions, including as it undertakes production of the plan.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 2927/16-21, to outline the timeframe for completion of works being undertaken by NI Water and Transport NI to adopt the sewers and roads within the Shergrim Grove development, Omagh.
(AQW 4573/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Water has advised that the developer of the Shergrim development in Omagh is insolvent and did not complete the roads and sewers to an adoptable standard.

Both TransportNI and NI Water have identified the defects within the road and sewer network in this development and estimated the costs associated with bringing them up to an adoptable standard. However, the bond security is not sufficient to cover the cost of the remedial works required to resolve the issues with the sewers.

I have asked my officials to continue to work closely with NI Water to see if a solution to this can be found. As you can appreciate, this is a complex matter and will take some time to fully consider what options are available. Until then, I am unable to give an indication of the timescale as to when this situation will be resolved.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the roads in Upper Bann that are waiting to receive traffic calming measures.

(AQW 4578/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: You will be aware that my Department's TransportNI receives many requests to develop the road network. All requests are assessed in accordance with established policy to ensure best value for public money.

When an assessment has been completed and a need has been confirmed then TransportNI engineering staff will consider which engineering measure best meets the identified need.

Engineering staff can consider a range of measures and these can include; visibility improvements, carriageway realignment, controlled crossings, footway provision, junction improvement and indeed traffic calming.

I can advise that there are no schemes in the current programme for Upper Bann where traffic calming is proposed. The work programme for subsequent years will be dependent on the budget allocation at that time.

The current programme was presented to the local council on 23 May 2016 and can be viewed online at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/corporatereports>

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of wi-fi provision on Northern Ireland Railway trains.

(AQW 4579/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Currently all Class 3000, 4000 and Enterprise trains operated by NI Railways are fitted with Wi-Fi.

After recent upgrades of their Wi-Fi equipment, each Translink train is capable of 4G connectivity and the system is operating to specification and is providing a good band width for its customers at no charge.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether his Department has any plans to resurface The Hill, Groomsport; and (ii) when this roadway was last inspected.

(AQW 4602/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's, TransportNI has no current plans to carry out carriageway resurfacing at The Hill, Groomsport.

The carriageway surface which was last inspected on the 28 July 2016 is deemed to be in a safe and serviceable condition.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether his Department has any plans to resurface The Brae, Groomsport; and (ii) when it was last inspected.

(AQW 4603/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has no plans to resurface The Brae, Groomsport.

At the last safety inspection which took place on the 28 July 2016 the carriageway surface was deemed to be in a safe and serviceable condition.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his officials have been monitoring the sequencing of traffic lights at the Gransha Road Roundabout, Bangor with a view to introducing improvements to enhance safer traffic progression.

(AQW 4611/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Traffic signals became operational on Gransha Road roundabout in Bangor on Friday 28 August 2015. Since installation my Department has been monitoring the effectiveness of the measures and all adjustments have now been completed.

I am pleased to advise that the scheme has improved traffic progression and safety for pedestrians, cyclists, and in particular vulnerable road users including children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, while maintaining the operational performance of the junction.

The new crossing facilities have been provided as part of the strategy to improve active school travel and cycling facilities in Bangor and we are encouraged to see the significant increase in pedestrians and cyclists using the crossings already. These measures have also enabled the cycling measures in the area to be increased along Gransha Road and East Circular Road.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department will give consideration to establishing a yellow box scheme at the junction of Old Gransha Road and Gransha Road, Bangor to improve traffic progression at this location. (AQW 4612/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department is aware that there is some queuing at peak times on Old Gransha Road, while waiting to access Gransha Road. This situation is common throughout the country where side roads are entering main roads in close proximity to major junctions. While the more lengthy delays appeared to be confined to a short period it was noted that traffic on the main Gransha Road were generally courteous and left gaps for right turning vehicles from the side roads to enter.

Yellow box road markings would not provide a solution to this issue as they are intended to facilitate vehicles turning right or moving ahead through a queue of traffic (paragraph 174 of the Highway Code). They are not intended to aid vehicles wishing to join a queue, for example when turning right out of Old Gransha Road onto Gransha Road in Bangor.

My Department would therefore have no plans to provide such a marking at this location.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many taxi meters were rejected at all Testing Centres (except Newtownards) on 30 September 2016; and (ii) the reasons why for each failure. (AQW 4633/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: On 30 September 2016, twenty one taximeters failed to meet the requirements of the taximeter test across all test centres (excluding Newtownards). Details recorded by the examiner at the time of test are set out in the table below.

Test Centre	Reason for Failure
Armagh	Distance check incorrect
Armagh	Sealing screw missing
Armagh	Fare charging programme (checksum) not approved
Armagh	Distance check incorrect
Armagh	Fare charging programme (checksum) not approved; and approved cable tie not fitted
Belfast	Fare charging programme (checksum) not approved
Belfast	Taxi Meter defective
Belfast	Taxi Meter defective
Ballymena	Taxi Meter defective
Ballymena	Taxi Meter defective
Coleraine	Taxi Meter defective
Coleraine	Printer defective
Coleraine	Fare charging programme (checksum) not approved
Cookstown	Distance check incorrect
Craigavon	Fare charging programme (checksum) not approved
Downpatrick	Sealing screw missing
Lisburn	No car registration number on customer receipt
Mallusk	Fare charging programme (checksum) not approved
Mallusk	Fare charging programme (checksum) not approved
Newbuildings	Distance check incorrect
Omagh	Fare charging programme (checksum) not approved

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has any plans to introduce an emergency area plan for towns and villages where no building area remains. (AQW 4637/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Councils are responsible for the preparation of new Local Development Plans (LDPs). I recognise the important role of councils in making decisions about the future development of their areas. The majority of councils are now working on the early stages of plan preparation in accordance with timetables agreed by my Department. In general, councils will wish to undertake a comprehensive review of the existing Area Plan for their district. This will include reviewing existing settlement development limits to ensure that they remain relevant to meeting the needs of the local community.

Existing Development Plans will operate as the Local Development Plans until new Plans are in place. Together with the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) and Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) existing Plans will provide the context for planning decisions until new Plans are in place.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will introduce an active travel bill.
(AQW 4642/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am very keen to promote active travel and that is one of the purposes of my strategic plan for greenways. This ambitious 25-year plan to develop a greenway network right across the north aims to give people ready access to a safe, traffic-free environment for health, active travel and leisure. Alongside this my officials have begun work to consider other ways in which active travel could be provided for and promoted and that work will consider whether an Active Travel Bill should be taken forward.

However, it is important to get the policy right from the outset. With that in mind I have asked officials to commence working on proposals for an active travel policy document.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the planned relocation of the Rivers Agency headquarters to Loughry is still going ahead in December 2016.
(AQW 4655/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Yes, the planned relocation of DfI Rivers headquarters to Loughry Campus in Cookstown is due to take place in December 2016. Work on the building in Loughry is well advanced. The main building structure is substantially complete, with construction work now focusing on external works and fitting out the building.

Staff in Rivers headquarters, currently based in Hydebank, will be in a position to move in from mid December 2016, assuming there are no unforeseen problems with the completion of the building.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many staff in the Rivers Agency have applied to be moved to other posts within the Northern Ireland Civil Service but have not yet been found new posts.
(AQW 4656/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have grouped the above four questions as they are all related to DfI Rivers relocation to Loughry. Within Rivers Agency there are two groups of staff and I have provided the detail you request by these groups:

- 1 General Service Staff
 - 15 General Service posts are being relocated to Loughry.
 - All but two members of staff have successfully been found head for head swaps with other Civil Servants who are content to work in Loughry. Work is currently ongoing to accommodate the remaining two members of staff.
- 2 Professional and Technical Staff
 - 41 Professional and Technical Staff posts are being relocated to Loughry. 23 of the staff in these posts are seeking a head for head swap.
 - The head for head swap process is currently ongoing with these staff and so it is too early to say with certainty what this process will deliver.
 - One of the benefits for Professional and Technical staff is that they are now within a Department which has a larger body of such staff, I therefore remain optimistic that it should be possible to accommodate all staff over time.

In addition to these posts there is a small number of existing vacancies which will also be filled in Loughry if funding permits.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many Rivers Agency staff have applied to be moved to other posts in in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.
(AQW 4657/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have grouped the above four questions as they are all related to DfI Rivers relocation to Loughry. Within Rivers Agency there are two groups of staff and I have provided the detail you request by these groups:

- 3 General Service Staff
 - 15 General Service posts are being relocated to Loughry.
 - All but two members of staff have successfully been found head for head swaps with other Civil Servants who are content to work in Loughry. Work is currently ongoing to accommodate the remaining two members of staff.
- 4 Professional and Technical Staff
 - 41 Professional and Technical Staff posts are being relocated to Loughry. 23 of the staff in these posts are seeking a head for head swap.
 - The head for head swap process is currently ongoing with these staff and so it is too early to say with certainty what this process will deliver.

- One of the benefits for Professional and Technical staff is that they are now within a Department which has a larger body of such staff, I therefore remain optimistic that it should be possible to accommodate all staff over time.

In addition to these posts there is a small number of existing vacancies which will also be filled in Loughry if funding permits.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether Rivers Agency staff will be relocated to Loughry against their will after assurances from the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development that they would only go if they wished.

(AQW 4658/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have grouped the above four questions as they are all related to DfI Rivers relocation to Loughry. Within Rivers Agency there are two groups of staff and I have provided the detail you request by these groups:

- 5 General Service Staff
- 15 General Service posts are being relocated to Loughry.
 - All but two members of staff have successfully been found head for head swaps with other Civil Servants who are content to work in Loughry. Work is currently ongoing to accommodate the remaining two members of staff.
- 6 Professional and Technical Staff
- 41 Professional and Technical Staff posts are being relocated to Loughry. 23 of the staff in these posts are seeking a head for head swap.
 - The head for head swap process is currently ongoing with these staff and so it is too early to say with certainty what this process will deliver.
 - One of the benefits for Professional and Technical staff is that they are now within a Department which has a larger body of such staff, I therefore remain optimistic that it should be possible to accommodate all staff over time.

In addition to these posts there is a small number of existing vacancies which will also be filled in Loughry if funding permits.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many Rivers Agency staff will be relocated to Loughry against their will.

(AQW 4659/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have grouped the above four questions as they are all related to DfI Rivers relocation to Loughry. Within Rivers Agency there are two groups of staff and I have provided the detail you request by these groups:

- 7 General Service Staff
- 15 General Service posts are being relocated to Loughry.
 - All but two members of staff have successfully been found head for head swaps with other Civil Servants who are content to work in Loughry. Work is currently ongoing to accommodate the remaining two members of staff.
- 8 Professional and Technical Staff
- 41 Professional and Technical Staff posts are being relocated to Loughry. 23 of the staff in these posts are seeking a head for head swap.
 - The head for head swap process is currently ongoing with these staff and so it is too early to say with certainty what this process will deliver.
 - One of the benefits for Professional and Technical staff is that they are now within a Department which has a larger body of such staff, I therefore remain optimistic that it should be possible to accommodate all staff over time.

In addition to these posts there is a small number of existing vacancies which will also be filled in Loughry if funding permits.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of (i) potholes; and (ii) street lights which have been reported online for the Fermanagh and Dungannon areas for the last two financial years.

(AQW 4666/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The online public reporting system (PIP) for potholes was only made available to the public during June 2015. As a consequence there were no potholes reported online during 2014/15 in either area. However, 173 were reported in the Fermanagh area and 104 in the Dungannon area during 2015/16.

The street lighting reporting system has been operational since April 2015 but can only produce reports on a Divisional basis. For the 2015/2016 financial year 1128 street lighting outages were reported across Western Division. Based on the total numbers of lights across the Division it could reasonably be assumed that around 15% of the online reports were in the Fermanagh area and 13% in the Dungannon area.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) the policy used to inform road users of road closures prior to and during planned works; and (ii) what methods are used.

(AQW 4667/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: When preparing temporary road closures, my officials will assess the impact on all road users, local services and those living alongside the works. The Department will endeavour to ensure that the general public and in particular those (frontagers) most affected are given advance notification of the necessary works and or road closures before the works commence. Initial consultation may involve organising local meetings, letter drops, leaflets, advance warning or information signs and advertisements in the local press. Responsibility for this normally lies with whoever is carrying out the work.

It is also normal practice that the PSNI, emergency services, schools, churches, bus services, etc are consulted and their views taken into account. Where such a road closure is to last more than two weeks the Department is required under legislation to advertise in the local press.

It is important to stress that roads do not remain closed for any longer than is absolutely necessary.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the dates and attendees of all meetings he has attended since May 2016 with Elgin Energy and their representatives in regard to planning application LA03/2015/0234.

(AQW 4691/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that I have not attended any meetings with Elgin Energy and/or their representatives regarding the planning application to which you refer, or on any other matter, since May 2016. Furthermore, I can also advise that I have not met with any solar energy company and/or their representatives during this time period.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the dates of all meetings held between him and solar energy companies and/or their representatives since May 2016.

(AQW 4692/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that I have not attended any meetings with Elgin Energy and/or their representatives regarding the planning application to which you refer, or on any other matter, since May 2016. Furthermore, I can also advise that I have not met with any solar energy company and/or their representatives during this time period.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the current street light repairs required within the Causeway Coast and Glens Council area.

(AQW 4712/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are currently 96 street lighting defects within the Causeway Coast and Glens Council Area.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of (i) train drivers; and (ii) conductors employed by Northern Ireland Railways in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4713/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The table below details the number of Train drivers and Conductors employed by NI Railways over the past five years.

Date	Train Drivers	Conductors
1 October 2016	134	109
1 October 2015	135	109
1 October 2014	134	106
1 October 2013	134	102
1 October 2012	133	93

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the timeline for the completion of Phase II of the upgrade of the Belfast to Derry railway line, including the passing loop; and (ii) the money that has been spent to date.

(AQW 4715/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the following:

- (i) The project is due for completion as scheduled by 31 December 2016.
- (ii) The costs to date are £34.96m and the project is expected to be delivered within budget.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many complaints have NI Water received over the last five years.

(AQW 4716/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The number of complaints that NI Water has received over the last five years is detailed in the table below:

Type of Complaint	Financial Year				
	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	April to September 2016
Telephone	73158	74316	70992	61316	32034
Written	3173	2505	2364	2269	1246
Total	76331	76821	73356	63585	33280

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the average response time for NI Water to address a reported incident. (AQW 4717/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Water's average response time to address reported incidents in 2015/16 is detailed in the table below:

Job Type	2015/16 Average Response Time
No Water Complaint	2 hours
Runoff Water Complaint	3 hours
Blocked Sewer Complaint	2.5 hours
Burst Water Main	3 hours

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many incidents of polluted drinking water have been reported to NI Water over the last five years.

(AQW 4718/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Water has advised that during the period 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2016, it had nine incidents reported of potential pollution of water taken from raw water sources prior to it undergoing treatment at NI Water assets. There was no impact to the quality of the drinking water supplied to customers in relation to these incidents.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline any new infrastructure projects planned by NI Water.

(AQW 4719/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: New infrastructure projects planned by NI Water are detailed in the table below:

Infrastructure projects planned by NI Water

- PC15 Water Mains Rehabilitation Framework
- East Belfast CSOs Screenings
- Stormwater Separation Programme for PC15
- Portadown DAP Stage 2
- Impounding Reservoir Audits.
- PC15 Water Mains Minor Works Framework.
- Sewer Structural Rehabilitation Package 3
- Sewer Structural Rehabilitation Package 4
- Portadown Drainage Area Network Improvements - Meadow Lane and Bann Street
- Kilkeel DAP Phase 1
- Ravenhill Avenue, Belfast, Sewer Upgrades
- Benone Upgrade of Vacuum Sewerage Network & Foul Vacuum Station
- Ravenhill Road Belfast - Storm Sewer Extension
- Killylane WTW to Crosshill SR Trunk Main Replacement (part)
- Belleek Meenacloybane Strategic Main Replacement.
- Eastleigh Dale/Pasadena Gardens, Belfast, Sewer Upgrade for DG5 removals.
- Silent Valley recreational facilities appraisal
- Queens Bridge, Belfast, Siphons Upgrade.
- 26 Ballyscullion Road Bellaghy DG5 at Risk Register
- Ballymena Flooding Study - Toome Rd
- Olympia Leisure Centre Windsor Park Storm Sewer Requisition
- Moneymore Road, Cookstown Sewerage Scheme
- Syonfin WPS to Dungoran SR 150mm DI Watermain Replacement
- A5 Western Transport Corridor
- Dunadry WWPS Upgrade
- Mourne Conduit Survey
- Ballycairn CSO, Coleraine, Upgrade.
- Milebush Park, Carrickfergus Flood Alleviation
- Bushmills & Portballintrae Drainage Area Plan Network Improvements
- Mourneview, Newcastle, Flood Alleviation
- Capital Maintenance Planning: Trunk Main Condition Grading (PC15 Year 2)
- Drumsough Road, Randalstown, Sewerage Scheme.
- Former Visteon Site Belfast Foul & Storm Sewer Extension
- Drumsesk Wastewater Header Tank - Feasibility Study
- Donaghbrook, Ballymoney - Flooding Alleviation
- Drumnagroon, Kernan Hill Rd, Craigavon Foul &

- Storm Sewer
- Hunters Mill, Annesborough Road, Lurgan, Storm Sewer Extension
 - Loughgall Road Portadown Storm and Foul Sewer Extensions
 - Kircubbin DAP CSO Upgrade
 - A6 Castledawson to Randalstown
 - Drumalane Rd, Newry Storm and Foul Sewers.
 - Appraisal of DG5 at risk register locations Phase 2
 - Bangor DAP Work Package 2: Rathmore Stream UIDs
 - Green Road, Ardglass, Foul and Storm Sewer.
 - Victoria Road, Belfast - Foul Sewer Extension and Storm Separation Investigation
 - Springwell Park, Groomsport
 - College Ave/ Shandon Drive, Bangor - Storm Sewer Requisition
 - Wastewater Marine Investment Scoping Study
 - Harberton Park / Kings Hall Storm Sewer Extension
 - Tullynakill Road WWTW Feasibility
 - Appraisal of DG5 at-Risk Register Locations (Mitigation Phase 3)
 - Brookhall Foul Sewer Extension
 - Grange Road Kilkeel Out of Sewer Flooding Feasibility Study
 - Foyle College, Limavady Road, Derry Storm Sewer
 - Legahory Craigavon, Replacement Watermains
 - Ballynure Road, Ballyclare Storm Sewer Extension
 - College Avenue, Belfast, Storm Sewer Extension.
 - 432 Crumlin Rd, Belfast - Storm Sewer Ext
 - Dublin Road Newry Out of Sewer Flooding
 - Upper Lisburn Rd, Belfast Storm Sewer Extension
 - Sperrin Drive, Sperrin Park Flood Alleviation
 - Appraisal of DG5 At-Risk Register Locations (Mitigation Phase 4)
 - Site at 9-11 Ballycraig Rd, Foul and Storm Sewer
 - 8-20 Sloans Street Dungannon Storm Sewer Extension
 - Lisnisky Lane, Portadown Foul Sewer Extension
 - Whyte Acres - Banbridge
 - Armagh Rd, Portadown, Foul Sewer Requisition
 - Birch Hill Road Antrim Foul & Storm Sewer Extensions
 - Glencam road Omagh Storm Sewer Extension
 - Maryville Avenue, Belfast, DG5 Appraisal
 - Roe Mill Road, Gorteen, Limavady Storm Sewer
 - Quoile Crescent, Downpatrick, Foul and Storm Sewer Replacement
 - Antrim Road, Templepatrick, Storm Sewer Extension
 - Railway Drain, Newry – Desilting, condition survey & associated civil work.
 - Millmount Village Dundonald Water Main Upgrades
 - Strathroy Link Road, Omagh
 - McClintock Street, Belfast, Storm Sewer Extension
 - Glencaw Park, Derry, Flood Alleviation Feasibility Study
 - Upper Hightown Road Newtownabbey Storm Sewer
 - Portglenone WWPS Access Road Culverting and Upgrading of Site Security Fence.
 - Ballygowan Road Belfast Storm Sewer Extension
 - Ballymena Showgrounds S.C. F&S sewer extension
 - Laganbank Sewer Investigation, Belfast
 - Saul Rd, Downpatrick Storm Sewer Extension
 - Rear of 11-13 Lurgan Rd, Banbridge Foul Sewer
 - 41 High Bangor Rd, Donaghadee - Foul Sewer Requisition.
 - East Belfast Integrated Catchment Modelling
 - Foyle Street, Londonderry Feasibility Study
 - 117 Mayo Street, Belfast Storm Sewer
 - 761 Upper N'ards Road, Belfast Storm Sewer
 - 131 Doagh Road Ballyclare Storm Sewer Extension
 - Agharan Road Newmills Storm sewer Extension
 - Lylehill Road, Templepatrick, Foul Sewer Extension.
 - Little Enler, Comber - Foul Sewer Extension
 - Courtney Hill, Newry, Storm Sewer Extension
 - Carran Hill WTW & Creamery Road Sewer Extension
 - Storm Water Separation
 - Derriaghy Rd, Lisburn - Storm Sewer Extension
 - Rathmoyle House, Mary Street, Ballycastle Storm Sewer
 - Rostrevor Road, Hilltown Storm Sewer Extension
 - WIIM Networks Work Packages & Verification(PC15 Year 2)
 - Crawfordsburn Way, Newtownards - Storm Sewer Extension
 - 59 Market Road, Ballymena, Storm Sewer
 - Northland Road, Londonderry, Storm and Foul Sewer Extensions.
 - Southern Regional College, Banbridge Storm Sewer
 - Castle Tower Special School, Trostan Avenue, Ballymena
 - 37 Limavady Road, Derry Storm Sewer Ext
 - Dunnamore Road, Dunnamore Storm Sewer Ext
 - Hillhead Road, Ballyclare Foul & Storm Sewer
 - PC15 Watermains Rehabilitation WP 12: Watermains Re-lining Bundle 1
 - Killyleagh Rd, Crossgar Foul Sewer Extension
 - Villawood Dromore Sewage Scheme
 - Desertcreat College, Cookstown, Foul Pumping Main Extension
 - Raceview Road, Broughshane Storm Sewer
 - PC15 Year 1- Asset Performance Miscellaneous Solutions Development
 - Skipperstone Road, Bangor, Foul & Storm Sewer Requisition
 - Oldtown Road, Bellaghy Foul Sewer
 - Mill Road. Newtownabbey, Storm Sewer Extension
 - Lapwing, Newtownards - Article 11 Enforcement Site

- Tandragee Road, Lurgan - Foul Sewer
- Edward St, Portadown Foul & Storm Sewer.
- 2-4 Cheston Street, Carrickfergus storm sewer
- Strangford Sewer Network Salinity Reduction
- Dreincourt , Armagh, Sewer Network Upgrade.
- 22 Upper Lisburn Rd, Belfast Storm Sewer
- Cloneen, Crew Rd Maghera Storm Culvert Repl
- Templepatrick Road, Ballyclare Foul Sewer
- Fashoda St, Belfast Storm Sewer Requisition.
- Omagh IPS Foul & Storm
- Glen Road, Belfast - Storm Sewer Extension
- PC15 PPRA Review of EP Water Mains Rehab Work Packages.
- Desertmartin Road, Tullynagee Road, Moneymore, Storm and Foul PM Extension.
- St Peter's High School Re-Development F&S Sewer
- Glenravel Rd Cargan Ballymena F&S sewer ext.
- Durham Street, Belfast Storm Sewer Extension.
- North Queen Street, Storm Sewer Extension
- A31 Magherafelt By-Pass, Watermain Diversions
- 165 Groomsport Rd, Bangor - Storm Sewer Upgrade
- Prince Andrew Way, Carrickfergus Foul Sewer
- Saintfield Road, Balloo Storm Sewer
- Mounthall Grange, Clonmakate Rd, Storm Sewer
- Ballyrobert Road Ballyclare Storm Sewer Extension
- Stewarts Hill, Armagh, Foul & Storm Sewer Extension
- Sheelin Park Flood Alleviation
- Dromore Street, Banbridge Foul Sewer Extension
- Cranfield Catchment , Kilkeel Storm Separation
- Carnagat Road Newry Foul & Storm Sewer Requisition
- Carnesure Park, Comber Foul Sewer Replacement
- Hallidays Road, Belfast , Storm Sewer
- Tollymore Rd, Newcastle Foul & Storm Sewer
- Galway Park & Galway Drive, Dundonald Storm Sewer
- Mossvale Rd, Dromore Foul Sewer Requisition
- Former Visteon Factory - watermain extension
- Magheraknock Road Ballynahinch Storm Sewer Extension
- Mill Street/Bridge Street ,Hilden ,Lisburn, Storm Sewer Extension
- Coney Island DAS
- Killymaddy Hill, Dungannon Storm sewer
- 106 Greencastle Road, Kilkeel, Storm Sewer Extension
- Lurgan Road, Moira - Storm Sewer Extension
- 55 Mountsandel Road Coleraine Storm Sewer
- Springfield Road, Portavogie Storm Sewer Extension
- DG5 Dunbarton Street Gilford Additional Studies
- SEC-1833 Hunters Mill, Downpatrick Art11
- Longstone St, Lisburn Storm Sewer Extension
- Obins Street Portadown Storm Sewer Extension
- 157 Larne Road, Ballymena Foul Sewer Ext.
- QUB Medical Centre University Terrace Storm Sewer Extension
- Ballyronan Road Magherafelt Storm Sewer Extension
- Glenard Road Newtownards Foul Sewer Extension
- 75 Kilkeel Rd, Annalong Storm Sewer Extension
- Glenford Grove, Newtownards - Foul & Storm Sewer Extension
- 2-24 Shore Road Greenisland Storm Sewer
- 336-344 Oldpark Road, Belfast F&S sewer req.
- 56 Knock Road, Ballymoney Storm Sewer Ext.
- 75-85 Cushendall Road, Ballymena, Storm and Foul Sewer Ext.
- Monteith Road Annaclone Foul & Storm Sewer Extensions
- 137-141 Ormeau Road Belfast Storm Sewer Extension
- Nutts Corner Road, Crumlin, Storm Sewer Extension
- Castle St, Comber - foul and storm sewer requisition
- Manse Road Ballygowan water main replacement
- Ravara Gardens, Bangor Foul Sewer
- Primacy Road, Bangor, Foul and Storm Sewer Extensions
- Glenwell Rd, Newtownabbey Storm Sewer
- Garvaghy Road, Portadown, Trunk Sewer and Syphons Base Maintenance and CCTV Study.
- 26 Crossgar Road, Saintfield foul and storm sewer
- Millennium Way, Lurgan (New Road Construction)
- Laurel Hill, Coleraine, Storm Sewer Extension
- Killynure Wood, Enniskillen Storm sewer
- The Cairn/Goldenview/Downview - Greenisland Foul & storm sewer extension
- Milltown Road, Ballymoney, Foul Sewer Extension
- Coa Road, Enniskillen Storm Sewer Ext.
- Princess Way, Portadown, Storm Sewer Extension
- Derrytrasna Road, Lurgan, Foul Pumping Main Extension
- Mahon Ave / Ripley Terrace Storm Sewer, Portadown
- Ben Crom Place, Kilkeel - Storm Sewer Extension
- Willow Gardens Dunmurry Sewer Extension
- Meadowvale, Dublin Rd, N'townstewart, Foul Sewer Extension.
- Brookmount Street, Belfast - Storm Sewer Extension
- Appraisal of DG5 At-Risk Register Locations (Mitigation Phase 5)
- Hillsborough Rd, Dromara Storm Sewer
- Brokerstown Road, Lisburn Storm Sewer
- Old Caulfield Rd Storm Sewer Extension, Castlecaulfield, Dungannon
- Knockbracken Road Newtownards Foul Sewer Ext
- Laurel Grove Newry Foul Sewer Extension
- Old Road Mayobridge Foul & Storm Sewer
- 142 Belfast Road, Antrim Storm Sewer Ext

- 152 - 154 Larne Rd, Carrickfergus
- Annsfield Close, Killyleagh Storm Sewer Extension.
- Lower Stanfield Street, Belfast, Storm Sewer Extension
- Donegal Avenue Whitehead Foul Sewer Extension
- Colebrooke Rd Fivemiletown Storm Sewer
- Magherafelt Town Centre Stormwater Management Project
- East Befast, Back Drainage Study.
- St Josephs Primary, Newry, Storm Sewer.
- Asset Performance CCTV Surveys 2015/16
- Moyola WTW to Mullaghaboy SR Trunk Main Replacement
- 642 Saintfield Rd, Carryduff Storm Sewer Extension
- Old Newry Road, Banbridge Foul Sewer Ext
- Coalisland Road Dungannon Storm Sewer Extension
- ONeill Park Ballymaguigan Foul & Storm Sewer Extension
- Orchardville and Finaghy Road North, Belfast Sewer Rehabilitation
- Fellows Hall Rd, Killylea Foul Sewer
- Caiseal Court, Ballyholland, Newry, Storm Sewer Extension.
- Favour Royal Road, Augher Foul Sewer
- 65-67 Coleraine Rd Portstewart Storm Sewer
- Moneymore Road, Magherafelt: Foul & Storm Sewer Extension
- Crossdened Row, Keady Storm Sewer Extension
- Hopefield Road, Portrush, Storm Sewer Extension
- 3A The Square, Moy Foul Sewer Ext.
- Adj 189 Donaghadee Rd, Bangor - Foul Sewer
- Society Street Coleraine Storm Sewer Extension
- Circular Road Belfast, Storm Sewer Extension
- Lismourne Place Strabane Foul Sewer Extension for Invest NI
- Roskeen Road, Moygashel, Dungannon, Foul Pumping Main and Storm Sewer
- Drumbeg Road Storm Sewer Extension
- Sion Mills Stable Block Foul Sewer
- Millbrook, Ballynahinch, Storm Sewer Extension
- Portadown DAP (Storage at Seagoe WWPS)
- Raby Street Belfast Sewer Alignment
- Ballywalter Road, Millisle Storm Sewer Extension
- 530 Shore Road, Belfast
- Chester Avenue Bangor Storm Sewer Extension
- Trostan Avenue, Ballymena, Foul Sewer Extension.
- The Hollows, Lurgan - Storm Sewer Requisition
- Culdaff Gardens, Derry Storm Sewer Extension
- Tobermore Rd, Magherafelt Storm Sewer
- Scarva Street Loughbrickland Pumping Main
- 163-165 Glen Road Belfast Storm Sewer Extension
- Commercial Way, Newtownabbey DG5 At-Risk-Register
- Hazelbank Rd, Coleraine Foul Sewer Extension
- Crawfords Hill Mains Replacement
- Ballyduff Road, Newtownabbey Storm Sewer Ext
- Flying Horse Rd, Downpatrick Sewer Extension
- Gracefield Road Magherafelt Storm Sewer Extension
- Killyman Street Moy Storm Sewer Extension
- Breagh Rd, Portadown - Storm Sewer
- Enniskillen Road Ballinamallard Storm Sewer Extension
- Cronstown Road, Newtownards, Storm Sewer Upgrade
- 20&22 Old Antrim Road, Ballymena Flood Alleviation
- Hillmount Crescent Tobermore Storm Sewer
- Hollywood Sewer Catchment Investigations Phase 2
- Strule River Omagh Trunk Water Main Repair
- Percy Lodge, Dromore Storm Sewer
- Ashley Drive Ballymoney Storm Sewer
- Mill Rd, Newtownabbey Foul and Storm Sewer
- PPRA's for Rehab Work Packages 2016/17
- Creevy Road, Lisburn Storm Sewer Extension
- Ferry Quarter, Shore Road, Strangford foul and storm sewer
- Glenmachan Street Belfast Storm Sewer for McDonalds
- Springfield Crescent, Belfast, Storm Sewer Extension
- Brooke Hall, Cairnshill Belfast Foul Sewer Extension
- Glenville Rd, Newtownabbey - Storm Sewer
- Woodlawn Park, Dungannon Storm & Foul sewer
- Orchardville WWPS Appraisal of Pumped Overflow and Inlet Sewer Upgrade
- Main street Belcoo Storm sewer ext
- Lisnablagh Road, Harpur's Hill, Coleraine Foul Sewer
- Chatham Road, Armoy, Watermain Replacement.
- Steelstown Road, Londonderry, Foul and Storm Sewer Extensions
- Shore Road, Glynn, Larne, Storm Sewer and Foul Pumping Main Extension

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many sewage treatment facilities are there in Northern Ireland. (AQW 4720/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Water has advised that it is currently responsible for operating 1,024 sewage treatment facilities across the North.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of fatal road accidents in each of the last five years on the Omagh to Ballygawley stretch of the A5.

(AQW 4722/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The most recent five year data available for fatal collisions on the A5 between Crevenagh Road Roundabout and Ballygawley Roundabout is as follows:

- March 2011 - March 2012 – 1 (on 2/4/11)
- March 2012 – March 2013 – nil
- March 2013 - March 2014 – 1 (on 18/9/13)
- March 2014 - March 2015 – nil
- March 2015 - March 2016 – 1 (on 17/12/15)

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail any new footpath schemes planned for Mid Ulster.

(AQW 4723/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: TransportNI plan to construct the following two footway schemes in the Mid Ulster District Council area during the current financial year:

- Granville Terrace, Granville (Approx 50m in length)
- Hillhead Road, Stewartstown (Approx 40m in length)

There are also plans to resurface the following footways during this financial year:

- U7701 Grove Way, Moygashel
- U5341 Davison Villas Castledawson
- U5005 Millburn Avenue Cookstown

Our budgets and programme of works for the financial year 2017/2018 have not yet been finalised.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many instances over the last three financial years has action been taken for improper use of a Blue Badge; and (ii) how each incident has been addressed.

(AQW 4726/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's contracted parking enforcement service provider deploys specialist Blue Badge Traffic Attendants (BB TAs) to take action aimed at preventing the improper use of Blue Badges.

When a BB TA detects a vehicle which is parked for the purposes of claiming a parking concession under the BB Scheme by displaying a valid BB which is being improperly used then they will address the incident by issuing a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN).

My Department's Parking Enforcement Unit maintains details of PCNs issued in these circumstances by calendar year rather than financial year.

Please see the table below for details of the PCNs issued for the improper use of Blue Badges for the last three complete calendar years and for 2016 to the end of September.

Year	PCNs issued
2013	87
2014	77
2015	224
2016 - to end September	137

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many water pipe leaks have been reported over the last five years.

(AQW 4730/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The number of leaks reported to NI Water over the last five years is detailed in the table below. The information is broken down to show the number of leaks identified by NI Water staff and by customer reports.

Financial Year	Internally detected	Customer Reported	Total
2011/12	9429	7621	17050
2012/13	8605	6195	14800
2013/14	8897	6731	15628
2014/15	8171	6083	14254

Financial Year	Internally detected	Customer Reported	Total
2015/16	8020	4942	12962
2016/17	3277	3184	6461
Totals	46399	34756	81155

Note: The numbers provided for 2016/17 are only for the first six months of the current financial year

The above table provides details of leaks repaired on water mains, communication pipes, valves and fire hydrants.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much money has been raised through water charges to businesses over the last three years.

(AQW 4731/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The amount of money raised by NI Water through water and sewerage, including trade effluent, charges to businesses over the last three years is detailed in the table below:

Financial Year	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Income Raised	£69,284,042	£67,370,620	£64,775,163

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the current value of the NI Water estate.

(AQW 4732/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have been advised by NI Water that the net book value of all fixed assets (excluding assets in the course of construction) at 30 September 2016 was £2,672m. These figures are unaudited and are taken from the NI Water's Fixed Assets Register. A breakdown by category is detailed in the table below.

Category	£
Land	24,182,625
Buildings	50,947,894
Civil Structures	419,009,827
Infrastructure	1,790,110,022
Mobile Plant and Vehicles	4,086,322
Fixed Plant	367,818,187
Information Technology	14,769,589
Land Management	597,586
Total	2,671,522,052

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the plans that NI Water have in preparation for winter.

(AQW 4733/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Water is planning to embark on the sixth year of its winter awareness campaign. The theme of the campaign this year will retain the well-established "Don't Wait Insulate" message. The company is engaging with a wide variety of stakeholders including my Department, and intends to use various media to advise customers on the prevention of frozen pipes and wastage caused by burst pipes. In addition, NI Water is also involved with other Utility companies in a well-established winter awareness campaign. As part of this campaign, key contact details of each of the organisations will be provided in a 'cut out and keep' advert in papers,

During September 2016, NI Water launched a new online mapping tool which displays real-time information on repairs and supply interruptions across the network. The mapping tool will enable customers to be kept informed during any severe weather incidents and can be accessed at the following link: <http://www.niwater.com/current-service-updates/>.

NI Water maintains a Major Incident Plan to provide a fully planned, reactive response to any incidents that may impact on customers, the environment or the business. Major Incident Plan training was undertaken during the year and refresh training and pre-exercise briefing will take place in advance of the winter period.

A NI Water mock incident exercise will be held on Thursday 20 October 2016. The aim is to practise and validate the company's incident management arrangements in a company-wide exercise. The exercise will test the Major Incident Plan, winter contingency plans, communications and logistics procedures, in preparation for the 2016/17 winter season.

NI Water also continues to progress a range of enhancements to its incident response capabilities, including:

- (i) Reviewing site specific contingency plans to cover critical pumping stations, trunk mains and critical infrastructure (e.g. power stations, hospitals and airports) for implementation ahead of December 2016;
- (ii) Continued development of NI Water's strategic approach to provision of Alternative Water Supplies; and
- (iii) Continued development of mutual aid arrangements.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether NI Water provide company cars for any employees; and (ii) if so to detail (a) how many; and (b) the cost to NI Water.

(AQW 4734/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Water has advised that it does not provide company cars to employees.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) to what extent the A6 dual carriageway between Dungiven and Derry will be co-funded by Europe; (ii) the extent of that funding and; (iii) which European programme will provide co-funding.

(AQW 4774/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department is continuing to assess the feasibility of several projects, including the A6, and will submit an application if and when the opportunity arises. At this stage, it is not possible to identify which European programme would be most suitable to provide the funding or the extent of the funding that would be available. My Department will continue in its efforts to apply for EU co-financing wherever possible.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) to what extent the A6 dual carriageway between Randalstown and Toome will be co-funded by Europe; (ii) the extent of that funding and; (iii) which European programme will provide co-funding.

(AQW 4775/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department is continuing to assess the feasibility of several projects, including the A6, and will submit an application if and when the opportunity arises. At this stage, it is not possible to identify which European programme would be most suitable to provide the funding or the extent of the funding that would be available. My Department will continue in its efforts to apply for EU co-financing wherever possible.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) to what extent is it envisaged that the A5 dual carriageway will be co-funded by Europe; (ii) to set out the extent of that funding and; (iii) which European programme will provide co-funding.

(AQW 4776/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department is continuing to assess the feasibility of several projects, including the A5, and will submit an application if and when the opportunity arises. At this stage, it is not possible to identify which European programme would be most suitable to provide the funding or the extent of the funding that would be available. My Department will continue in its efforts to apply for EU co-financing wherever possible.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much has NI Water spent on petrol and diesel over the last financial year.

(AQW 4816/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Water has advised that it spent £947,000 on petrol and diesel over the last financial year.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the cost to transport waste material from sewage plants for incineration over the last five years.

(AQW 4818/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The cost to transport waste material from sewage plants for incineration over the last five years is detailed below:

Financial Year Ending	Cost (£000)
31 March 2012	323
31 March 2013	451
31 March 2014	445
31 March 2015	438
31 March 2016	443
Total	2,100

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many cases have there been of sewage treatment plants breaking down over the last two years; and (ii) at which plants has this occurred.

(AQW 4820/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The number of breakdowns at Waste Water Treatment Works (WwTW) and the location of these facilities are detailed in the table below:

Year	Number of Incidents	Location of WwTW	
2014	17	Derryhale Belfast Banbridge Moneyreagh Ballymena Attical, Tullyframe Monea Dromore Drumaness	Saintfield Warringstown Hillsborough Ballygowan Killinchy Annsborough Portaferry Kilmore, Richill
2015	9	Dougan Place ST, Saintfield Tandragee Killinchy Annsborough	Kilmore Portaferry Eskragh Ballygowan

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure what training is provided to staff who test taxi meters; and what experience or qualifications do they require.

(AQW 4830/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Taximeter training for test centre staff is conducted in-house by the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) Technical Training Unit. It consists of one day classroom training with written guidance and practical demonstrations, including real time simulation of the test using training vehicles fitted with taximeters. Also available to staff are a number of short on-line videos, regularly updated in line with advances in taximeter design and fitting, providing step by step guidance on the process of testing and sealing newly approved models.

DVA consider that completion of in-house training on taximeter testing is sufficient to provide examiners with the skills to conduct taximeter tests.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of staff employed to repair streetlights in the Causeway Coast and Glens area, broken down over the last three years.

(AQW 4840/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Generally there is a minimum of one and a maximum of three maintenance vehicles repairing street lights in the Causeway Coast and Glens Area. This is very much dependent on the time of year and the actual number of lights reported out and therefore varies throughout the year.

It is the contractor's responsibility to make available whatever resources are necessary to meet the TransportNI contractual repair timescales. It therefore is not possible to determine a meaningful figure for staff employed to repair streetlights in the Causeway Coast and Glens area over the last three years.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on roads resurfacing schemes for the following roads in the Western Division, including any proposed start dates; (i) U0803 Baladoogh Road; (ii) U715 Ballynagilly Lane/Road; (iii) U0622 Kilmascally Road; (iv) U0633 Killycolpy Road; (v) U614 Derrycrin Road; (vi) U717 Creevagh Road; (vii) U5041 Ranaghan Road; (viii) U5001 Portna Road; (ix) U5006 Killycon Road; (x) U5064 Dreenan Road; (xi) C0051/U39/C546 Halfgayne Road; (xii) U5104 Creagh Hill Road; (xiii) U5099 Ballydermot Road; (xiv) U5108/U5109 Airfield Road; and (xv) U5241 Lisnamuck Hill.

(AQW 4875/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Sections on these roads have been identified for treatment as part of the Rural Roads Initiative and form part of a much larger programme of works across the Mid Ulster District Council area.

Work has already commenced on the Rural Roads Initiative within this area and is programmed to be completed before the end of the current financial year. However given the extent of this programme it is not possible to provide specific start dates for individual locations.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will give consideration to the provision of assistance in the driving theory test for people with learning difficulties.

(AQW 4883/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) provide the following arrangements to all driving theory test candidates, including people with learning difficulties, to assist them with their test:

- English audio voiceover which will read the onscreen text in English through headphones;
- A reader (a member of the test centre staff) to read the onscreen text;
- A recorder (a member of the test centre staff) to record responses to the multiple-choice questions; and
- Extra time (up to double time) to complete the test.

The English audio voiceover is available to all candidates and does not need to be pre-booked. However, where a candidate feels they have learning and reading difficulties, the additional arrangements outlined above can be provided, but must be requested at the time of booking and be supported by educational/medical evidence. There is no additional cost for any of these arrangements and both the reader and recorder assistance take place in a private testing suite with no other candidates present.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether Driver and Vehicle Agency and departmental staff at vehicle test centres are fully trained and qualified regarding all taxi meter and printer testing equipment.

(AQW 4895/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Taximeter training for test centre staff is conducted in-house by the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) Technical Training Unit. It consists of one day classroom training with written guidance and practical demonstrations, including real time simulation of the test using training vehicles fitted with taximeters. Also available to staff are a number of short on-line videos, regularly updated in line with advances in taximeter design and fitting, providing step by step guidance on the process of testing and sealing newly approved models.

DVA consider that completion of in-house training on taximeter testing is sufficient to provide examiners with the skills to conduct taximeter tests.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has given consideration to introducing a residents' parking scheme in the Gallows Hill area of Omagh as part of a wider traffic management approach for the Gallows Hill James Street / Kevlin Road area of the town.

(AQW 4897/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can confirm that my Department has given consideration to the need for a residents parking scheme in the Gallows Hill area of Omagh.

For an area to be considered suitable for the introduction of a residents parking scheme, more than 60% of the available kerbside space must be occupied by non residents for more than five hours each day, Monday to Friday, between 8am and 6pm and more than 80% of all parking must also be occupied for the same time.

TransportNI undertook parking occupancy surveys in the Gallows Hill area in 2012 to obtain the non residential and overall parking levels. The surveys confirmed that only 43% of parking in the Gallows Hill area was occupied by non residents with only 61% of the total parking available occupied. Recent site observations indicate that parking levels have not changed significantly since this survey was undertaken. Given this position, there are no plans at this time to introduce a residents parking scheme in the Gallows Hill area.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 3029/16-2,; whether he can ensure the correlation of a vehicle VIN number and taxi meter serial number will be fully considered as a legislative requirement, separate to the planned review of taxi legislation, to ensure traceability of all meters.

(AQW 4910/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Department has no plans, outwith the review of taxi policy and legislation, to consider this issue. However I expect that it will be considered as part of the review.

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he plans to upgrade the road network in Bushmills village.

(AQW 4973/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's TransportNI has programmed Upper Main Street, Bushmills for resurfacing. However as there are a number of other, higher priority, schemes that need to be delivered first, I am unable to provide a timescale for these works at this time. Currently there are no other plans to upgrade the road network in Bushmills village.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) how many taxi drivers has the Driver and Vehicle Agency sent for medical testing prior to renewal of their licence; and (ii) of these how many had results which (a) led to a renewal refusal; and (b) allowed the renewal; broken down by each of the last two calendar years to date.

(AQW 5003/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Taxi drivers are required by law to notify the Department if they become aware that they have a medical condition that may impact on their ability to drive a taxi. In addition, first time applicants and those aged 45 years or over are required to submit a medical questionnaire which is completed by their GP. As medical standards for taxi drivers are higher

than those required for car drivers, in all cases where a medical condition is declared that may impact on the applicant's ability to drive a taxi, the Driver & Vehicle Agency acts on the expert advice provided by the Occupational Health Service (OHS).

The Department's current computer system, that holds information on licensed taxi drivers, cannot easily facilitate a breakdown of OHS referrals which specifically relate to the renewal of a taxi driver's licence. In addition, an application for a taxi driver's licence can be refused for a number of reasons and the computer system cannot easily identify those applications which have been refused on medical grounds. A project is underway to replace the current system, which will allow greater access to management information and the ability to interrogate the data held on the system.

The following table provides the total number of medical referrals for taxi drivers.

	2014-15	2015-16
Total number of referrals to OHS for taxi drivers	1269	1125

Source: OHS Director's Report

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his Department's role in relation to the Northern Ireland Drainage Council.

(AQW 5005/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Drainage Council is a non-Departmental Public Body under the terms of the Drainage (NI) Order 1973. This legislation determines the membership of this body which includes two representatives from my Department. One represents drainage interests, the other strategic planning. My Department also provides secretariat and administrative support to the Drainage Council.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much funding has the Northern Ireland Drainage Council received from his Department over the last two year period.

(AQW 5006/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Drainage Council has no budget and the members of this body receive no salary. The running costs for the Drainage Council consists only of venue and travel expenses and these are paid by my Department.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) on how many occasions in the last twelve months has the six-car set on the 07:30 train exiting Whitehead on the Larne Line been reduced to a three-car set; and (ii) how will his Department reduce the risk of resulting overcrowding.

(AQW 5067/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) The 07.30 departure from Whitehead to Great Victoria Street operated as three car set on 15 occasions in the last 12 months due to either mechanical or operational issues.

Translink also schedules a three car set to operate during the summer and other holiday periods when passenger loadings are significantly reduced.

On the occasions when the train is formed by a three car set I understand passengers can be diverted onto alternative services, such as the service leaving nine minutes later at 8:

- (ii) 04 am from Whiteabbey which is a six car set (originating in Derry).

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how his Department plans to address the issue of motorists using the hard shoulder outside the Gosford Forest Park entrance as a parking area; and (ii) how his Department has worked with NI Forest Services to address the issue.

(AQW 5070/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I understand the issue at this location relates to parking on the hard shoulder to access Gosford Forest Park. I would advise that my Department's TransportNI has no power to deal with parking here but instances of obstruction may be dealt with by the PSNI.

I can confirm that senior officials have met with PSNI, Council Officials and Forestry Service staff to provide advice and discuss how this matter can be resolved. It is the view of my Department's TransportNI that the current charging operation contributes to parking on the hard shoulder. This is an operational matter for Forestry Service to consider and I understand that a review is to be carried out. I can confirm that my Department will continue to offer advice and support as appropriate and that a review of the speed limit will also be carried out here in conjunction with the PSNI.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to detail how many schools have specific road safety signage installed in close proximity to their school entrances in Mid Ulster; and (ii) whether this signage will be implemented to all schools in Mid Ulster.

(AQW 5099/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has a statutory duty to promote road safety and, within the context of the Road Safety Strategy, does this through a range of rolling road safety educational activities and engineering initiatives.

My Department continues to take a range of actions to reduce deaths and serious injuries on our roads and focuses on the key causes of road casualties, and on groups which are over-represented in the casualty figures. Children and young people are amongst the most vulnerable groups using our roads and as such must be taught how to use our roads safely, both in the school vicinity and in the wider community.

As over 95% of road traffic collisions where someone is killed or seriously injured are due to human error, there are a number of types of risks to children's safety at schools arising from road traffic and driver behaviour. Therefore, in addition to my Department's portfolio of educational activities, we also help improve safety by encouraging drivers to reduce their speed and reminding them of school children in the area through engineering initiatives. One such example is the use of road safety signage in close proximity to school entrances.

There are currently 42 schools within the Mid Ulster Council Area that have Safer Routes to School Signage adjacent to the school.

TransportNI has a school assessment procedure which enables each request to be assessed and prioritised based on collision history, mean speed, traffic volumes and existing local infrastructure measures. These projects are placed on a programme of works for each Council area and delivery will depend on the level of capital funding made available to my Department in each financial year.

I am committed to continuing to work towards reducing deaths and serious injuries on our roads. I recognise the continuing challenges of preventing road deaths and serious injuries and will continue to ensure that my Department uses the tools at its disposal to address the issues.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline how his Department is ensuring that rural dwellers receive adequate public transport provision.

(AQW 5101/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I recognise the importance of providing for the transport needs of those who live in rural areas. To address these needs my Department takes a series of measures:

- Translink is subsidised to provide an Ulsterbus network. Financial constraints mean this is not as comprehensive as in urban areas but it remains extensive.
- My Department directly grant funds Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTPs) to provide Dial-a-Lift services, a transport option for individuals living in rural areas who are unable to, or have difficulty accessing local basic services due to a lack of transport (e.g. access to a car or public transport). I secured Social Investment Funding recently to extend Dial-A-Lift services in parts of the North. In some larger towns in rural areas the Disability Action Transport scheme also operates.
- The Assisted Rural Transport Scheme (ARTS) is jointly funded by my Department and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). It allows individuals with a valid SmartPass to travel for free or half fare on the Dial-a-Lift services operated by their local Community Transport operator.
- My Department is also currently taking forward work, along with the Departments of Health and Education and a number of other key stakeholders including Translink, to consider how all of the resources available for public passenger transport could be used better to provide improved integrated transport options for users (including those living in rural areas) and better value for money to the public purse.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the different taxi meter brands on the Driver and Vehicle Agency approved meter list.

(AQW 5111/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has approved the following eight brands of taximeters:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| ■ Aquila; | ■ Hale Taximeters; | ■ Alberen; |
| ■ Digitax Automotive Electronics; | ■ Viking; | ■ Tetax; and |
| | ■ Autocab; | ■ Cygnus |

These details are published on the nidirect website as the 'DfI Approved Taximeter and Printer List'. They can be found at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/DfI-approved-taximeter-and-printer-list-13-October-2016.pdf>

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 3092/16-21, to detail (i) what constitutes a live site; and (ii) the different stages of adoption.

(AQW 5114/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A live site is one that as part of its planning permission, has received a determination in accordance with the Private Streets (NI) Order 1980. In the majority of cases the development will have commenced however the stage of construction can vary significantly from site to site with in some cases only house foundations being in place while other developments are largely complete.

TransportNI issues four stages of construction for adoption of road infrastructure and upon completion of each stage a reduction in bond is given.

The four stages are detailed as below:

50% bond reduction stage

The main requirements to satisfy this bond reduction stage are:

- Sub-base, road-base and kerbing is complete,
- Road drainage is complete,
- Sightlines are in place,
- Article 161 agreement with NI Water is in place.

70% bond reduction stage

The main requirements to satisfy this bond reduction stage are:

- All of the items in the 50% stage along with the construction of the roads and footways to base course level,
- All ironwork complete,
- Technical approvals and geotechnical certifications are completed if required.

90% bond reduction Stage - Preliminary Certificate

In order for a Preliminary Certificate to be issued, all of the items in the 50% and 70% stages have to be completed and free from all defects at this point, including the following:

- Street Lighting approved,
- Final surface laid on the roads, verges and footways,
- NI Water has issued a Preliminary Certificate for the sewerage network.

Adoption

This takes place 12 months after a Preliminary Certificate has been issued provided no further problems have arisen and TransportNI receives final certification of the sewerage infrastructure from NI Water. The final bond reduction of 10% is then released.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the amount spent in Fermanagh and South Tyrone through the rural roads scheme.

(AQW 5116/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Financial information is not available on a constituency basis however £4 million of the £10 million rural roads initiative budget has been allocated to TransportNI's Western Division. Of this £758k has been allocated to the Mid Ulster South (Dungannon) Section Office and £790k has been allocated to the Fermanagh & Omagh West (Fermanagh) Section Office area.

These Section Offices cover the Fermanagh & South Tyrone constituency, however, you should note that part of the area controlled by the Mid Ulster South (Dungannon) Section Office falls into the Mid Ulster constituency and therefore some of their funding will be spent in that area.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail who in his Department is responsible for the approval and testing of meter tariffs.

(AQW 5119/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's Road Safety & Vehicle Regulation Division (RSVRD) and the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) are collectively responsible for establishing the approval criteria for taximeters.

RSVRD is responsible for specifying the maximum fare charges and the DVA is responsible for the delivery of the taximeter approval and testing scheme.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether it is a functional requirement for acceptance onto the approved meter and printer list that the printer has Paper Out and Printer Disconnect as prerequisites for inclusion.

(AQW 5120/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The current taximeter approval criteria do not require a taximeter to cease functioning when the printer is out of paper or when the printer is disconnected from the taximeter. Therefore, not all taximeter and printer combinations recorded on the taximeter and printer approval list have been subject to a paper out or printer disconnect requirement.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether all meters and printers accepted onto the approved meter and printer list have the printer Paper Out and Printer Disconnect requirement.

(AQW 5121/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The current taximeter approval criteria do not require a taximeter to cease functioning when the printer is out of paper or when the printer is disconnected from the taximeter. Therefore, not all taximeter and printer combinations recorded on the taximeter and printer approval list have been subject to a paper out or printer disconnect requirement.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail who in his Department is responsible for the approval and testing of meter types.

(AQW 5122/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's Road Safety & Vehicle Regulation Division (RSVRD) and the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) are collectively responsible for establishing the approval criteria for taximeters.

RSVRD is responsible for specifying the maximum fare charges and the DVA is responsible for the delivery of the taximeter approval and testing scheme.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on (i) the proposed new Ballymena bus and train station; and (ii) the extension of the local Park and Ride.

(AQW 5145/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise you that:

- (i) Translink has completed an initial high level study of the site and is now progressing the appointment of an Integrated Design Team to undertake a detailed feasibility study and develop a number of costed options.
- (ii) The existing site has no capacity for the Park and Ride to be extended. However, if a suitable site can be identified and acquired, it would be Translink's intention to progress this as a separate business case ahead of the main station redevelopment scheme.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many taxi drivers has the Driver and Vehicle Agency sent for medical testing prior to renewal of their licence; and (ii) of these, how many had results which were inconclusive and required further testing before the (a) granting; and (b) refusal of a licence, broken down for each of the last two calendar years to date.

(AQW 5168/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Department's current computer system, that holds information on licensed taxi drivers, cannot easily facilitate a breakdown of Occupational Health Service (OHS) referrals which specifically relate to the renewal of a taxi driver's licence. In addition, an application for a taxi driver's licence can be refused for a number of reasons and the computer system cannot easily identify those applications which have been refused on medical grounds. A project is underway to replace the current system, which will allow greater access to management information and the ability to interrogate the data held on the system.

On average around 80% of all referrals to OHS are concluded by OHS medical experts without the need for further information or additional tests. The table below provides an overview.

	2014-15	2015-16
Total number of referrals to OHS for taxi drivers	1269	1125
Total number of referrals concluded by OHS	977	964
Total number where further information or testing was required	292	161

Source: OHS Director's Report

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department can produce the Measuring Instruments Directive certificates for all taxi fare meters passed as approved by the Department.

(AQW 5171/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: All taximeters presented for approval and subsequent use in licensed taxis must be compliant with the European Directive 2004/22/EC (The Measuring Instruments Directive).

My Department can produce copies of certificates to confirm that each taximeter approved for use in licensed taxis, and recorded on the published 'DfI Approved Taximeter and Printer List', has been constructed in compliance with the Measuring Instruments Directive.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether his Department had any problems reading tariffs; and (ii) if so, to detail how long did it take to notify the manufacturers.

(AQW 5172/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA), within my Department, is responsible for approving taximeter tariff programmes and ensuring their compliance with the regulated maximum fares. Certain tariff programmes supplied by the taximeter manufacturer are complex in structure and on occasions have been difficult to interpret. Where difficulties arise, the DVA aims to notify the relevant taximeter manufacturer within two working days of receipt of the programme.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has passed any tariffs with selectable rates that exceed the real time calendar equivalent time structure.

(AQW 5173/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA), within my Department, is responsible for approving taximeter tariff programmes and ensuring their compliance with the regulated maximum fares.

The taximeter manufacturer is responsible for writing the tariff programmes and passing these to the DVA for assessment and approval. On the basis of the information provided by the taximeter manufacturer, the DVA has only approved a tariff with selectable rates that do not exceed the real time calendared maximum fares.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has passed any meters on which the driver/operator is able to change the date and time to enable more expensive fares.

(AQW 5174/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA), within my Department, is responsible for approving taximeters and fare charging programmes for use in licensed taxis.

The taximeter and programme combinations, approved by the DVA, do not provide for the driver to change a programmed date or time that would facilitate the customer being charged a fare that exceeds the regulated maximum fare.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether Transport NI maintain responsibility for county boundary signage in County Tyrone; and (ii) how many County Tyrone boundary signs are in place throughout the county.

(AQW 5176/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: TransportNI do not have responsibility for county boundary signage and officials therefore have no record of the number of such signs in place at the boundary of County Tyrone.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department will carry out an inquiry into water and sewage treatment works that are constructed near to or beside inland waterways to be assured that all is being done to ensure that there are no more discharges into waterways.

(AQW 5210/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Water operates an Environmental Management System (EMS), externally accredited to ISO14001, which is used by the Company, to minimise the risk of chemical discharges from NI Water sites.

NI Water is very mindful of the crucial role it plays in the protection of the local environment and treats each and every pollution incident with the utmost seriousness. Following any incident, NI Water undertakes a full investigation to establish the cause of the incident and to ensure that any lessons learned are applied across the organisation to ensure all reasonable steps are taken to minimise the risk of accidental discharges to the environment. NI Water has already commenced this process for the recent incident at Annsborough Waste Water Treatment Works. As with any water company, it is impossible to guarantee zero discharges across the entirety of its estate and both the Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland and the NI Environment Agency work closely with NI Water to monitor any such discharges.

Notwithstanding this, NI Water is fully cognisant of the impact of any incident and deeply regrets the distress they can cause to local communities. For this reason, NI Water is absolutely committed to doing all it can to ensure that all steps are taken to avoid such occurrences. In addition, on the rare occasions that they do take place, NI Water will play a full part with local stakeholders and statutory agencies to mitigate and address the short and long term effects of any discharge.

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he would consider the introduction of a lower speed limit covering the series of junctions servicing (i) Markethill town; (ii) Gosford Forest Park; (iii) Mullaghbrack Road; and (iv) Tandragee Road on the main A28.

(AQW 5249/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's TransportNI has already received a request to review the speed limit along the A28 from the Tandragee Road junction to the Mullaghbrack Road junction which will encompass all of the locations to which you refer. I can confirm that the assessment has commenced and will be carried out in conjunction with PSNI using the current policy and guidance.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the Gas to the West project.

(AQW 5263/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A planning application for this project was received by my Department on 3 October 2016 and the accompanying Environmental Statement was received on 18 October 2016. My officials in Strategic Planning Division are now in a position to commence the statutory application process which will include advertisement in the local press and consultation with a wide range of statutory bodies.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to the Castledawson Park and Ride facility, to detail (i) when the proposed expansion is expected to be completed; (ii) how many new spaces are being added; (iii) what the total number of spaces will be on completion; and (iv) how many of these spaces will be disabled spaces.

(AQW 5270/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Officials are currently taking forward the vesting process to acquire the land necessary to facilitate the extension of the Park and Ride facility close to Castledawson Roundabout. It is expected that the Vesting Order will become operative in November 2016 and that construction will commence before the end of this year to allow the extension to become operational in Spring 2017.

The extension to the existing Park and Ride facility will provide an additional 192 spaces including 10 disabled spaces. These parking spaces are in addition to the 78 spaces which are currently available.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many staff work for the Driver and Vehicle Agency.

(AQW 5285/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As at 14 October 2016 the Driver & Vehicle Agency had 785 staff in post.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the main functions of the Driver and Vehicle Agency.

(AQW 5286/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The main functions of the Driver & Vehicle Agency are:

- vehicle and driver testing;
- driver licensing – issuing and, where appropriate, withdrawing licenses in respect of drivers of cars, motorcycles, lorries, buses, etc;
- driving and riding instructor registration – assessing the suitability of applicants, checking tuition standards, the delivery of Compulsory Basic Training and taking appropriate action when instructors fail to meet required standards;
- passenger transport licensing – issuing and, where appropriate, withdrawing licenses in respect of bus and taxi operators and taxi drivers, and licensing public service vehicles for both the bus and taxi industries;
- compliance audits and enforcement of licensing, roadworthiness and other legal requirements for goods and passenger carrying operators and their vehicles;
- other requirements in relation to vehicles including Transport's Internationaux Routier checks, collision investigations and checking repair work following defect/prohibition notices; and
- technical vehicle and driver standards – ensuring DVA fulfils its legal obligations in respect of the provision of statutory vehicle and driver tests, providing technical advice to assist in the review and development of legislation that may affect the vehicle and driving testing environment.

Further details can be found in the Agency's Business Plan 2016/17 and Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2016. These can be found at <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/topics/road-users/driver-vehicle-agency>

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the cost per procedure to the Driver and Vehicle Agency for a taxi licence renewal medical in the event of a health query.

(AQW 5292/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Occupational Health Service (OHS) do not charge per procedure, but charge an annual fixed flat rate for taxi driver referrals, under the terms of a service level agreement. Where further medical consultation is also required, the costs are charged on a case by case basis and vary depending on the individual circumstances. The table below provides a breakdown of the medical costs for taxi drivers for the 2015/16 financial year.

OHS Fixed Flat Rate	£60,000.00
Medical Consultants Fees	£56,317.20
Disability Action	£1,250.00
Total	£117,567.20

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure why street lighting was not provided at the rear of the housing association development in Cumran Park, Clough.

(AQW 5407/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The roads and entries to the rear of the housing association development in Cumran Park, Clough are not adopted. These areas are therefore outside TransportNI's area of responsibility as far as the provision of street lighting is concerned.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what measures are being put in place to reduce the impact on local businesses and residents of the four-week road closure, due to the resurfacing work on a section of Ballymiscaw Road, Hollywood.

(AQW 5447/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that I and my officials understand the concerns of local residents and businesses that are affected by the current resurfacing of Ballymiscaw Road, Hollywood.

Prior to the commencement of this much needed resurfacing scheme, which is programmed to run from the 6 October 2016 to 5 November 2016, advance information boards were erected and information letters provided to residents/businesses. To further assist the garage, which is within the road closure, a Variable Message Sign has been placed at the Church Road end of the scheme displaying information on the works and access to the garage.

The Member can be assured that my officials are working closely with the contractor to ensure disruption to affected residents, businesses and road users is minimised during the road works.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) the rationale; and (ii) any additional costs as a result of the delays in the completion of Millennium Way, Lurgan.

(AQW 5475/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Despite good progress with the construction of the new section of Millennium Way, progress has been slower than expected at both the Flush Place/Gilford Road/Banbridge Road and Millennium Way/Malcolm Road junctions.

At Flush Place equipment from a significant number of utility providers' including BT, NIE, NIW, Virgin Media, Eircom and Firmus Gas has required to be altered. Considerable advance works were undertaken to facilitate the extension to Millennium Way scheme, however, a number of the utility providers have been unable to complete their works in accordance with the timeframes required. This has had subsequent implications for the progress of the main construction works.

At Malcolm Road there are a number of high and low voltage electricity cables in the existing carriageway. Working around these cables has proved more difficult than anticipated and this has limited progress at the junction. To facilitate construction of the junction NIE is progressing a programme of works during October and November.

It is also important to note that in order to minimise disruption to traffic and businesses in the area during the busy Christmas period works on the live carriageways will be limited during December.

You will appreciate that this is a complex issue and at this time I am not in a position to confirm the additional costs as a result of these delays at this time.

TransportNI will continue to work with the construction contractor and utility providers to complete the works as soon as possible and will endeavour to minimise delays during the remainder of the works.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the dualling of the A26.

(AQO 505/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The 5 mile (or 8 kilometre) long A26 dualling scheme between Glarryford and the A44 Drones Road junction forms part of the key transport route between Belfast, the north coast, and some of the provinces most popular tourist attractions. The scheme represents a significant £55million investment by the Executive and has provided a welcome boost to the local economy.

Construction of the scheme commenced in April 2015, and I am very pleased to advise that work has been progressing well – to date, approximately 70% of the works are complete – so we are on programme for completion by summer 2017.

The majority of earthworks are substantially complete and work is well advanced on all major structures, with six substantially complete. Construction of the new carriageway is also progressing well.

Once fully completed, this scheme will reduce journey times during peak hours, improve journey time reliability and improve the safety performance along this section of the A26.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the steps being taken to reduce the likelihood of incidents of flooding in West Tyrone.

(AQO 511/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Firstly, it is worth highlighting that my Department is constantly on alert to the threat of flooding, so that preparations can be made in good time to minimise the impact of flooding events.

As you will be aware, my Department is the Lead Department in this area and proactive approach has already provided positive benefits in improving the overall Government response to flooding emergencies. This was recognised in the recent Northern Ireland Audit Office report on Flood Prevention and Management, and I plan to build on this success.

My Department carries out routine inspections and maintenance to various drainage systems to ensure they are in free flowing conditions.

Multi-Agency Emergency Response Plans are in place, and emergency stores and equipment are fully stocked and prepared.

The three agencies (DfI Rivers, TransportNI and NI Water) rely heavily on multi-agency response which is co-ordinated by the appropriate district council. Where flooding emergencies have a wide-spread effect across different localities, there are central strategic co-ordination arrangements in place.

My Department carries out detailed investigations of flood events when they do occur and constructs flood defences to protect against flood conditions. There is such a study being conducted into the Clady floods and, if viable works are identified, these will be prioritised and programmed as funding allows.

All these measures help us to be prepared for flooding events - and I hope this provides assurance that my Department is proactive in this area.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Infrastructure following the recent accident involving two school children, whether he will carry out an immediate safety assessment of the Scarva Road junction in Banbridge .

(AQW 5568/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: All collisions on our roads are indeed regrettable but those involving young school children are especially traumatic for their families and all involved.

You will be aware of the many measures my Department has taken to educate road users with the intention of reducing collisions and injuries on our roads, most recently through the 'road to zero' campaign.

The PSNI investigation will follow its course and the police will provide my officials with any relevant information so engineers can consider any viable measures to avoid such a collision in the future.

Regarding the Scarva Road itself, I can advise that in the vicinity of the school there are clear road markings including central hatching and red warning patches on the road. There are also flashing school warning signs which flash at the relevant times of day when school children are on the move.

I can also advise that a review of the location was carried out over the summer and additional SCHOOL KEEP CLEAR yellow zig-zag markings have been provided on the Scarva Road at St Patrick's College entrance.

Regarding the nearby junction I can advise that this crossroads is fully signalised with fully controlled pedestrian crossings on all legs of the junction. In recent years these crossings were upgraded and have been fitted with the latest PUFFIN technology which will hold traffic on red until it senses that all pedestrians using the crossing have safely crossed the road

I can also add that my Department's TransportNI will be happy to work with the Education Authority and the school to assist in identifying steps they can take to improve safety for their pupils.

I was very sorry to hear of the injuries sustained by the two young girls and I wish them a speedy return to full health and I can assure you that my officials will review the information with the PSNI when the accident investigation is complete to identify if there are any further measures which can be considered for the Scarva Road.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Infrastructure why Transport NI is removing granite kerbstones from North Belfast and transporting them for use in South Belfast.

(AQO 512/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Departments TransportNI is carrying out a footway resurfacing scheme on Sunningdale Park which started on 30 August 2016 and will last for 10 weeks.

The scheme included the removal of existing granite kerbs and replacement with concrete kerbs.

To re-lay the existing granite kerbs and replace any broken granite ones would have added a significant cost to the scheme and jeopardised its delivery in this financial year.

The undamaged granite kerbs will be taken to Rathmore storage depot for re-use in other resurfacing schemes on main roads and in conservation areas within the North Belfast area.

Mrs Little Pengelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline any proposed investment in roads infrastructure in South Belfast.

(AQO 514/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As the member will be aware the first phase of Belfast Rapid Transit, which my Department is currently developing, will connect East Belfast, West Belfast and Titanic Quarter via the city centre. The intention is to extend the network to the north and south of the city, subject to the success of Phase 1 and the availability of funding. The route to the south will be subject to a feasibility study and public consultation but it is anticipated that it will terminate at Cairnshill Park & Ride.

As Park & Ride usage across Belfast continues to grow, my Department has lodged a Planning Application for an additional 300 parking spaces at Blacks Road Park & Ride which will more than double the available parking at this site, which currently operates at capacity. It is hoped to commence work on this expansion in 2017/18.

I am also pleased to confirm plans to spend just over £1M on resurfacing work on a number of roads in the South Belfast area and almost £200k on Local Transport and Safety Measures. These will include the provision of new Puffin crossing facilities on the Lisburn Road and Tates Avenue and two traffic calming remedial schemes at Ladybrook Park and Shandon Park.

I can also confirm plans to invest £300k on a segregated cycleway along Middlepath Street between the Queen Elizabeth II bridge and Island Street. This will form a key link in our cycle network between the East and the West of the City.

Details of all the work being carried out by TransportNI in the South Belfast area can be found in TransportNI's report to Belfast City Council, available on the Departmental website.

Mr Poots asked the Minister for Infrastructure what discussions his departmental officials have had with Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council on developing the Knockmore/Sprucefield link road.

(AQO 515/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Officials from TransportNI have met with their counterparts from Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council on a number of occasions to discuss the Knockmore Link Road.

Most recently, the Eastern Division Manager met with Council representatives on 4 October 2016, to discuss the opportunities for progressing the proposal.

The Knockmore Link is identified in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan as a non-strategic road scheme to be developed and funded, either in full or for a very substantial part.

While officials from TransportNI have been involved in discussions, the Council has agreed that it will take the lead in delivering the scheme.

Officials from my Department will continue to support the delivery of this scheme through technical advice and assistance.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the spending on road maintenance in Mid Ulster for the last year.
(AQO 516/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Structural Maintenance is the collective term for activities which maintain the integrity of the road and footway structure. The main activities include resurfacing and reconstruction, surface dressing, patching and structural drainage.

Structural maintenance comprises good value, planned maintenance activities, such as resurfacing and surface dressing, as well as less efficient, reactive patching. It also includes improvements to the rural road drainage system. It does not include routine maintenance activities - such as grass cutting or winter maintenance.

Maintaining the surfaces and underlying structures of roads and footways is essential for the social and economic well-being of the north and is a high priority for TransportNI.

My Department's TransportNI does not analyse or maintain records of maintenance expenditure on a constituency basis. Rather, expenditure in TransportNI is analysed by District Council area.

Total structural maintenance expenditure during 2015-16 across the Mid Ulster Council area was some £6.5m.

Of course, it is always the case that if more funding was available, more maintenance work would be carried out and I can assure you that TransportNI will continue to make strong bids for additional structural maintenance funds at every opportunity. In the meantime, TransportNI will continue to make the best use of resources available to it to develop and maintain the road network.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Infrastructure what are his departmental engineers' road priorities, until 2021.
(AQO 517/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As set out in the New Programme for Government, my Department's desired high level outcomes are to 'improve transport connections for people goods and services' and to 'increase the use of public transport and active travel'.

With these high level outcomes in mind, I will be setting out an Action Plan of projects for delivery. That Action Plan includes a number of flagship transport projects, which were identified in the 2016-2017 Budget, and will take priority.

In addition to these flagship capital projects my department will continue to prioritise routine maintenance programmes.

It is my intention that investment in the transport network will not be limited to flagship transport projects. The inclusion of additional projects depends on the total funding available and the contribution that can be made by European Union funding. Therefore I have instructed my officials to continue to pursue European Union funding for schemes whilst the outfall of BREXIT still remains unclear.

Looking further forward, my Department's transport priorities will be guided by a refreshed suite of transport plans. Work will begin in the very near future on the Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan. This will be followed by a series of Local Transport Plans, including the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan which will be developed to coordinate with the delivery of Councils Local Development Plans.

Department of Justice

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Justice whether she plans to implement legislation making domestic violence, domestic abuse and coercive control criminal offences; and if so, whether she will provide funding to train criminal justice practitioners in the new law.

(AQW 4321/16-21)

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): I have identified that Domestic Violence and Abuse is a key priority for my tenure as Minister of Justice and I am committed to bringing both a domestic abuse offence and a domestic violence disclosure scheme to Northern Ireland.

I am aware that significant work will be required to embed a new offence in Northern Ireland. This will of course require the provision of training and guidance for all relevant criminal justice practitioners. My Officials will work with practitioners to identify the training and resources needed however it is too early at this stage to identify where funding for training will come from.

I can assure you that I am committed to ensuring the offence is implemented effectively in Northern Ireland and I recognise this will require a robust framework to be in place.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice to list the Ministerial visits she has undertaken since taking up office, including the (i) date; (ii) purpose; and (iii) parliamentary constituency visited.

(AQW 4351/16-21)

Ms Sugden: As at 7 October 2016, the information requested is listed in the table at Annex A.

Annex A

Date	Venue	Purpose	Constituency
2 /6	Visit to Hydebank	Passing out Parade	South Belfast
9/6	Visit to Loughside	Security Briefing	North Down
15/6	Visit to Magilligan Prison	Meeting with Senior Team & tour of facilities	East Londonderry
	Coleraine PSNI	Familiarisation visit	East Londonderry
	Call on Elizabeth Chestnutt – meeting took place at Mayor's Office Coleraine	PCSP Call Blocking Initiative	East Londonderry
	Community Service Rescue, Coleraine Marina	Familiarisation visit	East Londonderry
	West Bann Centre, Coleraine	Pop into Good Morning Causeway	East Londonderry
19/6	Ballintoy Church of Ireland	Annual Thanksgiving Service, Causeway Coast Peace Group	North Antrim
22/6	Armagh City Hotel	Human Trafficking Cross Border Conference	Newry and Armagh
29/6	Newforge Country Club	Launch of OCTF & Crime Stoppers event	South Belfast
	Youth Justice Agency, Lisburn	Volunteer Awards	Lagan Valley
05/7	Strand Rd, Londonderry	Launch of New Foyle Hub Community Service	Foyle
	Visit to PSNI	Familiarisation visit	Foyle
	Visit to Courthouse	Familiarisation visit	Foyle
	Assets Recovery Community Schemes (ARCS) Visit	Familiarisation visit	Foyle

Date	Venue	Purpose	Constituency
	Street Talk	Familiarisation visit	Foyle
	Men's Action Network	Familiarisation visit	Foyle
	Visit to Youth Justice Agency, Strand Rd	Familiarisation visit	Foyle
	Visit to Foyle Women's Aid	Familiarisation visit	Foyle
06/7	Visit to Woodlands	Met Senior Staff & tour of facilities	North Down
22/8	Brooklyn, Belfast	Visit to RUCGC Memorial Gardens & Museum	East Belfast
24/8	Visit to NIACRO – Amelia St, Belfast	Familiarisation Visit & meeting	North Belfast
31/8	Visit to the Police Ombudsman's Office, Belfast	Meeting & introduction to staff	North Belfast
04/9	Devenish Parish Church, Enniskillen	Memorial Service & unveiling of plaques in memory of RUCGC & UDR	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
05/9	Visit to Royal Courts of Justice (RCJ)	Lord Chief Justice Annual Address	North Belfast
07/9	Visit to Forensic Science Laboratory, Seapark	Meeting with staff and tour of facilities	East Antrim
	Visit to Public Protection Branch – Seapark	Meeting with staff	East Antrim
08/9	Inn on the Court	Bar Library Dinner	North Belfast
11/9	Clonard, West Belfast	Annual Law Service	West Belfast
15/9	Visit to London	Series of meetings including with the Home Secretary	
18/9	Enniskillen Methodist Church	Visit to RUCGC Annual Memorial Service	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
21/9	Waterfront Hall	NICEM Conference	North Belfast
	Laganside Court Complex	Visit to meet staff	North Belfast
22/9	Ulster Museum, Belfast	Women & Leadership in a changing world – Dinner	South Belfast
24-25/9	London	National Police Memorial Day	
27/9	Hydebank	Visit with Health Minister	South Belfast
28/9	Lough Erne, Enniskillen	Cross Border Organised Crime Conference	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
29/9	Londonderry	Foyle Women's Aid Conference	Foyle
3/10	Townsend St, Belfast	Visit to Lower Shankill/Falls Forum	West Belfast
5/10	Maryfield, Belfast Rd	Visit to Police Rehabilitation & Retraining Trust	North Down
6/10	Visit to Probation Board – Belfast	Hate Crime Week	North Belfast
	Laganside Court, Belfast	Visit to meet Young Witness Service Staff & Volunteers	North Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline departmental discussions held with the Lord Chief Justice and Director of Public Prosecutions on the introduction of appeals for unduly lenient sentences at magistrates' courts.

(AQW 4370/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My review of sentencing policy, announced on 9 June, includes consideration of the underlying policy and scope of the provisions governing the referral of sentences by the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) to the Court of Appeal on

the grounds of undue leniency. Part of this consideration will include discussions with the Office of the Lord Chief Justice and the DPP. I hold regular discussions with the DPP and Office of the Lord Chief Justice on a number of wide ranging issues. However, as yet, no formal discussions have taken place.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Justice what action her Department has taken to address a potential rise in racist harassment in Northern Ireland following the European Union referendum result.
(AQW 4391/16-21)

Ms Sugden: While reports of racist incidents following the referendum here in Northern Ireland have not been on the same scale as in England, this is an issue of concern for my Department. We will continue to monitor hate incidents in conjunction with the PSNI and other partners and take action where necessary.

I am committed to working with the Executive Office, who lead on tackling hate and intolerance in society, and other partners to ensure that the valuable contribution of migrants to Northern Ireland society is recognised, and to enhance their feelings of safety and security in our community. I recently launched the 'No Hate Here' campaign alongside Junior Ministers Fearon and Ross. This initiative, developed by North Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership, is designed to raise awareness of hate crime, support victims, and encourage local businesses and community groups to act as safe places where vulnerable members of the community can go for support.

From a criminal justice perspective, work to tackle hate crime is taken forward through my Department's Community Safety Strategy, which contains a commitment to tackling all forms of hate crime and the harm it causes through prevention, awareness, education and support for victims and communities. To deliver on this commitment, my Department chairs a multi-agency Hate Crime Delivery Group, which takes forward actions relating to hate crime. Membership includes PSNI, the Probation Board, Courts Service, Prison Service, the Executive Office, the Housing Executive, and Victim Support NI.

An Action Plan has been developed to deliver this commitment; this includes actions around increasing reporting and providing support for victims of all hate crime, including through the regional Hate Crime Advocacy Service which is jointly funded by the PSNI and DOJ.

At a local level, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) develop and deliver a range of initiatives that aim to tackle racism and promote tolerance. I understand that, for example, Mid and East Antrim PCSP funds a bilingual advocacy service which provides a range of supports to black and minority ethnic communities in the local area.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice following the death post-custody of Joseph Rainey, and the content of the Northern Ireland Prisoner Ombudsman's report on this incident, will she reconsider having new committals to custody considered vulnerable and placed under a Supporting Prisoners at Risk scheme or equivalent monitoring and/or supervision until sufficient assessment, evaluation, and a standard of coping skills are reached.
(AQW 4420/16-21)

Ms Sugden: It is recognised that the period following committal can be a particularly vulnerable time for some people and as such Hydebank Wood College implements special procedures for all new committals to monitor them closely for a period of at least 24 hours after committal, with increased levels of observations available during this time.

A Supporting Prisoner at Risk (SPAR) can be considered for any student at any time during their custody. There were no recommendations in the Prisoner Ombudsman's report to automatically place new committals on SPARs.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what changes to the role of Prison Officers were introduced as a result of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008.
(AQW 4521/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 did not introduce any changes to the role of Prison Officers.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice on what date she received the report commissioned by the Prison Service Director General and Director of Human Resources comparing prison officer absenteeism to absenteeism among departmental civil servants; and on what date it was received by officials in her Department.
(AQW 4523/16-21)

Ms Sugden: This Report was considered by the Prison Service Management Board (PSMB) at its meeting in October 2013. Having discussed the report, the consensus view of the Board was that the analysis backing up the report was limited and therefore there was not a sufficiently robust evidence base from which to formulate an action plan.

As this Report was commissioned and completed during the mandate of the previous Minister of Justice, and because it was not accepted by PSMB, I have not received it.

I am keen to look at the issue of absenteeism and to focus on the support available to Prison Officers. My officials continue to seek to improve the working environment and support services which are available to staff within available resourcing constraints.

I will ask officials to review the 2013 Report to establish if there is merit in any of the recommendations as part of the ongoing work to support staff.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of (i) prosecutions; and (ii) convictions for terrorism related offences in each of the last five years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 4536/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Terrorism offences may be prosecuted under the Terrorism Act 2000, the Terrorism (Northern Ireland) Act 2006 and the Counter Terrorism Act 2008. Information in relation to prosecutions and convictions disposed of at courts in the period 2011 – 2015, the latest five years for which information is available, where at least one offence was a terrorism offence, has been provided in the following tables.

Prosecutions at courts for terrorism offences by court division, 2011 - 2015

Court Division	Prosecutions				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Antrim	0	0	4	1	0
Ards	0	0	1	0	0
Armagh and South Down	1	6	1	1	0
Belfast	9	14	16	21	11
Craigavon	2	2	1	0	0
Fermanagh and Tyrone	1	1	0	0	0
Londonderry	5	6	3	0	1
Total	18	29	26	23	12

Convictions at courts for terrorism offences by court division, 2011 - 2015

Court Division	Convictions				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Antrim	0	0	0	1	0
Ards	0	0	1	0	0
Armagh and South Down	0	0	0	0	0
Belfast	4	3	13	20	4
Craigavon	0	0	1	0	0
Fermanagh and Tyrone	0	1	0	0	0
Londonderry	2	2	1	0	1
Total	6	6	16	21	5

Note:

- 1 Figures relate to prosecutions or convictions which included at least one count of the offences specified.
- 2 The figures provided relate to prosecutions or convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.
- 3 Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.
- 4 Data for 2013 - 2015 have been sourced from the DOJ Prosecutions, Convictions and Sentencing Dataset while data for 2011 - 2012 have been sourced directly from the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS).

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice what discussions she has had with the Chief Constable in regard to the Police Service of Northern Ireland's Wildlife Crime Unit.

(AQW 4559/16-21)

Ms Sugden: As Minister of Justice I do, of course, have regular discussions with the Chief Constable about a wide range of policing issues. However, since my appointment, I have not been involved in any discussions with the Chief Constable specifically in regard to the PSNI's Wildlife Crime Unit.

Further to your question, I will seek a meeting with the Chief Constable to discuss the PSNI's Wildlife Crime Unit.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice what discussions she has had with the Chief Constable which related to (i) arrests and; (ii) prosecutions brought by the Police Service of Northern Ireland's Wildlife Crime Unit, broken down for each of the last three years.

(AQW 4560/16-21)

Ms Sugden: As Minister of Justice I do, of course, have regular discussions with the Chief Constable about a wide range of policing issues. However, since my appointment, I have not been involved in any discussions with the Chief Constable specifically in regard to the PSNI's Wildlife Crime Unit.

Further to your question, I will seek a meeting with the Chief Constable to discuss the PSNI's Wildlife Crime Unit.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Justice (i) to outline what changes were made in the running of prisons following the finding of an inquest jury in 2004 that defects in the prison system had been a contributory factor in the suicide of 19-year-old Annie Kelly in September 2002 in HMP Maghaberry; and (ii) whether she is satisfied that these defects have been eliminated.

(AQW 4597/16-21)

Ms Sugden: In the period since 2004 there have been very significant changes in the running of prisons. These changes have included the transfer of responsibility for healthcare provision to the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, and the relocation of female prisoners to Ash House at Hydebank Wood. In 2006 the Prison Service also introduced a Suicide and Self-Harm Policy which has been kept under, and is currently being reviewed.

Whilst much has been achieved, I believe that ongoing vigilance is required to ensure that the care and support provided for vulnerable people in custody is effective and appropriate.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Justice whether any prison officer or other official has been dismissed or charged with a disciplinary offence arising from the report of the Prisoner Ombudsman on the case of Sean Lynch.

(AQW 4599/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Senior Management Team of the Northern Ireland Prison Service is clear that this is not a disciplinary matter, rather it is about learning the lessons identified in the report and ensuring all prison staff are equipped to the best possible standard to deal with situations involving serious deliberate self-harm.

The challenges faced by prison staff cannot be under-estimated as illustrated by the high number of prisoners housed within the three establishments and in particular Maghaberry Prison, where at the beginning of September 2016 there were 250 prisoners who were recorded as having mental health issues.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2358/16-21, whether she will introduce a policy to enable the police to recover costs for providing policing for commercial operations such as mining and petroleum extraction.

(AQW 4605/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Further to the answer provided in AQW/2358/16-21, there is currently no legislative impediment to the PSNI introducing charges to commercial operators to recover their costs. Petroleum extraction is not a matter for DOJ.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Justice how many prosecutions have there been as a result of raids on brothels within the last eighteen months.

(AQW 4614/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The most recent eighteen month period for which information on the number of prosecutions at courts is available is 1 July 2014 to 31 December 2015, during which time one case for offences relating to the purchase of sex and two cases for offences relating to running a brothel were disposed at court, all for offences under the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008. Of these, one case, in relation to offences associated with running a brothel, resulted in a conviction.

Data relating to the location of an offence, or of circumstances pertaining to an arrest are not held within Departmental databases, so it has not been possible to provide information on the number of prosecutions there have been as a result of raids on brothels.

Note:

- 1 Figures relate to prosecutions which included at least one count of the offences specified.
- 2 The figures provided relate to prosecutions for all classifications of the offences specified.
- 3 Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Justice how many prosecutions have there been for running a brothel in the last eighteen months.

(AQW 4615/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The most recent eighteen month period for which information on the number of prosecutions at courts is available is 1 July 2014 to 31 December 2015, during which time one case for offences relating to the purchase of sex and two

cases for offences relating to running a brothel were disposed at court, all for offences under the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008. Of these, one case, in relation to offences associated with running a brothel, resulted in a conviction.

Data relating to the location of an offence, or of circumstances pertaining to an arrest are not held within Departmental databases, so it has not been possible to provide information on the number of prosecutions there have been as a result of raids on brothels.

Note:

- 4 Figures relate to prosecutions which included at least one count of the offences specified.
- 5 The figures provided relate to prosecutions for all classifications of the offences specified.
- 6 Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail a comprehensive account of what occurred in Quoile House, HMP Maghaberry on 2 September 2016; including (a) the cause of the locking mechanism to fail; (b) all damage caused; (c) all injuries sustained; (d) the length of time the situation was out of control; and (d) how many prisoners will face action as a result.

(AQW 4626/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I can confirm that there was an incident in Quoile House, HMP Maghaberry on the 2 October 2016. During this incident, the mechanical locking system malfunctioned. Prison Service contractors are investigating the cause of this malfunction. Until such times as the cause of the malfunction has been determined additional security measures have been implemented in Quoile House, which will negate any similar incidents occurring.

The incident occurred at 18:20hrs. This is during the “night state” and there were three members of staff present in Quoile House. Staff withdrew to the “Circle”, and area protected by Grilled/Doors from the residential landing, and alerted managers to the malfunction.

Additional staff were deployed to the area and specialist contractors tasked to the prison. All prisoners returned to their cells when instructed to do so. All prisoners were securely locked and a full headcount completed and the prison roll reconciled at approximately 19:00hrs.

There were no reported injuries to either staff or prisoners and there was no damage caused to any cells, equipment or the fabric of Quoile House.

There will be no disciplinary charges against any prisoner in relation to this incident.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the report conducted by Dr. Jackie Bates–Gaston that found higher rates of staff absenteeism among prison officers compared to other civil servants in her Department.

(AQW 4629/16-21)

Ms Sugden: This Report was considered by the Prison Service Management Board (PSMB) at its meeting in October 2013. Having discussed the report, the consensus view of the Board was that the analysis backing up the report was limited and therefore there was not a sufficiently robust evidence base from which to formulate an action plan.

As this Report was commissioned and completed during the mandate of the previous Minister of Justice, and because it was not accepted by PSMB, I have not received it.

I am keen to look at the issue of absenteeism and to focus on the support available to Prison Officers. My officials continue to seek to improve the working environment and support services which are available to staff within available resourcing constraints.

I will ask officials to review the 2013 Report to establish if there is merit in any of the recommendations as part of the ongoing work to support staff.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Justice whether she will seek an assurance from the Police Service of Northern Ireland that it is working to address a recent upsurge in rural crime in West Tyrone.

(AQW 4630/16-21)

Ms Sugden: PSNI crime figures show a downward trend in Counties Fermanagh and Tyrone of 8.8% against all crime types, which means there are 232 fewer crimes for the area compared to this time last year.

I am, however, also aware of a recent upsurge of thefts in the Omagh area. The PSNI have arrested and charged a team of three people with a large number of these offences and further investigations remain ongoing.

Police also continue to work closely with the local Police and Community Safety Partnership and other partner agencies to encourage reporting, not only of crime within the rural community, but also any suspicious vehicles, people and cold callers.

My Department’s Community Safety Strategy 2012-2017 contains a commitment to making rural communities safer by reducing opportunities to commit crime. It also highlights my Department’s commitment to supporting the outcomes of the Executive’s Rural White Paper and Action Plan, led by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

(DAERA), to support and sustain rural communities and to deliver initiatives in rural areas across Northern Ireland that will contribute to safer rural communities.

The Rural Crime Partnership, which consists of representatives from my Department, the PSNI, NFU Mutual, the Ulster Farmers' Union and DAERA, also delivers actions taken forward at a strategic level to support safer rural communities.

Complementing the work of my Department's Organised Crime Task Force, the cross-jurisdictional Joint Agency Task Force, whose core membership is drawn from the PSNI, An Garda Síochána, National Crime Agency, Home Office Immigration Enforcement, HMRC, Irish Revenue Commissioners and UK Border Force, identified rural crime as a priority crime area for the period 4 April to 4 October 2016.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice what action she is taking to improve access to justice and information for victims and survivors of conflict related incidents.

(AQW 4641/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Stormont House Agreement proposed a range of bodies to provide a comprehensive approach to dealing with the legacy of the past.

The new institutions will include: the Historical Investigations Unit, a new independent body to take forward outstanding investigations into Troubles-related deaths; the Independent Commission for Information Retrieval, a new independent body, established by international agreement, to enable victims and survivors to seek and privately receive information about the Troubles-related deaths of their next-of-kin; and an Oral History Archive, a central place for people from all backgrounds to share experiences and narratives related to the Troubles.

While final political agreement has not yet been reached on the Stormont House Agreement proposals for Dealing with the Legacy of the Past, my officials and I continue to engage with others to secure agreement on the legislation which would establish the new institutions proposed by that Agreement.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice what engagement she has had with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists on the adequacy of existing law on the grounds for termination of pregnancy.

(AQW 4643/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I have had no engagement with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

My Department, through the inter-Departmental working group on fatal fetal abnormality has, as set out in its terms of reference, consulted with the Royal College in the course of its work.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice what is the average cost of administering a road traffic prosecution in the Magistrate Court when the defendant has pleaded guilty; and to detail the breakdown of such costs.

(AQW 4654/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The (i) number of; and (ii) percentage of road traffic offences in which the defendant has pleaded guilty are presented in the table below for each of the last three years.

	Year		
	2013	2014	2015
Total number of defendants who pleaded guilty to at least one road traffic offence	12,087	11,470	10,195
Percentage of defendants ¹ who pleaded guilty to at least one road traffic offence	73%	75%	69%

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

1 Relates to defendants disposed during each year that were charged with at least one road traffic offence

It is not possible to calculate an average cost for a particular type of case without entailing a disproportionate cost.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of; and (ii) percentage of road traffic offences in which the defendant has pleaded guilty, broken down for each of the last three years.

(AQW 4660/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The (i) number of; and (ii) percentage of road traffic offences in which the defendant has pleaded guilty are presented in the table below for each of the last three years.

	Year		
	2013	2014	2015
Total number of defendants who pleaded guilty to at least one road traffic offence	12,087	11,470	10,195
Percentage of defendants ¹ who pleaded guilty to at least one road traffic offence	73%	75%	69%

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

1 Relates to defendants disposed during each year that were charged with at least one road traffic offence

It is not possible to calculate an average cost for a particular type of case without entailing a disproportionate cost.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how many of the twenty one recommendations of the Prisoner Ombudsman following the death of Patrick Kelly have been accepted by the Prison Service and her Department; and (ii) which of these have been or are in the process of being implemented.

(AQW 4672/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Prisoner Ombudsman's Report into the death of Mr Patrick Kelly made twenty-two recommendations. Four recommendations relate solely to the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) and three joint recommendations to NIPS and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT).

NIPS accepted three of the recommendations in full and one in principal, which is outside the remit of NIPS. Two recommendations have been implemented and a training needs analysis requested to address the third recommendation.

Two of the joint recommendations with the SEHSCT have been accepted with one fully implemented and one partially implemented. A third recommendation was not accepted.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Justice whether any prison officer or other official has been disciplined following the death of Patrick Kelly in February 2015 at HMP Maghaberry.

(AQW 4673/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Senior Management Team of the NIPS is clear that this is not a disciplinary matter, rather it is about learning the lessons identified in the report and ensuring all prison staff are equipped to the best possible standard to deal with situations involving serious deliberate self-harm.

The challenges faced by prison staff cannot be under-estimated as illustrated by the high number of prisoners housed within the three establishments, and particularly Maghaberry Prison, where at the beginning of September 2016 there were 250 prisoners who were recorded as having severe mental health issues.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the maximum period in criminal law and the Court of Appeal that a judgement can be reserved.

(AQW 4683/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There is no maximum period prescribed within which a reserved judgment must be delivered. The setting of timescales for the delivery of judgments is a matter for the Lord Chief Justice.

The Lord Chief Justice's guidance on the delivery of judgments states that in cases where it is not possible to give an ex tempore judgment, the vast majority of judgments should be delivered within days or weeks of the conclusion of the proceedings. In longer or more complex cases, judges should aim to deliver judgment within three months.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of (i) inmates; (ii) prison officers present during the day; and (iii) prison officers remaining overnight in Maghaberry Prison, broken down by grade.

(AQW 4711/16-21)

Ms Sugden:

- (i) As of 7 October 2016 the prison roll in Maghaberry was 896.
- (ii) (iii) It would not be appropriate to discuss the staffing levels in a high security prison.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of reports that forty prison officers were recruited in the Prison Service before vetting and security checks were carried out or completed.

(AQW 4746/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I am satisfied that vetting and security checks were carried out before prison officers were recruited to the Prison Service.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to outline her Department's plans to improve prison officer safety when on duty. (AQW 4749/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My Department is fully committed to securing the health and safety of prison officers whilst at work. This includes the provision of information, instruction and training to ensure general awareness of health and safety issues and, as necessary, specific training to ensure competence to fulfil the full range of duties.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service, Health and Safety (H & S) Adviser is responsible for the monitoring of health and safety compliance by use of audits and inspections of specific areas, procedural arrangements, training and working environments.

NIPS continue to explore the use of technology to assist in improving safety for those working in a prison environment. Body Scanners undergoing trials in England will be considered for use by NIPS to assist in preventing the entry of illegal drugs into prisons. Recently Maghaberry have introduced the use of Body Worn Video Cameras which have greatly assisted in the de-escalation of potential violent incidents. Further purchases of these cameras, for use in residential areas in Maghaberry and other prisons, is currently being discussed.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of lockdowns in (i) HMP Maghaberry; (ii) HMP Magilligan; and (iii) HMP Hydebank Wood, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 4750/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The number of lockdowns is as follows:

Establishment	1 October 2014 to 30 September 2015	1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016
Maghaberry	2315	1611
Magilligan	0	0
Hydebank Wood College	71	341

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether she plans to hold discussions with the Public Protection Arrangements in Northern Ireland (PPANI) to (i) introduce a blanket ban on internet use for people being managed following a conviction for crimes such as downloading indecent images of children and any other cyber-crimes in which there are further potential victims through internet use; and (ii) explain how PPANI agencies are enforcing existing bans and/or restrictions.

(AQW 4758/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Prohibitions or restrictions on the ownership of any computer or other electronic device capable of storing photographic images or accessing the internet, without the approval of a Probation Officer or Designated Risk Manager, can be included as a condition of an offender's post-release licence and form part of their risk management plan. Similar prohibitions and restrictions can also be imposed by Courts as a condition of a civil Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO).

A blanket ban in relation to particular offences, without any consideration of individual circumstances or specific risks evidenced is unlikely to withstand challenge in the High Court. The law requires that conditions must be lawful, necessary and proportionate and based on evidence of the specific risk of harm to the public posed in individual cases.

In circumstances where certain access is permitted it is restricted to devices which have the capacity to retain and display their internet browsing history. Compliance is monitored by Designated Risk Managers as part of the normal risk management process and includes examination of the device at scheduled appointments and during unannounced visits.

Enforcement action is taken where an individual is found to have acted in contravention of the conditions imposed. Where this is a breach of a licence condition the enforcement actions may range from a formal warning to imposition of additional licence conditions or recall to custody. Where there has been an alleged breach of a SOPO condition, PSNI will bring the offender before the Court where, on conviction, a custodial sentence may be imposed.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to provide a comprehensive account of what occurred in HMP Maghaberry Bush House and Erne House on 2 September 2016, including (i) the cause; (ii) the damage; (iii) the injuries sustained; (iv) the length of time the situation was out of control; and (v) how many prisoners will face action as a result.

(AQW 4759/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I can confirm that there was an incident in Bush House on 2 October when a prisoner became refractory and damaged the contents of his cell. This incident was resolved quickly and the prisoner moved to the Care and Supervision Unit and disciplinary charges laid against him. Further to this incident, a small cell fire was started a number of hours later, which staff responded to quickly and on the arrival of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service the fire was declared as extinguished. The prisoner involved has been subject to internal disciplinary charges and referred to the Police Service of Northern Ireland. There were no staff or prisoners injured.

There were several incidents of prisoner unrest within Erne House resulting in one small cell fire and damage to five cells. Staff quickly extinguished the fire and on their arrival, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, declared the fire

extinguished. The prisoners involved in the indiscipline have had internal disciplinary charges laid against them and have been reported to the Police Service of Northern Ireland in relation to setting the fire.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2795/16-21, to provide, or place in the Assembly Library, a copy of the standard pro forma template.

(AQW 4760/16-21)

Ms Sugden: A copy of the template has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Justice for an assessment of whether her Department will ensure full access to justice in any review of the cost of legal aid.

(AQW 4814/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I am committed to bringing forward a strategy for legal aid which will ensure that free legal aid remains available for the most vulnerable in society and that those who can afford to, meet their own costs. In this way I will seek to maintain access to justice.

The steps taken to contain legal aid expenditure have so far focused on reducing the fees payable for legal aid work and ensuring that the level of representation is commensurate for the type of case and the court tier. These changes have not impacted on access to justice.

I am taking forward some modest changes to the scope of legal aid which are being progressed in areas where there are other sources of advice available or where money, or property, is at the core of the dispute. Individuals will be able to access the advice that they need and if they wish can pursue their case through private funding. These reforms will be subject to further scrutiny by the Assembly in due course. Prison Service Management Allowing Amnesties

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline who or which level of management in each Northern Ireland Prison Service facility decides to allow an amnesty in any circumstance.

(AQW 4835/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Governor in charge of a prison is responsible for the safe custody of all prisoners until they are discharged, for the safeguarding of their rights and for the maintenance of discipline in the prison.

Any decisions to grant an amnesty will be taken by a Governor, or his Deputy, in each Northern Ireland Prison Service facility.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to her departmental remit, to outline how the UK exiting the European Union will impact on children, with specific reference to any protections enshrined in EU law not currently transposed into UK and Northern Ireland legislation.

(AQW 4881/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are a number of EU justice related measures in regard to children. They deal with issues such as human trafficking, child sexual exploitation, abduction and allow judgments relating to matters such as child maintenance, contact and residence to be enforced across the EU. Some of these measures take the form of EU Directives and have been transposed whilst others are EU Regulations which are directly applicable and are supported by Northern Ireland legislation. My Department will, however, take whatever steps it can to ensure there is no reduction in the justice protections afforded to children and continues to work with other Departments and counterparts in other jurisdictions to explore these and other justice related implications.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice to outline the framework to assess whether a paramilitary organisation is active.

(AQW 4909/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Assessments of the activity of paramilitary groups are made by the PSNI and the Security Service. I have no role in this process.

An assessment of paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland was carried out by the PSNI and the Security Service and published in October 2015.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Justice how many anti-social behaviour orders have been handed down (i) in conjunction with; and (ii) as an alternative to, a custodial sentence, binding order, conditional discharge or any other disposal for public order offences in Armagh city, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5053/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There were no anti-social behaviour orders handed down (i) in conjunction with; or (ii) as an alternative to, a custodial sentence, binding order, conditional discharge or any other disposal for public order offences in Armagh city, in any of the last three years.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the 2013 NIPS-commissioned report by Dr Jackie Bates-Gaston, how many of the 8 recommendations under The Way Forward have been (i) considered; and (ii) implemented.

(AQW 5061/16-21)

Ms Sugden: This Report was considered by the Prison Service Management Board (PSMB) at its meeting in October 2013. Having discussed the report, the consensus view of the Board was that the analysis backing up the report was limited and therefore there was not a sufficiently robust evidence base from which to formulate an action plan.

As this Report was commissioned and completed during the mandate of the previous Minister of Justice, and because it was not accepted by PSMB, I have not received it.

I am keen to look at the issue of absenteeism and to focus on the support available to Prison Officers. My officials continue to seek to improve the working environment and support services which are available to staff within available resourcing constraints.

I will ask officials to review the 2013 Report to establish if there is merit in any of the recommendations as part of the ongoing work to support staff.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Robinson asked the Assembly Commission whether it is legally bound to accept an Independent Financial Review Panel determination when the relevant consultation document did not include questions on areas where major change was proposed.

(AQW 4027/16-21)

Mr Attwood (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Members (Salaries and Expenses) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2016 ("the 2016 Determination") sets out the salaries and allowances payable to Members of the Assembly under section 47 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. These salaries and allowances are paid by the Commission.

The Commission can pay only the salaries or allowances as set out in the 2016 Determination. The Independent Financial Review Panel has statutory independence conferred on it by section 3 of the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The 2016 Determination is a legal instrument made by the Panel in the exercise of a statutory power and must be treated as lawful and binding in its entirety. Only a court could decide that one or more of the provisions of the 2016 Determination was not lawful.

The Commission cannot, therefore, look behind the 2016 Determination (for example, to the consultation processes adopted by the Panel) to assess whether, for

any reason, some of its provisions should be applied and others should not. As such, the Commission is legally bound to pay salaries and allowances in accordance with the 2016 Determination.

Mr Robinson asked the Assembly Commission whether it plans to repeal the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(AQW 4029/16-21)

Mr Attwood (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The tenure of the current Independent Financial Review Panel ended on 1 July 2016. The Assembly Commission is reviewing the present model of determining and administering financial support for Members. It is anticipated that consultation with Members will form part of that review. At this time, no decision has been taken to repeal the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Mr Robinson asked the Assembly Commission to outline what action it intends to take to ensure that the staff pension scheme, as updated by the Independent Financial Review Panel Determination of March 2016, is in compliance with all applicable legislation, including the requirement for a consultation with stakeholders.

(AQW 4030/16-21)

Mr Attwood (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Determination issued by the Independent Financial Review Panel (IFRP) on 23 March 2016 did not update a staff pension scheme for Members' support staff as no such pension scheme was in existence.

The Determination that was in place prior to March 2016 made provision for a Member to avail of financial support to make contributions to an employee's pension scheme but the selection of the pension scheme was a matter for the employee. Therefore, prior to the March 2016 Determination, an ad-hoc collection of individual pension arrangements was in place.

From 1 August 2016, every Member has a legal requirement to make provision for a workplace pension for every employee under the "auto-enrolment" pension initiative. That legal requirement is not related to the funding that is available under the

March 2016 Determination but, when making the 2016 Determination, the Panel was mindful of the impending auto-enrolment date for Members of 1 August 2016.

The March 2016 Determination altered the maximum level of employer's pension contributions that a Member could make to an employee's pension arrangements from 10% of gross salary to 5% of gross salary. The Panel also determined that if a Member wished to avail of funding for employer's pension contributions, the contributions could only be paid to the approved pension scheme that was established for the purpose of assisting each Member to meet his or her pension auto-enrolment obligations.

A Member's employee is under no compulsion to participate in this approved scheme. However, if any other pension arrangements are made and even if those

arrangements are fully compliant with auto-enrolment requirements, funding for employer's contributions is not available.

As the March 2016 Determination did not update a "staff pension scheme", there was no requirement for consultation with stakeholders of a pension scheme that did not exist.

Mr Robinson asked the Assembly Commission to outline the role it took in ensuring that proper consultation was carried out with Members and Members' staff during the procedure which led to the Independent Financial Review Panel's Determination in March 2016.

(AQW 4031/16-21)

Mr Attwood (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Independent Financial Review Panel (IFRP) was established in July 2011 by the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 ("the 2011 Act") to make determinations in relation to the salaries, allowances and pensions payable to Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Section 3 of 2011 Act specifies that the Panel shall not, in exercise of its functions, be subject to the direction or control of the Northern Ireland Assembly or the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission. The Panel is fully independent of both the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Commission.

Therefore, the Commission had no role in specifying, administering or overseeing any consultation exercise undertaken by the IFRP in advance of issuing its Determination on 23 March 2016.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 28 October 2016

Written Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the newly appointed press secretary has the power to direct members of the Executive Information Service or other civil servants.
(AQW 3388/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The new Executive press secretary will not exercise any power in relation to the management of any part of the Civil Service.

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the new Executive press secretary has the power to direct civil servants.
(AQW 3393/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The new Executive press secretary will not have the power to direct civil servants.

Mrs Long asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps have been taken to ensure the implementation of the Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime - Executive Action Plan.
(AQO 250/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We refer the Member to the answer given to AQO 244/16-21 on 20 October 2016.

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether financial redress measures will be included in the Programme for Government 2016-21.
(AQW 4209/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The HIA Inquiry will be making its recommendations, including a fully formed recommendation with regard to redress, in its report to the Executive in January 2017.

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment on how the United Kingdom exiting the European Union will impact on children, with specific reference to any protections enshrined in EU law that are not currently transposed into UK and Northern Ireland legislation.
(AQW 4874/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: On the 2 October Prime Minister Theresa May announced that she intended to introduce an EU Repeal Act that will transpose all existing EU law into UK law at the point of exit. It will then be a matter for the UK Parliament and the local Assembly as to which elements are retained, amended or repealed. How the process will work in practice and the full implications of the Act will only become clear when the Bill is published, which is anticipated to be in the next Parliamentary Session.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline what procedures exist to avoid conflicts of interest between members of Social Investment Fund steering committees and organisations that receive SIF funding.
(AQW 5184/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Social Investment Fund is community led. Given the focus on the community developing and prioritising projects to address local needs, a process to manage any conflicts of interest was put in place.

Declaring potential conflicts of interests is a policy adopted across government. Where a conflict was declared, the Steering Group member was not involved in any discussion or decision around the prioritisation of the proposal.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether any overlap exists between the current and former membership of the Falls Community Council and membership of the West Belfast Social Investment Fund steering committee.
(AQW 5185/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The membership of the West Belfast SIF Steering committee is detailed on the TEO website.

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the costs of the Investigating Links in Achievement and Deprivation report; (ii) when it will be published; and (iii) why it has not been published to date.

(AQW 5206/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: This project entitled 'Understanding differential educational achievement within and between areas of multiple deprivation in NI – a case study approach' is being carried out by Professor Ruth Leitch, Professor Joanne Hughes, supported by Dr Ian Shuttleworth and Dr Michael Levers.

The overall cost of the contract for this project was £290,563. The study has been running since 2012 and has involved a wide range of in-depth case studies in local areas to develop a better insight into the factors contributing to educational achievement and associated barriers.

Officials are currently working with Professor Ruth Leitch and her team to finalise the report for publication.

Mr Douglas asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the impact the Fresh Start Agreement has had on East Belfast.

(AQO 466/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The work to implement the Fresh Start agreement right across our society, including in East Belfast, is ongoing. Many programmes that are presently being delivered, such as the SIF Project, Central Good Relations Fund, District Councils Good Relations Programme, Urban Villages and the Minority Ethnic Development Fund are making a real change in society, including in East Belfast.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, following the use of Royal Prerogative by the First Minister and deputy First Minister on three occasions since 2007, to outline who was appointed in each case.

(AQO 467/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We would refer the Member to the answer already given to you in our response to AQW 3404/16-21 on 26 September 2016.

Mr Dunne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the impact Together: Building a United Community has on the young people involved in its programmes.

(AQO 470/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Together: Building a United Community Strategy is aimed at having a positive impact for all across our society.

Children and Young People are a key priority within the Strategy and as such a number of the headline actions focus specifically on improving the opportunities and life experiences for them.

The Summer Camps program was the first headline action to be successfully completed with 101 camps, involving 4,200 young people, delivered in 2015/16. The evaluation was very positive and encouraging, highlighting positive attitudinal change in young people towards people from different backgrounds; participants were also able to talk openly about their culture and to take part in other cross community activities.

The Cross Community Sports Programme, which took place in Village and Lower Falls area in 15/16, has had a positive impact. The programme aimed at developing young leaders, and participants used sport to break down divisions in society and deliver a programme to tackle sectarianism, racism and improve good relations.

The initial phase of the United Youth Programme, involving over 300 young people, concluded on 31 March 2016. An evaluation has been completed and findings have been very positive, with the programme deemed effective in terms of design, administrative and financial control systems, and learning and development outcomes for the participants.

We have engaged with young people in the development of these programmes and in September the T:BUC Engagement forum focused on Children and young people and how they can help shape future delivery.

Junior Minister Ross and Junior Minister Fearon, have had the opportunity to visit some of these programmes and it is clear both from the evaluations and the feedback from all involved that they are making a real difference. We look forward to their continued development and hearing the views of young people as they progress through the various programmes.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to outline her Department's role in trying to secure proper broadband provision in rural areas; and (ii) for an assessment on how its efforts are making a difference in West Tyrone.

(AQW 4013/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): The statutory responsibility for telecoms in Northern Ireland lies with the Department for Economy (DfE). Going forward, I will work with my party colleague Simon Hamilton, Minister for the Economy, to ensure that the appropriate resources are made available to tackle the remaining rural broadband not spots and areas with poor line speeds.

I am strongly committed to improving access to Rural broadband as I believe it can act as an economic driver for rural areas to develop and expand businesses. The new Rural Development Programme has a rural broadband fund available to Local Action Groups (LAGs). This can be used to tackle the 'harder to get at' areas that still do not have access to broadband. LAGs have indicated through their Local Rural Development Strategies, that they plan to invest £1.8m to improve broadband access in rural areas.

The LAG for the West Tyrone area, Fermanagh and Omagh Local Action Group has indicated through their Local Rural Development Strategy that they plan to invest £250k to improve broadband access across the LAG area.

In addition my Department has also contributed to DfE's Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP) which I know has enabled some 1,300 premises in West Tyrone to have accessed new broadband services through this project.

Finally I understand from information received from DfE that they have plans for further improvements and recently commenced implementation of the Superfast Roll-out Programme (SRP) which seeks to extend the reach of broadband services of at least 24 Megabits per second (Mbps) to a further 39,000 premises by the end of 2017, including in the West Tyrone area.

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the move of her Department's headquarters to Ballykelly.

(AQW 4269/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: All planning approvals are now in place and we expect building work to begin in November 2016. Officials are finalising the staff transition arrangements so that the building can open in January 2018.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how many staff are employed in her Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.

(AQW 4326/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department does not have a "Departmental Information Service".

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs when she was first made aware of the May 2015 report Preliminary Analysis On the Impact of a UK Referendum on its Membership of the European Union, compiled by the European Policy and Coordination Unit within the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister.

(AQW 4421/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I was first made aware of this report over the last number of weeks.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the plans to replace fishing quotas following the referendum result to leave the European Union.

(AQW 4471/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: As I said in a previous response, new arrangements will need to be negotiated between the UK, the EU and other coastal states to manage fishing opportunities and access to resources. The trading and support framework that will apply to the fisheries sector following a UK withdrawal from the European Union will be the subject of negotiation.

I intend to be closely and directly involved in the domestic agricultural, environmental, fisheries, and trade policy agendas as they unfold in order to maximise the opportunities that will come from leaving the European Union.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how the income collected from the Carrier Bag Levy has been allocated during the period when the Challenge Fund was not available.

(AQW 4520/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: As the Challenge Fund was launched during 2011-12 this scheme has been open for the last five financial years (2011-12 to 2015-16), the last three of which have been funded from the income from the carrier bag levy since its introduction in April 2013. The Department is currently considering the scope and options for launching a Challenge Fund this

year alongside other priorities for expenditure. If a fund is to be launched it will be publicly advertised and details of the fund and how to make an application will be made available.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what plans she has to introduce legislation covering the outstanding clauses of the Fisheries Bill.

(AQW 4617/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Legislation is required to amend the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966, and I am considering options to take in relation to this. My Department is, currently, progressing the Foyle Fisheries (Amendment) Bill, in parallel with a similar Bill being brought forward in the Republic of Ireland.

I will, of course, keep the matter under review.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what steps she will be taking to improve the bathing water quality of Ballyholme beach.

(AQW 4622/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: It is disappointing to see that in 2016 Ballyholme bathing water failed to meet the minimum requirement of the EU Bathing Directive. The water catchment surrounding Ballyholme bathing water is complex, comprising pressures from tourism, industry and significant urbanisation and agricultural practices. It should be noted however that 17 out of the 20 scheduled bathing water samples tested over the 2016 season at Ballyholme beach returned results that met excellent water quality standard. Only 3 failed to meet the required standard, and these were all following heavy rainfall events.

DAERA works closely with the Department for Infrastructure and Northern Ireland Water to set standards which ensure that our bathing waters are protected. I understand that NIW is spending £11.6 million to improve the wastewater treatment infrastructure around Ballyholme, and a number of phases are already completed. We also work closely with the agriculture sector to protect water quality.

Ballyholme was prioritised for specific catchment investigations in both 2011 and again in 2016. These proactive investigations carry out tailored inspections of all possible pollution sources within the catchment and rectify problems when found. In 2016 Ballyholme was also prioritised by DAERA officials to have additional weighting applied to farms within the catchment under the cross compliance inspection regime. It is also an area that has been put forward as an area that would benefit from the Environmental Farming (Group) Scheme.

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what action she will take to help end the prevalence of parking on the main entrance to Gosford Forest Park.

(AQW 4644/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I am aware of concerns raised with regard to parking of cars along the main road at the entrance to Gosford Forest Park and that the entrance charge to the Park has been suggested as a contributory factor.

A survey in 2014 found that 92% of visitors rated the forest as excellent, very good or good and 91% would probably or definitely recommend the forest to a friend or visitor. Indeed, out of all our forests, Gosford scored best as the forest which was both safe and welcoming. However Gosford also scored poorly in terms of 19% of visitors complaining that they didn't have enough to do and 26% complaining that they had to pay for parking. When I visited the Park as it was hosting the Armagh show I was very impressed by what the forest now has to offer. The addition of a children's play area maintained by the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council has made a significant difference to the use of the park.

However I can quite understand visitors complaining when the survey showed that 38% of visitors do not pay! I fully agree that the practice of parking on the main road is wrong; it obstructs traffic and is a hazard, and it deprives the Forest Service of income needed to maintain the Park. For our part, Forest Service will look again at what it can do to ensure fees are paid. Liaison will also be required with other agencies as ultimately my Department does not have statutory responsibilities in relation to the management and maintenance of public roads or associated parking enforcement issues.

Officials from TransportNI, PSNI, Council and Forest Service have met to discuss parking issues associated with Gosford Forest Park and plan to meet again to see what further measures can be taken.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the importance of the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme in ensuring that upland farmland is properly and environmentally managed.

(AQW 4701/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department delivers a range of schemes that support the proper and environmental management of upland farms including the Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme and the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) (including the Greening payment). In addition, the new Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) is planned to open for applications in February 2017, subject to the necessary approvals.

The ANC Scheme is primarily an income support measure to farmers in the Severely Disadvantaged Area to compensate for part of the additional costs and income forgone related to constraints on agricultural production. Although applicants must

maintain their land in good agricultural and environmental condition, there are no specific environmental obligations in the scheme.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to detail what date the new Environmental Farming Scheme will open; and (ii) for her assessment of whether the delays in the scheme have caused a shortfall in many farm incomes.

(AQW 4702/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- (i) I announced in September that the new Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) is planned to open for applications in February 2017, subject to the necessary financial approvals.
- (ii) I recognise that the majority of legacy agri-environment scheme agreements and the associated payments, under previous Rural Development Programmes, have ended or will end shortly. Therefore, I expect that many farmers will be interested in applying to the new EFS.

However, EU regulations stipulate that agri-environment payments must cover only the costs incurred and income foregone associated with carrying out environmentally beneficial actions that are above baseline legislative requirements.

Therefore, while agri-environment schemes contribute to environmental and socio-economic priorities, they are not income support schemes.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the amount of Rural Development Funding made available in each of the last ten years, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 4714/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The amount of Rural Development Funding the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has made available, under the Rural Development Programme, in the past 7 years is £316,256m. This is broken down by constituency in the table below.

Rural Development Programme Funding from 2009/10 to 2015/16

Constituency	2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000	2011/12 £'000	2012/13 £'000	2013/14 £'000	2014/15 £'000	2015/16 £'000	Total £'000
Belfast East	64	69	1,733	53	179	119	5,113	7,330
Belfast North	26	35	39	32	67	48	34	282
Belfast South	63	144	112	140	538	454	25	1,477
Belfast West	29	53	142	59	576	307	164	1,331
East Antrim	1,238	1,814	2,654	2,127	2,768	2,927	1,999	15,526
East Londonderry	2,771	3,955	4,580	3,516	5,465	5,021	2,397	27,705
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	5,532	6,315	9,160	7,567	11,722	8,440	4,728	53,465
Foyle	397	471	788	1,350	825	942	553	5,326
Lagan Valley	735	961	1,127	1,894	2,127	2,064	800	9,708
Mid Ulster	3,234	4,826	5,826	4,162	5,944	4,391	2,582	30,967
Newry & Armagh	2,785	2,361	3,284	4,604	4,904	5,107	2,826	25,872
North Antrim	4,196	5,238	5,776	4,960	6,957	5,245	3,426	35,798
North Down	104	119	146	127	367	489	332	1,684
South Antrim	1,390	1,527	2,145	1,844	2,659	2,878	894	13,338
South Down	1,526	1,823	2,970	2,166	4,130	5,241	2,136	19,992
Strangford	1,117	2,141	2,323	1,966	2,063	2,823	1,820	14,254
Upper Bann	753	1,627	1,877	2,006	1,970	2,762	2,004	13,001
West Tyrone	4,241	5,126	7,031	5,551	7,091	6,599	3,561	39,200
Grand Total	30,203	38,606	51,715	44,128	60,352	55,857	35,395	316,256

Due to the Department's document retention policy of 7 years, financial information for 2008/09 and earlier years is limited and has therefore been excluded.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 3486/16-21, how many community groups from Fermanagh and South Tyrone applied for the Challenge Fund in (i) 2013-14; and (ii) 2015-16. (AQW 4754/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The 2013/14 Challenge Fund was administered by Northern Ireland Environment Link and the Department does not hold records of community groups who applied for funding.

In 2015/16 the Department of the Environment administered the Challenge Fund. 11 community groups applied to the 2015/16 Challenge Fund.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the (i) funding invested in environmental improvement projects in West Tyrone; (ii) groups that received the funding; and (iii) amount and purpose of each award since the carrier bag levy in April 2013.

(AQW 4761/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The table below details the funding invested during the three financial years 2013/14-2015/16 in environmental improvement projects in West Tyrone from the carrier bag levy income, since the introduction of the levy in April 2013.

Group	Purpose	Total (£)
Beltrim Charitable Trust	Wildfire/controlled burn Demonstration Event	1,224
Beltrim Charitable Trust	Slieveanorra & Croaghan Grouse and Wildlife Project	4,129
Beragh Care Development Association	Beragh Community Garden	14,915
Beragh Red Knights GAC	River Footpath & Accessibility	8,000
Campsie Residents' Association	Campsie 'RIVERBEND' Community Allotments	4,371
Cooley Primary School	Woodland Creation	4,055
Dromore Primary School	Stepping Stones to Our Wildlife Garden	5,000
Erganagh Primary School	Greenfingers	2,172
Gillygooley Primary School	Wildlife and pond redevelopment	3,390
Gortin Primary School	School Garden Development	5,000
Killeter & District Development Trust	Breathing new life into old sites	9,350
Langfield Primary School	Langfield Primary School Wildlife Hotel	2,984
Langfield Primary School	Waste Reduction Project	449
Loughash Primary School	Ash and Splash Around Loughash	5,000
Loughmacrory Community Development Association	Scoping Study - archaeological and natural heritage trail	7,020
Loughmacrory Community Development Association	Loughmacrory and Coolnagreana Burn Environmental Restoration	14,200
Magheramason Community Development Association	Magheramason Storage	2,322
Mid Ulster Enterprises (Creggan) Ltd	Bronze Age Settlement Reconstruction	14,130
Omagh Academy	Benefitting Biodiversity and the School Community	423
Omagh District Council	Ulster Wildlife signage Lough Braden	3,375
Omagh Early Years Centre	Storybook Garden	4,000
Omagh High School	Growing Plants and Minds	2,337
Outdoor Recreation NI	Gortin Glen Forest Park – Trail Design	25,000
Owenkillew Development Company Ltd	Gortin Community Learning Outdoors	4,884
Owenkillew Development Company Ltd	Gortin Outdoors Live and Learn	8,340
Owenkillew Development Company Ltd	Gortin wildlife garden and biodiversity trail	15,991
Playtime, Day Nursery, Playgroup and Out of School Club	Eskra Out of Schools Wildlife Garden	4,282

Group	Purpose	Total (£)
Pond Park Primary School	Outdoor Classroom	4,998
Sion Mills Buildings Preservation Trust	Sion Stables CGI Modelling & APP development.	26,316
Sion Mills Buildings Preservation Trust	Exhibiting Sion Mills' Built Heritage	10,400
Sion Mills Community Forum	Sion Mills River Restoration and Environmental Education Project	7,980
Sixmilecross Enterprise Ltd	The Secret Garden	20,000
St Joseph's Primary School	Little Buds and Buddies Garden Project	4,285
Victoria Bridge Cross Community Forum	Flower Power Project	5,000
Windmill Integrated Primary and Nursery School	Outdoor classroom and garden	5,000
		£260,322

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline which of the 118 targets or associated actions of the Agri-food Strategy Board are delayed or blocked by (i) the work of; or (ii) potential work of the Public Accounts Committee.

(AQW 4762/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department is responsible for 82 agreed actions as detailed within the Executive Response to Going for Growth.

I am not aware of any actions being taken forward by my Department that have been impacted through the Public Accounts Committee's exercise of its functions.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the revisions her Department has made to planning and Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control application procedures and priorities to ensure the speed of successful processing of Agri-Food applications is equal to, or better than those in Great Britain.

(AQW 4786/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: A Planning Response Team (PRT) was established under the former Department of the Environment (DOE) to coordinate and implement the new systems and arrangements for responding to planning consultations following the transfer of statutory planning functions. These arrangements have been consolidated following the formation of DAERA.

DAERA PRT provides a single point of contact for the planning authority and others to obtain relevant advice regarding the environmental effects to assist the council in the process of determining planning applications.

Following the Launch of the 'Going for Growth' report a pre-screening system for PPC farm proposals was set up by NIEA in 2014 to assist farmers in identifying potential environmental issues. NIEA continues to meet regularly with representatives of the pig and poultry industries in Northern Ireland to help ensure that relevant environmental issues are being addressed and ensure that better quality PPC applications are received and that application determination times are minimised.

The statutory determination time for applications under the PPC regulations is 6 months. The average time to determine PPC farm applications over the period January 2015 to October 2016 was 124 days (approx. 4 months). This is similar to the statutory requirement (4 months) in England and Wales for permit determination.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she has any plans to develop a Code of Practice for the implementation of regulations that impact the agricultural industry.

(AQW 4787/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Your question relates to Recommendation 40 made by the Agri-Food Strategy Board in their strategic action plan Going for Growth. The Executive published its response to Going for Growth in October 2014 including agreed actions to be taken forward by government departments and agencies. An update on Executive-led actions outlined in the response is available on the DAERA website at

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Going%20for%20Growth%20Progress%20Update%20-%20period%20ending%2030%20June%202016.pdf>.

This update has also been shared with the Assembly's Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on 22 September 2016.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) how many farmers, groups and organisations in Strabane have received European Union funding since 2011; (ii) the total expenditure in Strabane from the European Union since 2011; and (iii) what plans she has to ensure people will not lose out as a result of an exit from the European Union.

(AQW 4838/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The total level of European Union funding provided by the Department to farms, groups and organisations in Strabane from 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2016 is £1.2m. A detailed breakdown of this funding has been provided in the table at Annex 1. The number of farmers, groups and organisations in Strabane that have received European Funding for the same period is 531 and a breakdown by year has been provided in the table at Annex II.

Annex 1 Total expenditure in Strabane from the European Union since 2011.

EU Funding	2011/12 £'000	2012/13 £'000	2013/14 £'000	2014/15 £'000	2015/16 £'000	Total £'000
Single Farm payments and Area-based Schemes	192	171	184	105	100	752
Agri-environment scheme	92	97	92	78	85	444
NIRDP Axis 1	1		6			7
Total	285	268	282	183	185	1,203

Annex II Details of the number farmers, groups and organisations in Strabane that have received funding since 2011.

EU Funding	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Total
Single Farm payments and Area-based Schemes	36	32	32	20	15	135
Agri-environment scheme	85	88	87	67	66	393
NIRDP Axis 1	1		2			3
Total	122	120	121	87	81	531

The domestic and regional trading and support framework that will apply following the UK's exit from the EU will be subject to negotiation and agreement within the UK, between the UK and the EU and between the UK and its other trading partners. I can assure you that I will be fully engaged in these processes. My priority will be to ensure that Northern Ireland's interests are protected and I intend to be a strong voice at the negotiating table.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) the meetings her Department had regarding penalties imposed on livestock being brought to slaughter with the Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland; and (ii) what subsequent action she will take to limit these penalties on producers, over the last twelve months.

(AQW 4839/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- (i) My Department has not had any specific meetings with the Livestock and Meat Commission over the last twelve months regarding penalties imposed on livestock being brought to slaughter. However, DAERA and the LMC engage regularly on a range of issues affecting the livestock industry.

You will be aware that this matter initially came to the fore in 2014 when local meat plants introduced significant changes to their pricing structure in order to reduce the number of out-of-spec cattle presented for slaughter. Since then there has been extensive dialogue and liaison across the beef supply chain, including significant input from my Department and the LMC. This has resulted in an increasing awareness of market specification requirements among farmers enabling them to meet the challenges of a demanding market place. I believe that ongoing communication within the industry on market requirements is vital.

- (ii) In relation to subsequent actions my Department will take to limit penalties, I would point out that the price paid to producers and the establishment of pricing structures is a commercial matter and outside DAERA's remit. I will however, do what I can to support the competitiveness and profitability of the local livestock industry and to encourage improved transparent communications throughout the supply chain.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she has expanded the scope, and simplified, the Agri-food Processing and Marketing Grant and the European Fisheries Fund schemes to maximise uptake within European Union rules.

(AQW 4867/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Your question relates to a recommendation made by the Agri-Food Strategy Board in their strategic action plan Going for Growth (Recommendation 50). The Executive published its response to Going for Growth in October 2014, including agreed actions to be taken forward by government departments and agencies. An update on Executive-led actions outlined in the response is available on the DAERA website at

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Going%20for%20Growth%20Progress%20Update%20-%20period%20ending%2030%20June%202016.pdf>. This update has also been shared with the Assembly's Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on 22 September 2016.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether her Department has reviewed and identified the key factors within the regulations governing the Basic Payment Scheme, inheritance tax, income tax, land tenure and conacre that prevent more effective use of agricultural land.

(AQW 4868/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The independent Expert Working Group on Sustainable Land Management have been looking at the issues of land mobility and land rental. They expect to issue their Sustainable Agricultural Land Management Strategy soon and my department will respond to that report in due course.

Over the last few years there have been helpful clarifications from HMRC on the issue of how conacre and longer term leasing of land is treated in respect of the available inheritance tax exemptions.

The linking of direct payments to agricultural land under the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) may influence who it is farmed by, and have impacts on land purchase and rental values.

However, provided CAP subsidies are claimed by the person farming the land, the operation of the CAP does not prevent land transfers by sale, long term lease or short term rental agreements.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she intends to review the appropriateness and effectiveness of breed specific legislation.

(AQW 4914/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I understand that Belfast City Council is currently reviewing the recent high profile case involving the seizure, assessment and return of a pit bull. When the findings of that review are available I will consider whether the existing legislative provisions could be reviewed to allow the impact of seizure on dogs and their owners to be more effectively managed, while ensuring appropriate protection for the public.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to list each (i) suspected; and (ii) confirmed case of botulism including the location and date recorded, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4940/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The list below provides details of the location and date of confirmed cases of botulism in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years. A confirmed diagnosis of botulism requires laboratory confirmation and the elimination of other possible causes of disease, which is obtained as part of a post-mortem examination.

Year	County	Date
2011	Antrim	24/10/2011
2011	Armagh	13/04/2011
2011	Armagh	03/10/2011
2011	Down	27/04/2011
2011	Down	02/07/2011
2011	Londonderry	27/04/2011
2011	Londonderry	02/07/2011
2011	Tyrone	23/03/2011
2011	Tyrone	08/08/2011
2011	Tyrone	22/08/2011
2012	Antrim	02/11/2012
2012	Armagh	18/09/2012
2012	Armagh	22/09/2012
2012	Down	08/11/2012
2012	Down	12/11/2012
2012	Down	14/11/2012
2012	Down	10/12/2012

Year	County	Date
2012	Down	17/12/2012
2012	Londonderry	15/06/2012
2012	Tyrone	14/05/2012
2012	Tyrone	25/05/2012
2012	Tyrone	18/06/2012
2012	Tyrone	25/06/2012
2012	Tyrone	28/11/2012
2012	Tyrone	18/12/2012
2012	Tyrone	28/12/2012
2013	Antrim	15/04/2013
2013	Antrim	24/04/2013
2013	Antrim	31/05/2013
2013	Antrim	31/05/2013
2013	Antrim	14/06/2013
2013	Antrim	03/07/2013
2013	Antrim	09/07/2013
2013	Antrim	05/08/2013
2013	Antrim	26/09/2013
2013	Antrim	08/11/2013
2013	Antrim	12/11/2013
2013	Armagh	14/11/2013
2013	Down	03/04/2013
2013	Down	28/05/2013
2013	Down	29/05/2013
2013	Down	31/05/2013
2013	Down	05/06/2013
2013	Down	15/06/2013
2013	Down	21/06/2013
2013	Down	02/07/2013
2013	Down	23/08/2013
2013	Down	19/12/2013
2013	Down	20/12/2013
2013	Londonderry	08/02/2013
2013	Londonderry	06/06/2013
2013	Londonderry	16/07/2013
2013	Tyrone	06/04/2013
2013	Tyrone	15/04/2013
2013	Tyrone	15/04/2013
2013	Tyrone	08/05/2013
2013	Tyrone	06/06/2013
2013	Tyrone	19/06/2013

Year	County	Date
2013	Tyrone	20/06/2013
2013	Tyrone	25/07/2013
2013	Tyrone	30/07/2013
2013	Tyrone	21/08/2013
2013	Tyrone	13/09/2013
2013	Tyrone	19/09/2013
2013	Tyrone	07/10/2013
2013	Tyrone	10/12/2013
2014	Antrim	04/03/2013
2014	Antrim	05/04/2014
2014	Antrim	23/04/2014
2014	Antrim	28/04/2014
2014	Antrim	10/05/2014
2014	Antrim	28/07/2014
2014	Antrim	04/08/2014
2014	Antrim	07/08/2014
2014	Antrim	23/10/2014
2014	Armagh	09/05/2014
2014	Armagh	15/05/2014
2014	Armagh	09/07/2014
2014	Down	12/05/2014
2014	Down	16/05/2014
2014	Down	02/07/2014
2014	Down	07/07/2014
2014	Down	07/08/2014
2014	Down	02/10/2014
2014	Down	14/10/2014
2014	Down	22/10/2014
2014	Down	25/11/2014
2014	Down	05/12/2014
2014	Down	09/12/2014
2014	Down	10/12/2014
2014	Down	30/12/2014
2014	Fermanagh	08/04/2014
2014	Londonderry	06/01/2014
2014	Londonderry	17/07/2014
2014	Londonderry	23/09/2014
2014	Londonderry	16/10/2014
2014	Londonderry	20/10/2014
2014	Londonderry	10/11/2014
2014	Tyrone	29/01/2014

Year	County	Date
2014	Tyrone	06/02/2014
2014	Tyrone	07/02/2014
2014	Tyrone	09/05/2014
2014	Tyrone	16/05/2014
2014	Tyrone	11/07/2014
2014	Tyrone	02/10/2014
2015	Antrim	03/03/2015
2015	Antrim	26/03/2015
2015	Antrim	20/04/2015
2015	Antrim	22/04/2015
2015	Antrim	30/04/2015
2015	Antrim	30/04/2015
2015	Antrim	14/05/2015
2015	Antrim	26/05/2015
2015	Antrim	26/06/2015
2015	Antrim	02/07/2015
2015	Antrim	20/07/2015
2015	Antrim	22/07/2015
2015	Antrim	27/07/2015
2015	Antrim	03/08/2015
2015	Antrim	06/08/2015
2015	Antrim	18/08/2015
2015	Antrim	27/08/2015
2015	Antrim	02/09/2015
2015	Antrim	29/09/2015
2015	Antrim	05/10/2015
2015	Antrim	13/10/2015
2015	Antrim	26/10/2015
2015	Antrim	02/11/2015
2015	Antrim	17/11/2015
2015	Armagh	03/02/2015
2015	Armagh	20/05/2015
2015	Armagh	15/06/2015
2015	Armagh	21/07/2015
2015	Armagh	04/08/2015
2015	Armagh	12/08/2015
2015	Armagh	14/08/2015
2015	Armagh	07/09/2015
2015	Armagh	22/10/2015
2015	Armagh	02/11/2015
2015	Armagh	11/12/2015

Year	County	Date
2015	Down	12/01/2015
2015	Down	26/01/2015
2015	Down	16/02/2015
2015	Down	18/03/2015
2015	Down	30/03/2105
2015	Down	13/04/2015
2015	Down	30/04/2015
2015	Down	05/05/2015
2015	Down	11/05/2015
2015	Down	20/05/2015
2015	Down	26/06/2015
2015	Down	15/07/2015
2015	Down	16/07/2015
2015	Down	20/07/2015
2015	Down	10/08/2015
2015	Down	01/10/2015
2015	Down	14/10/2015
2015	Down	11/11/2015
2015	Londonderry	27/02/2015
2015	Londonderry	02/04/2015
2015	Londonderry	20/06/2015
2015	Londonderry	10/09/2015
2015	Londonderry	12/10/2015
2015	Londonderry	06/11/2015
2015	Londonderry	17/11/2105
2015	Tyrone	13/01/2015
2015	Tyrone	19/01/2015
2015	Tyrone	23/01/2015
2015	Tyrone	04/03/2015
2015	Tyrone	12/06/2015
2015	Tyrone	12/06/2015
2015	Tyrone	29/07/2015
2015	Tyrone	31/07/2015
2015	Tyrone	04/08/2015
2015	Tyrone	25/08/2015
2015	Tyrone	28/08/2015
2015	Tyrone	14/09/2015
2015	Tyrone	06/10/2015
2015	Tyrone	06/10/2015
2015	Tyrone	23/10/2015
2015	Tyrone	03/11/2015

Year	County	Date
2015	Tyrone	03/11/2015
2015	Tyrone	03/11/2015
2015	Tyrone	09/11/2015
2015	Tyrone	17/11/2015
2015	Tyrone	17/11/2015

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to list each investigation by the Veterinary Sciences Division that identified strong circumstantial evidence that poultry litter was responsible for an outbreak of botulism. (AQW 4941/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Botulism is not a notifiable disease under the Diseases of Animals Order (NI) 1981 and no statutory action is required. My Department does not hold records of investigations that identify poultry litter as a cause for an outbreak of botulism.

Information and advice on how to minimise the risk of botulism is available on the DAERA website.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 3695/16-21, to outline (i) when each conversation took place; (ii) the topics discussed; (iii) the actions agreed; and to provide an update on each action. (AQW 4943/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I have had numerous discussions with the Minister of Justice. It would not be appropriate for me to go into the detail of these discussions.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 2815/16-21, to outline the volume of beef originated from Botswana entering through the Port of Belfast, including that coming from the rest of the United Kingdom and European Union, in each of the last three years. (AQW 4944/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The response to AQW 2815 stated that beef imported from a third country such as Botswana can be moved or traded freely within the European Union following clearance at a Border Inspection Post in any member state. This includes meat imported through the EU and GB. We only hold information on direct imports through Belfast Border Inspection Post, and the relevant figures have been provided (reproduced below for ease of reference).

Country	Botswana	
	No of Consignments	Quantity (kgs)
2013	0	0
2014	2	45,125
2015	8	183,950

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she will initiate plans to conserve the sand dunes at Waterfoot beach, Glenariff. (AQW 4974/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The sand dunes at Waterfoot beach, Glenariff do not satisfy the criteria for designation as an Area of Scientific Interest (ASSI). As such, my Department would have no plans in place to conserve these dunes for nature conservation purposes.

The Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust receive funding from the Department through the Environment Fund - £150,000 plus an additional £35,000 offered in September 2016, largely for nature conservation and landscape projects.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to detail the number of departmental and arm's-length body staff that exited under the Voluntary Exit Scheme, broken down by grade; (ii) how many of these posts were then suppressed; and (iii) (a) what proportion; and (b) how many posts were later (1) advertised; and (2) filled by internal promotion. (AQW 5045/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The overall number of DAERA departmental and arm's length body staff that exited under the Voluntary Exit Scheme are 460 and 152 respectively. The additional information requested is broken down in the table below.

DAERA

Grade	(i) Left under VES	(ii) Suppressed	(iii) (1) Proportion Advertised	(iii) (2) Proportion filled by Internal Promotion
Accountant (grade7)	1			
Administrative assistant	29	11		
Administrative officer	85	48		
Agricultural Inspector grade 2	8	1		
Agricultural Inspector grade 3	8	2		
Area Supervisor (Temp EOII)	2	2		
Assistant Accommodation manager/ess	1			
Assistant Librarian	1	1		
Assistant Scientific Officer	2			
Assistant Warden	1	1		
Auditor (SO)	1	1		
Auditor DP	1			1
Cleaner	1			
Craftsman sp1	1	1		
Deputy Chief Fisheries Officer	1			
Deputy Principal	24	13		
Divisional Manager (G6)	1			
Divisional Veterinary Officer	2	2		
Executive officer 1	28	18		
Executive officer 2	34	9		
Fisheries officer 2	1			
Foreman fitter	1	1		
Forest Officer 1	2			
Forest officer 2	1			
Grade 7	2	2		
Higher Scientific Officer	18	8	1	
HPTO Manager	1	1		
ICT level 3	3	1		
ICTlevel 4	3			
ICT level 5	1			
ICT level 6	1			
Industrial	3	2		
Inspector group 1	35	24		
Inspector group 2	16	7	2	
Inspector group 3	3			
Inspector group 4	8	5		
Inspector group 5	1	1		
Mapper	1	1		

Grade	(i) Left under VES	(ii) Suppressed	(iii) (1) Proportion Advertised	(iii) (2) Proportion filled by Internal Promotion
Meat inspector	8	8		
Personal secretary	3	3		
PPTO Landscape Architect	1	1		
Principal	8	2		
Principal Scientific Officer	1			
Principal Scientific Officer (G7)	2			
PTO (Landscape Arch Assistant)	1	1		
PTO Graphic Designer	1			
PTO Warden	1	1		
Ranger	1	1		
Scientific Officer	6	6		
Senior Civil Servant	3	1		
Senior fisheries officer	1			
Senior personal secretary	1	1		
Senior Principal	1			
Senior Principal (G6)	1	1		
Senior Scientific Officer	13	8		
SGB2 watchperson/cleaner	3			
SP Scientific Officer (G6)	3	2		
Specialist A 2	1			
Specialist B 3	1			
Staff Officer	43	13		1
Staff Officer (accountant)	2			
Supervisor sp1	1	1		
Support grade band 2	2	1		
Typist	6	5		
Veterinary Officer testing	3	2		
Veterinary Officer	9	5		
Grand Total	460	226	3 (0.65%)	2(0.43%)

AFBI (Arms length body)

Grade	Left under VES	Suppressed	Advertised	Internal Promotion
Administrative Assistant	4	4		
Administrative Officer	10	8		
Assistant Scientific Officer	18	14		
Chargehand Grade C	27	23		
Deputy Principal	4	3	1	
Executive Officer II	2	2		

Grade	Left under VES	Suppressed	Advertised	Internal Promotion
Higher Scientific Officer	17	15		1
ICT Level 4	1	1		
ICT Level 5	3	2		1
Industrial Supervisor Grade B	1	1		
Personal Secretary	2			1
Post Mortem Attendant	1			
Principal	2	1	1	
Principal Scientific Officer	6	5		
Scientific Officer	29	28		1
Senior Principal Scientific Officer	1	1		
Senior Scientific Officer	11	10		
Staff Officer	3	3		
Support Grade Band 1	3	3		
Support Grade Band 2	5	4		
Typist	1	1		
Veterinary Research Officer	1	1		
Grand Total	152	130	2 (1.32%)	4 (2.63%)

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of social farming.
(AQW 5109/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Social Farming offers people who avail of a range of services including mental health, learning disability and other aspects of care supports with the opportunity to spend time on a farm as part of their daily or weekly routine. This has proven to increase their self-esteem and improve their health and well-being. Social Farming can also provide the host farmer with remuneration opportunities and an overall sense of fulfilment in that they are helping others.

My Department continues to fund Rural Support's Social Farming Support Service to further develop the network of service providers and users. Rural Support also offers guidance and promotes best practice amongst farmers. Recently, I have made funding available through the Social Farming Capital Grant Scheme to help farmers adapt their premises to suit the needs of participants. Social Farming has an important role in modern society and I look forward to its expansion throughout Northern Ireland in the years ahead.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 3519/16-21 and given her assessment that the regulation of the waste industry would be enhanced by a more comprehensive core data set, whether she will introduce a requirement on the commercial and industrial sectors to report waste arisings.
(AQW 5124/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I currently have no plans to introduce a requirement on the commercial and industrial sectors to report waste arisings.

Whilst the requirement for commercial and industrial sectors to report their waste arisings may help to fill a data 'gap' this is not the only solution to producing a more comprehensive core dataset to the benefit of both providers and users.

My Department are investigating the extension of the present electronic management system for waste flow which could provide us with much more accurate data on the waste that is being produced and help Northern Ireland businesses, the waste industry and Government to adopt, promote and support better waste and resource management in the future.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 3519/16-21, how did her Department's system of commercial waste self regulation fail to prevent the development of the illegal dump at Mobuoy Road; and whether she has any plans to enhance these regulations to prevent further widespread illegal dumping.
(AQW 5125/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: While legal proceedings in relation to Mobuoy Road remain ongoing, I am not in a position to comment in detail on any aspect of this case, procedural or otherwise.

However, you will be aware that, following the discovery of the illegal waste deposits at Mobuoy Road, the former Department of the Environment initiated an independent review (the Mills Review), which was published in 2013. Significant progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of that review.

In addition, my Department is investigating the extension of the present electronic management system for waste flow which could provide much more accurate data on the waste that is being produced and help Northern Ireland businesses, the waste industry and Government to adopt, promote and support better waste and resource management in the future.

Consequently, my Department currently has no plans to enhance regulations to prevent further illegal dumping.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she plans to carry out a public information exercise to make the public aware of the damages of river pollution and its effects on the ecosystem of our inland waterways.

(AQW 5170/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: There already are a wide range of ways that information is passed to the public and those who work beside or in waterways to highlight how their activities may impact on inland waterways. These messages tend to be targeted at specific audiences to ensure the best take up of information rather than general information which might be lost on the majority of the public.

NIEA contributes to the development, review and promotion of best practice advice by working in partnership with colleagues from the UK, regulatory bodies in Northern Ireland, environmental working groups, stakeholders, industry and environmental consultants. These published guidelines are known as 'Guidelines for Pollution Prevention' and cover a wide range of activities some of which are listed including:

- Above ground oil storage tanks;
- Treatment and disposal of sewage where no foul sewer is available;
- Works and maintenance in or near water;
- Vehicle washing and cleaning;
- Garages and vehicle servicing centres and
- Dairies and other milk handling operations.

NIEA has contributed heavily to Industry generated Best Practice Literature e.g. Construction Industry Research and Information Association 'Environmental Best Practice on Site' and regulator advisory leaflets e.g. 'Control of Pollution (Oil Storage) Regulations 2010 – Are You Compliant?', 'Vehicle Wash Operators Guidance' and 'Proper use of Drains'.

On the ground engagement is undertaken during the completion of proactive risk assessment inspections by NIEA at commercial, industrial and institutional establishments to reduce the risk of pollution of waterways through identifying perceived risks of activities promoting best practice and appropriate mitigation measures whilst ensuring compliance with legislative requirements e.g. Control of Pollution (Oil Storage) Regulations (NI).

The risk assessment process equips NIEA with information to assign a 'risk status' to a site. This enables the proactive team to take appropriate level of action employing regulatory tools provided under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 to prevent or reduce the likelihood of a polluting discharge and an offence under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. NIEA staff have completed such assessments at range of industrial sites e.g. Mallusk, Carn, Carnabne and at 'high risk' industries e.g. quarry, timber treatment oil industries and Agri-Chemical stores. At Agri-Chemical stores best practice is promoted both to the store and also to customers by using the 'Care in agricultural use near waterways' advisory leaflet along with other material produced by DAERA.

NIEA also inputs and promotes best practice through providing recommendations via the planning process, responding to Environmental Impact Statements, providing verbal and written advice during proactive risk assessment inspections, ensuring agreement of construction method statements for any works in, near or liable to impact waterways to mitigate against perceived risks.

Targeted messages are also released at certain times of the year in relation to issues like the spreading of slurry, silage cutting or during warmer weather and low flows to warn all landowners and industrialists to be extra vigilant when rivers are more vulnerable to water pollution. In addition NIEA provides information/advice via an educational route through CAFRE.

The potential impacts of pollution of a waterway, associated mitigation measures, best practice techniques and Legislative requirements to reduce the likelihood of a pollutant entering a waterway are also promoted through operational, regulatory strategic and advisory delivery mechanisms.

Consequently, given the existing measures in place, I have no plans to carry out a public information exercise.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment on when her Department will make the last payment from the Basic Payment Scheme following the result of the referendum on European Union membership.

(AQW 5200/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: It is not possible to be definitive when the last payment will be made from the Basic Payment Scheme. This will depend on precisely when the UK leaves the EU and the provisions within the withdrawal agreement.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in relation to a plan to replace the Basic Payment Scheme, what discussions (i) she has had with departmental officials; (ii) her Department has had with Scottish officials; (iii) her Department has had with Welsh officials; and (iv) her Department has had with Whitehall officials.

(AQW 5201/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I have regular discussions with my departmental officials on the implications of the decision to leave the EU. Initial discussions have also taken place between my officials and their counterparts both in Whitehall and some of the other devolved administrations and will continue as the process evolves.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she will consider a provision for fishing clubs to receive compensation from a person or business found guilty of killing their stock.

(AQW 5216/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: DAERA Inland Fisheries is responsible under the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966 for the conservaton, protection, promotion and development of salmon and inland fisheries.

In the event of a fish kill resulting from a pollution incident Inland Fisheries staff count the fish mortalities and help to identify the area of river affected. This data along with baseline fisheries data, can be used by Inland Fisheries to estimate the likely number of fish killed, as many dead fish may get washed away or eaten by predators. This can then be presented as evidence to inform the award of compensation by the courts for fish killed by a pollution event, should a polluter be identified and convicted of the pollution offence. However if the polluter is identified, angling clubs may also take a separate civil action against the polluter when convicted to seek compensation for the loss of angling amenity suffered due to the pollution incident.

Any compensation awarded by the courts and received from polluters will be used by my Department, working in partnership with fishery owners and local angling clubs, to carry out remedialworks to assist the recovery of the fishery affected. Recent research indicates that habitat improvement works are more beneficial in the longer term than simply replacing fish stocks as non native fish do not survive in the long term to contribute to the spawning stock. Each pollution incident is however different and each one is reviewed individually to identify action required to help fish stocks recover from the event.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether her Department has an Agri-Food Fund to support rapid investment in the industry.

(AQW 5217/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Agri-Food Strategy Board, within Going for Growth, recommended that:

'Government must put in place an Agri-Food Fund to support rapid investment in the industry' (Recommendation 57).

The Executive Response to Going for Growth was published in October 2014 and outlined agreed actions to be taken forward by government departments and agencies.

An update on Executive-led actions outlined in the response is available on the DAERA website at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Going%20for%20Growth%20Progress%20Update%20-%20period%20ending%2030%20June%202016.pdf> and was also shared with the AERA Committee .

As noted in that report, Action in response to Recommendation 57 is being led by the Department for the Economy, and included an Agri-Food Loan Scheme which opened in March 2014.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what arrangements have been made with her Department to promote co-operation as required by Section 2(2) of the Children's Co-operation Act.

(AQW 5247/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: You will be aware that in terms of the Executive making arrangements to promote co-operation as outlined in the Children's Co-operation Act, this is being considered in line with the development of the new Children and Young People's Strategy. The new Strategy is expected to outline how co-operation could be promoted through the agreement of key principles of co-operative working; the potential establishment of effective structures; and through the proactive identification of opportunities to co-operate.

My Department's Children Champion and officials will work with the Department of Education, who have responsibility for policy development affecting children and young people, and will also continue to collaborate with Agencies, stakeholders and children and young people's organisations to achieve the outcomes contained within the new Strategy.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline any departmental discussions with the Ministry of Defence regarding the future safety of the fishing fleet after an incident with a submarine and a County Down trawler in April 2015, including when they took place.

(AQW 5254/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Safety at sea remains a policy matter for the Department for Transport, not my Department. I am aware the Department for Transport's Marine Accident Investigation Branch have recently concluded their investigation into the snagging of the Ardglass trawler Karen B317 by a submarine and made recommendations to the Royal Navy. My Department was not involved in any discussions.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the percentage compliance of salmon conservation limits for Department monitored waterways, broken down by waterway since 2009.

(AQW 5274/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department monitors salmon returns to a number of index rivers in Northern Ireland by using automated fish counters. The status of each salmon stock is then assessed against a Conservation Limit established for that river. The Conservation Limit defines the number of adult salmon required to fully seed the river based on salmon habitat assessment surveys. Table 1 indicates percentage compliance with the Conservation Limit for a number of monitored salmon rivers in Northern Ireland from 2009 to 2015.

	Bush	Clady	Main	Blackwater	Glendun
2009	62	n/a	68	n/a	33
2010	56	n/a	61	n/a	64
2011	46	163	77	64	76
2012	79	120	129	83	88
2013	137	159	53	45	178
2014	83	108	102	40	55
2015	82	104	106	65	88

Where a primary salmon river does not have a fish counter present my Department monitors salmon stocks by using juvenile salmon recruitment derived from electric fishing surveys carried out during the summer period.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she will include the Chair of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in talks with the Irish Government regarding Brexit.

(AQW 5300/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Whilst I will ensure the Committee are kept fully updated on our progress, I will not be including the Chair in any talks between myself and my counterpart in the Republic of Ireland regarding the decision to leave the EU.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline when she plans to meet with officials in Wales, Scotland and Dublin to discuss Brexit; and will she discuss their views with the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

(AQW 5301/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I have already met with my Welsh and Irish Ministerial counterparts, on several occasions. My officials have been and will continue to engage with officials from Whitehall, the other Devolved Administrations and the Republic of Ireland. I will ensure the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs is kept updated progress as the process unfolds.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether her Department has any knowledge why persons operating in the waste management industry would not meet the test to be considered a fit and proper person.

(AQW 5349/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The fit and proper person test is a requirement of The Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (the Order).

This is applied to operators that carry out waste operations that require either a waste management licence, issued in accordance with The Order, or a waste permit, issued in accordance with The Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) Regulations (NI) 2013, for activities listed in Schedule 1 to the Regulations.

There are exemptions to waste management licensing, detailed in Schedule 2 to The Waste Management Licensing Regulations (NI) 2003, that are specific and for low risk, low environmental impact operations. Operators must register exemptions with my Department. The fit and proper person test does not apply to sites operated under a waste exemption registration.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs when a holistic environmental appraisal of the Special Protection Area and Ramsar site in Carlingford Lough was last carried out.

(AQW 5351/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Monitoring of the features of SPA and Ramsar sites are undertaken on a six year reporting cycle as part of my Department's monitoring programmes. Reporting on the condition of the Carlingford Lough SPA features was last carried out in 2014. The results of this assessment were taken into account in the recent Water Framework Directive River Basin Management Plan process in 2015.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what departmental measures are taken to ensure companies undertaking waste management are reputable, in full compliance with the law and managed by fit and proper persons.

(AQW 5353/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is the regulator for waste facilities. Waste facilities holding a waste management licence, issued under The Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, or a waste permit issued under The Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013, are required to be operated in accordance with the Regulations, and with stringent conditions set within the licence/permit. This includes the fit and proper person requirement.

NIEA staff not only evaluate information provided by the operator, including the fit and proper person requirement, but also carry out unannounced regulatory site inspections, to assess compliance with the authorisation. Non-compliance will lead to regulatory and/or enforcement action being taken, whichever is appropriate, in accordance with the NIEA Enforcement and Prosecution Policy.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the progress of the construction of the new departmental headquarters in Ballykelly.

(AQW 5358/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Following a tendering process, JH Turkington & Sons Ltd were appointed in March 2016 and have almost completed the pre-construction design phase work. All planning approvals are in place and the Construction Notice for the project is expected to issue on 7 November 2016. Building work is then expected to begin within two weeks from that date. The current programme for construction indicates a completion date of January 2018.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the (i) removal of barriers, such as charges for Export Health Certificates; and (ii) exploration of the potential to achieve separate certification for animal health status.

(AQW 5376/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Your question relates to a recommendation made by the Agri-Food Strategy Board in their strategic action plan Going for Growth. The Executive published its response to Going for Growth in October 2014 including agreed actions to be taken forward by government departments and agencies. An update on Executive-led actions outlined in the response is available on the DAERA website at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Going%20for%20Growth%20Progress%20Update%20-%20period%20ending%2030%20June%202016.pdf>.

This update has also been shared with the Assembly's Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee on 22 September 2016.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what proportion of local egg production is free range

(AQW 5405/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: At September 2016 the Register of Laying Hen Establishments shows free range capacity accounting for 54.2% of Northern Ireland egg production. In addition 2.3% of capacity was available for birds in organic systems, which also meet the criteria for free range production.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether there is any legislation to protect the local fishing fleet from interaction with Naval vessels.

(AQW 5533/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Safety at Sea is a reserved matter for the Department for Transport. We are aware the fishing fleet must share space with other legitimate users of the marine environment including merchant shipping and vessels from various naval forces, however my Department does not legislate in this area.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme payments will continue after March 2017, to support the Going for Growth strategy.

(AQW 5668/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: In June I announced that I will not reduce the Basic Payment Scheme to fund an Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) Scheme under Pillar I of the CAP. A Pillar I to Pillar II transfer to fund an ANC Scheme in Pillar II under the Rural Development Programme will also not be introduced.

I am still considering other options for future support to ANC but given the pressures on both the Department's and the Executive's budget, providing any additional support will be challenging. Long-term value for money cannot be ignored, nor indeed the redistribution of Pillar I monies which is already occurring as a result of the transition towards flat rate support in Pillar I.

Mr Bell asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how recent changes in the Euro to Sterling exchange rate are helping to improve returns for local farmers.

(AQO 548/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The recent movement in the Euro to Sterling exchange rate has improved the value of direct payments such as the Basic Payment which will be paid to local farmers in respect of 2016 applications. The exchange rate for the payment has been set at €1 = £0.85228, which increases the expected value of direct payments for this year by £39 million compared to the 2015 claim year. This is a very welcome boost, in what has been a difficult year for farmers in Northern Ireland. In order that farmers benefited quickly from this improvement to the budget, I have made advance payments (of 70% of the value of payments) to 90.72% of eligible farmers by 20 October 2016; with full payments being made to 95% of eligible applicants by the end of 2016.

The depreciation of Sterling also has the effect of making our agri-food exports more competitive, which tends to increase demand and prices for the output of the NI agri-food sector. As a result, I would expect that some of the price increases we have seen in recent months have been driven by movement in the exchange rate.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how many farmers have received advance payments for the 2016 Basic Payment Scheme.

(AQO 546/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I recently announced that Northern Ireland would be the first region of the United Kingdom to make advance payments. I am pleased to be able to confirm that 90.72% of eligible farmers have received an advance payment, resulting in a total of £158,474,453 reaching 21,111 farmers much earlier this year. I am delighted with this outcome which exceeds the challenging target of 80% I set earlier this month.

These payments will deliver a boost to the cash flow of our farm businesses right across Northern Ireland. I am particularly pleased that many Young Farmers and a significant number of businesses subject to inspection are receiving advance payments. My Department is now focusing on the necessary work to deliver full or balance payments to 95% of eligible farmers in December.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she has considered establishing an independent environment agency.

(AQO 547/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I have to confess to some confusion regarding the stance of the member's party on this issue. On the one hand they have made repeated calls for the creation of an independent environment agency and, on the other, they presided over the removal of the independent members from the NIEA Board so I have asked my officials to reverse this position to ensure independent external input to, and scrutiny of, the Board.

I take my responsibility for protecting our environment very seriously and have no intention of abdicating that responsibility to an unelected, unaccountable quango.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how many of the recommendations in the Going for Growth Strategy have either been, or are in the process of being, delivered.

(AQO 549/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Agri-Food Strategy Board made 118 recommendations addressed to government and industry within Going for Growth. The Executive Response detailed agreed actions that would be taken by relevant Government Departments and agencies in response to 81 of those recommendations, with the remainder to be addressed by the industry itself.

My Department monitors progress against the agreed actions recorded in the Executive Response, and publishes regular updates.

The most recent update, published on the DAERA website at the end of September, covered progress to 30 June 2016. It notes that all of the Government actions have either already been, or are in the process of being, delivered.

Key achievements to date include the Farm Business Improvement Scheme, through which we are supporting around 3000 farmers in Business Development Groups, and delivering training through Farm Family Key Skills. My Department has also released information to help farmers prepare for the FBIS-Capital scheme ahead of formal opening later this month. Through the Agri-Food Loan Scheme, the Economy Department has provided funding for producers involved in integrated supply chains and Agri-Food Quest is well established as an industry-led Competence Centre targeting innovation in the sector. In addition, we have opened up 49 new markets since the launch of Going for Growth and, and just last week I took receipt of the Sustainable Agricultural Land Management Strategy.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how her Department is working with local councils to increase the amount of domestic waste being recycled.

(AQO 550/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: This year I have allocated upwards of £2.5 million in financial assistance for local councils to invest in and improve recycling infrastructure and services.

My Department will also be working in partnership with councils; on communications, especially around food waste; on research, particularly to identify options, costs, and timelines for increasing council household waste recycling rates; and on agreeing action plans to reinforce the strategic approach to dealing with Northern Ireland's municipal waste.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in light of the recent pollution by NI Water of the Annsborough River, how her Department will ensure that those responsible are held accountable.

(AQO 551/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: From 1 April 2007 discharges made by Northern Ireland Water Ltd (NIWL) started being regulated under the Water (NI) Order 1999 similarly to any other sector and Crown Immunity was removed. This meant NIWL fell subject to regulation and enforcement where the conditions of those consents were breached or where water pollution incidents occurred.

In respect of the recent fishkill that impacted the Carrigs River upstream of Dundrum Bay, Co Down reported on 8 October 2016, my Department's NIEA and Inland Fisheries staff were on site rapidly after notification of the fish mortalities. Working in partnership, evidence was collected in respect of the incident and in regard to the number and type of fish killed. Following set Water (NI) Order 1999 procedures, further and better particulars of the cause of the incident continue to be collated and the alleged offender will be further questioned under caution in the immediate future.

Once all of the evidence has been considered, a decision will be taken, following the NIEA's set procedures, on the appropriate enforcement action in this case.

You will appreciate that investigations, under the Water (NI) Order 1999, are criminal in nature and the requirements set out in the Police and Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1989 Codes of Practice must be complied with in all such cases. You will also appreciate that I cannot provide specific details, at this stage, as the facts of the case are treated as if 'sub judice' at this point.

In line with the Polluter Pays principle, where fishkills occur, it is NIEA's policy to use the Water (NI) Order 1999 to seek restoration and remediation costs from those responsible to ensure that compensatory measures are taken in respect of the impacted river. And that will be the case in regard to the Carrigs River incident.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the implementation of the capital element of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme.

(AQO 553/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Farm Business Improvement Scheme is being rolled out in a phased way. The Business Development Groups, and Farm Family Key Skills training, are already well underway to help farmers clearly identify their needs and make the right decisions about developing their business. The next phase will be the Capital Scheme, which is expected to open later this month.

The Capital Scheme will offer tiered grant support linked to the needs in the farmer's business plan. The grant rate for the Scheme will be 40 percent of eligible costs. Tier 1 of the Scheme will support smaller scale investments costing under £30,000 to improve the sustainability of farm businesses. Tier 2 will drive larger scale, transformational investment in projects costing in excess of £30,000.

On 20 September, I launched the Preparation Stage for the Capital Scheme to provide information and a number of on-line tools to help farmers start thinking about what they need to do if they are interested in applying for grant support.

I would encourage farmers to look at the information available on DAERA's website. Further information will be provided when the Scheme opens formally.

Department for Communities

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities for an update on conferring operational responsibility for Urban Regeneration and Community Development to Local Government.

(AQW 2920/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): The extension of Regeneration and Community Development powers to Local Government did not proceed under the last mandate. The new Department for Communities (DfC) has now been established with a much wider range of responsibilities, including responsibility for local government and it will be in that context that I will wish to consider the options for going forward. Ultimately, any decision to extend powers to local government will be a matter for the Executive.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities whether he plans to change the social housing policy to ensure a percentage of new social housing units built are bungalows to accommodate wheelchair users.

(AQW 4886/16-21)

Mr Givan: I am committed to the provision of accessible homes for those who need them.

My Department has recently completed the development of new wheelchair accessible accommodation standards for new social housing in Northern Ireland. This new approach to design will greatly reduce the reliance on lengthy bespoke solutions and allow a more proactive approach to address the current and future needs of wheelchair users.

My officials are currently engaged with the Housing Executive, which manages the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP), and Housing Associations on developing an implementation plan, including targets, for the provision of new wheelchair standard accommodation as part of the SHDP from 2017/18.

I am keen to ensure that this approach reduces the current backlog of those waiting for this type of accommodation.

I would also emphasise that ensuring the provision of more accessible accommodation will be part of the delivery plan for 'Improving the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families', one of the strategic Indicators in the new Programme for Government for which my Department has policy responsibility.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities how many people are recorded as homeless in North Down.
(AQW 4888/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) has advised that homelessness data is recorded by the local NIHE office to which a household presents as homeless. The information provided is for the North Down and Ards council area by a process of combining the data for Newtownards and Bangor local NIHE offices.

The Housing Executive has advised that the number of homelessness presenters in North Down & Ards in 2015/16 was 1,408 of which 946 were accepted by the Housing Executive as full duty housing applicants.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities how many people are homeless and sleeping outside.
(AQW 4889/16-21)

Mr Givan: The most recently published homelessness figures are for the year 2015/16. The total number of homeless households accepted as Full Duty Applicants in 2015/16 was 11,202. The Housing Executive has advised that in respect of those sleeping outside across Northern Ireland, figures are not currently held.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Communities to detail the public money spent by the Executive in each of the last ten years on subsidising the upgrade of (i) Windsor Park; (ii) Kingspan Stadium; (iii) Casement Park; and (iv) Brandywell Stadium.
(AQW 4906/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department was allocated a capital budget of £110 million by the Executive for the Regional Stadia Programme, in conjunction with the governing bodies for soccer, rugby and Gaelic games. As a result, my Department has been investing in the three regional stadia, The National Stadium at Windsor Park, Kingspan Stadium, and the redevelopment of Casement Park Stadium on rolling basis since 2010.

The Brandywell Stadium may be eligible for capital funding under the Sub Regional Stadia Programme for Soccer, which I am planning to launch later this year.

A breakdown of public money spent by the Executive in the last ten years on subsidising the upgrade of (i) Windsor Park; (ii) Kingspan Stadium; (iii) Casement Park; and (iv) Brandywell Stadium is detailed in the table below.

Financial Year	Regional Stadia Programme			
	(i) Windsor Park	(ii) Kingspan Stadium	(iii) Casement Park	(iv) Brandywell Stadium
2007/08			565,773	
2008/09		1,215,000		
2009/10				
2010/11	215,462	28,828		
2011/12	-	218,169	161,403	
2012/13	1,198,289	4,456,923	1,656,403	
2013/14	680,525	8,759,873	3,279,352	
2014/15	17,980,639	2,496,990	555,442	
2015/16	8,390,547		817,637	
2016/17			898,416	

Financial Year	Regional Stadia Programme			(iv) Brandywell Stadium
	(i) Windsor Park	(ii) Kingspan Stadium	(iii) Casement Park	
Total	£28,465,462	£17,175,783	£7,934,426	

Sport NI has provided Derry City & Strabane District Council with compliance advice for its early stage development plans for the Brandywell.

The Executive Office is providing Social Investment Funding to Derry City and Strabane District Council for works to the South end Stand & Boundary walls and the development of a new pitch at the Brandywell site, with £936,700 committed to the project in 2017/18 onwards.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities to detail the departmental funding provided for Olympic sports where athletes that live and train in Northern Ireland face obstacles should they wish to represent the United Kingdom.

(AQW 4937/16-21)

Mr Givan: For the period 1 April 2013 to date, Sport NI provided Exchequer funding of just over £4 million to Olympic sports which are structured on a United Kingdom wide or Northern Ireland only basis.

This funding was awarded to individual athletes, governing bodies of sport, sports clubs and schools for the development of each sport from grassroots to high performance levels, including Olympians and those with Olympic potential.

Details for each sport are attached at Annex A.

Annex A

Exchequer funding for Olympic sports structured on a United Kingdom wide or Northern Ireland only basis for the period 1 April 2013 to date.

Sport	Amount (£)	Structure
Archery	56,000	UK
Athletics	511,424	UK
Canoeing	250,735	UK
Fencing	1,670	UK
Football	2,288,727	NI
Gymnastics	32,916	UK
Judo	143,823	UK
Sailing	294,624	UK
Shooting	133,000	UK
Taekwondo	254,500	UK
Volleyball	0	NI
Weightlifting	30,453	UK
Wrestling	5,000	UK
Total	4,002,872	

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities to detail the departmental funding provided for Olympic sports where athletes that live and train in Northern Ireland can choose to represent the United Kingdom without facing difficulties such as those that arise in boxing.

(AQW 4938/16-21)

Mr Givan: Athletes who live and train in Northern Ireland and who have reached Olympic standards can receive funding from Sport NI, an arms length body of the Department, and support from the Sports Institute Northern Ireland. This funding can be provided to cover living costs, accommodation, travel, coaching and training costs; and support provided can include assistance for athletes to prepare for major competitions.

For the period 1 April 2013 to date, Sport NI provided Exchequer funding of almost £6.5 million to sports that do not require an athlete to move to a club in England, Scotland or Wales in order to represent the United Kingdom at Olympic competition. Details for each sport are attached at Annex A.

This funding was awarded to individual athletes, governing bodies of sport, sports clubs and schools for the development of each sport from grassroots to high performance levels, including Olympians and those with Olympic potential.

ANNEX A

Exchequer funding provided for the period 1 April 2013 to date, for Olympic sports which do not require an athlete to move to a club in England, Scotland or Wales in order to represent the United Kingdom.

Sport	Amount (£)
Aquatics (Swimming, Diving, Waterpolo)	187,324
Archery	56,000
Athletics	511,424
Badminton	518,460
Basketball	32,558
Canoeing	250,735
Cycling	82,416
Equestrian	258,658
Fencing	1,670
Football	2,288,727
Golf	264,977
Gymnastics	32,916
Judo	143,823
Rugby	419,560
Sailing	294,624
Shooting	133,000
Table Tennis	67,828
Taekwondo	254,500
Tennis	492,543
Triathlon	148,408
Volleyball	0
Weightlifting	30,454
Wrestling	5,000
Total	6,475,605

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities whether his Department has carried out rural proofing or taken into account its duties in relation to the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 when deciding on locations to process Universal Credit and legacy benefits.

(AQW 4991/16-21)

Mr Givan: A draft Rural Impact Assessment Screening document has been prepared which has indicated that a Rural Impact Assessment is not required. Impact for service users can be mitigated through the continued availability of face-to-face services from alternative locations and the use of enhanced telephony and digital services.

My Department will also use any evidence provided in response to the current public consultation exercise to inform the rural proofing process and the Rural Impact Assessment Screening document is being kept under review during the consultation period.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities to outline the level, character and extent of investment made by his Department, or the Department for Social Development, in Omagh Jobs and Benefits Office since 2010 including telephony systems and other capital expenditure.

(AQW 4992/16-21)

Mr Givan: Omagh Jobs & Benefits office forms part of the Government-owned estate. The building is therefore held by the Department of Finance's Properties Division. Any investment on the building would have been a matter for the Department of Finance to maintain its condition and fabric as an asset.

As part of a wider review of customer services within the Job & Benefits office network, the former Department for Social Development established a Telephony Support Unit in the Omagh Jobs & Benefits office in 2013. The Telephony Support Unit currently deals with Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance and Social Fund enquiries from claimants across Northern Ireland.

In May 2014, a Social Fund crisis loan telephony service was also implemented in the Omagh office again dealing with claimants from across Northern Ireland.

The Omagh Jobs & Benefits office was also in May 2014 selected as one of several offices to pilot a Financial Support Service. This pilot provided an enhancement to the crisis loan service delivered to claimants requesting assistance from the discretionary Social Fund crisis loan provision. The pilot was part of a wider package of measures designed to support claimants to achieve and maintain financial independence. The pilot ended in October 2014.

There has been no additional investment to the business as usual general administrative expenditure during the financial years 2010/11 to 2012/13.

The table below sets out the investment costs in Omagh Jobs & Benefits office by the Department for Social Development for the financial years 2013/14 to the end of August 2016.

Area of Investment	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17 Ytd @ Aug 2016	Total
1 Telephony					
IT – Telephony Implementation Costs	£50.8k	£30.9K			£81.7k
IT – Telephony Running Costs ¹	£37.3K	£48.12K	£54.6K	£19.6K	£159.62K
2 Training					
Training Costs ²					

Note:

- 1 The IT Telephony Running Costs the Telephony Support Unit include the IT Telephony Running Costs for the Crisis Loan Telephony Service.
- 2 The cost of training staff in Omagh throughout the period from 2010 to date is included within the Department's overall training expenditure and cannot be identified separately.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities to detail money lost through error by the Social Security Agency compared with the amount lost through benefit fraud in the last three years.

(AQW 4993/16-21)

Mr Givan: The amounts lost through customer fraud and customer error, compared to loss through Social Security Agency staff error in the calendar years 2013 – 2015 inclusive, were published each year in the Social Security Agency's Annual Report and are set out in the table below.

Year	Customer Fraud	Customer Error	Staff Error	*Total loss
2013	£16.1m (0.3%)	£8.4m (0.2%)	£21m (0.4%)	£45.6m (0.9%)
2014	£25.2m (0.5%)	£9.3m (0.2%)	£17.4m (0.3%)	£51.9m (1.0%)
2015	£28.3m (0.6%)	£5m (0.1%)	£18.2m (0.4%)	£51.5m (1.0%)

* Figures may not total precisely due to rounding

The information provided is an Official Statistic. The production and dissemination of all such statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Total loss has remained between 0.9% and 1.0%, of all benefit expenditure over the last three years. This is an excellent record, achieved through a robust and effective benefit security strategy.

The amounts lost through staff error are consistently lower than that lost through customer fraud and error. In fact total staff accuracy including underpayments last year was 99.4% across the entire benefit system. This was a remarkable achievement against what is a highly complex benefit system, and represents a strong staff performance - recognised as such by both the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Independent Joint Standards Committee.

Nonetheless, small margins of fraud or error can result in significant sums given the scale of benefit expenditure and it is therefore crucial the performance evidenced to date continues. As Minister with responsibility for the integrity of the benefit

system, I am committed to maintaining that momentum and will ensure my Department continues to enhance its counter fraud and error techniques to protect the public purse.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities to outline his plans to engage with hard to reach groups among those impacted by the new Social Strategy.

(AQW 4994/16-21)

Mr Givan: I plan to bring the draft Social Strategy to the Executive with the intention of having it issued for consultation, subject to Executive approval. During the public consultation period, we propose to engage with people across society and would welcome the views of everyone.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities whether the decision to close Cookstown, Newcastle and Ballynahinch Jobs and Benefits Offices (i) was rural proofed before the decision was made; and, if not (ii) when this will be completed.

(AQW 5021/16-21)

Mr Givan: I would refer the member to my response to AQW 5159/16-21 tabled by Colin McGrath which will soon be published in Hansard.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities whether an economic assessment was carried out for the towns that are scheduled to have Jobs and Benefits Office closures.

(AQW 5022/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department is aware of wider concerns regarding the impact of the proposed closures of the Cookstown, Newcastle and Ballynahinch Social Security Offices and JobCentres on job opportunities and the local economy. In order to assess the economic impact of the proposals a Regulatory Impact Screening is currently being completed on these proposals to determine whether a Regulatory Impact Assessment is required.

My Department will also use any evidence provided in the response to the public consultation exercise into the proposed office closures to inform the Regulatory Impact Screening.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities to outline the discussions his Department had with other Departments to ensure the digital aspects of Universal Credit can be achieved.

(AQW 5023/16-21)

Mr Givan: My officials have had discussions with Department of Finance colleagues to draw on their experiences of how best to provide support for claimants using a digital service.

Furthermore, my officials regularly engage with the Department for Work and Pensions who have already rolled out Universal Credit, to ensure any lessons learned are considered and the digital aspects of Universal Credit can be achieved in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities to outline, as part of the Welfare Reform, (i) whether it is projected that staffing in the Working Age group will decrease by 2022; and (ii) the extent in reduction of staffing.

(AQW 5024/16-21)

Mr Givan: At present, it is too early to determine if staffing levels in the Working Age group will decrease by 2022. However, it is projected that over the next 5 years, there will be an increase in staffing in the first three years, because of the need to operate dual social security benefit systems, before a decline over the following two years before moving into a steady state position. Work is ongoing to determine what the overall workforce requirements will be longer term.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities to detail the percentage of females that will be affected by the reorganisation and closures of the rural office network, broken down by office.

(AQW 5025/16-21)

Mr Givan: Based on the latest available figures, the gender breakdown for each of the potentially impacted offices is:

Office	Gender				Total	
	Female		Male			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Ballynahinch	10	66.7	5	33.3	15	100.0
Cookstown	23	88.5	3	11.5	26	100.0
Newcastle	18	85.7	3	14.3	21	100.0

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) the number of towns and surrounding areas that do not have adequate Broadband provision essential for the digital aspects of Universal Credit; and (ii) whether he will address this deficit with the Minister for the Economy.

(AQW 5047/16-21)

Mr Givan: An assessment has not been carried out to identify the number of towns and surrounding areas that do not have adequate broadband provision to enable digital access to Universal Credit.

The Department for Economy statistics state that approximately 99% of premises in Northern Ireland are able to get a broadband service of 512kbps (kilobits per second) using fixed line broadband.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the percentage of female staff that will be affected by the relocation of Social Security Offices and Jobs and Benefits Offices, broken down by office.

(AQW 5048/16-21)

Mr Givan: Based on the latest available figures, the gender breakdown for each of the potentially impacted offices is:

Office	Gender				Total	
	Female		Male			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Ballynahinch	10	66.7	5	33.3	15	100.0
Cookstown	23	88.5	3	11.5	26	100.0
Newcastle	18	85.7	3	14.3	21	100.0

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister for Communities to outline the Equality Impact Assessments that have been completed regarding the proposed relocation of Social Security Offices and Jobs and Benefits Offices.

(AQW 5049/16-21)

Mr Givan: On 20th September 2016, the Department commenced a public consultation exercise on proposals to close a number of Social Security Offices and JobCentres. There are no proposals to relocate any Jobs & Benefits offices.

As part of the consultation exercise the Department also published an Equality Screening document which indicates that the proposals would not have a differential impact on any Section 75 categories. However, my Department will use any evidence provided in the response to the consultation to inform a further screening of the policy to determine the need for an Equality Impact Assessment.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister for Communities to outline, as part of Welfare Reform, (i) whether it is projected that staffing in the Working Age group will decrease by 2022; and (ii) the extent in reduction of staffing.

(AQW 5050/16-21)

Mr Givan: At present, it is too early to determine if staffing levels in the Working Age group will decrease by 2022. However, it is projected that over the next 5 years, there will be an increase in staffing in the first three years, because of the need to operate dual social security benefit systems, before a decline over the following two years before moving into a steady state position. Work is ongoing to determine what the overall workforce requirements will be longer term.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail the cost of the (i) 2015 Department of Social Development/Northern Ireland Housing Executive Asset Commission Summary Report; and (ii) 2014 SERC Cavity Wall Insulation Inspection Report.

(AQW 5058/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) The Department's records show that the 2014/15 Asset Commission, including the stock condition survey, has cost £4,046,980.
- (ii) The report commissioned from SERC cost £25,000.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Communities whether the estimated proportion of households in fuel poverty reduced with the fall in prices for home heating oil.

(AQW 5065/16-21)

Mr Givan: A household is defined as being in fuel poverty if the occupants would have to spend more than 10% of their income on all household fuel use in order to maintain an acceptable level of temperature throughout the home. Three key factors are taken into account in the measurement of fuel poverty: household income, fuel prices and the energy efficiency of a home.

Fuel poverty in Northern Ireland is measured through the Northern Ireland House Condition Survey, the last survey was completed in 2011 and identified that 42% of households in Northern Ireland were in fuel poverty. The next House Condition Survey is due to report on the level of fuel poverty in 2017.

While Government can improve the energy efficiency of households and, to a certain extent, influence income levels, fuel prices are wholly beyond its control and are determined by world markets. Northern Ireland traditionally has higher fuel prices than the rest of the UK and lower average earnings; this ensures that the fuel poverty measurement of households in Northern Ireland is also high relative to other regions of the UK.

When oil prices rise or fall it is reasonable to assume that this will have an effect on one of the key components of fuel poverty measurement.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of cavity walls that have been (i) surveyed; and (ii) insulated through the External Cyclical Maintenance Programme, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5066/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that the position on cavity wall insulation throughout Housing Executive stock is being established via the External Cyclical Maintenance programme in which representative samples of cavity inspections will be undertaken to determine if the cavity has been filled and if it has been filled what condition it is in.

As this intrusive inspection approach has only commenced recently, the Housing Executive is unable to provide the information requested.

The only instance recorded for the 5 year period in question in which cavity wall insulation was installed through an External Cyclical Maintenance scheme was for 6 dwellings in Bellaghy in 2014/15.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 4212/16-21, for a breakdown of these figures by constituency.

(AQW 5078/16-21)

Mr Givan: Pursuant to AQW 4212 in which Mr McCrossan was advised that 8,558 Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions were imposed for the period May 2011 until March 2016 and that 1,481 ESA sanctions were imposed for the period June 2013 until March 2016. Our current information systems do not make it possible to provide a breakdown of these figures on a constituency basis.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities to outline the departmental support for people imprisoned due to the Troubles, to assist them with getting skills, training and employment.

(AQW 5108/16-21)

Mr Givan: Clients experiencing significant disadvantage in the labour market, including ex-prisoners, may avail of early access to the wide range of support and assistance my Department provides in helping individuals move towards and into work.

The support offered is based on a detailed assessment of individual needs and includes a range of job search support including CV building, interview techniques and job application techniques. Advisers also offer individually-tailored advice, provide information and refer or signpost clients to appropriate provision, including skills and work programmes.

In addition, my Department's Programme for Government Delivery Plan for Indicator 17 (Reduce Economic Inactivity) proposes the trialling of a mentoring scheme for individuals who have been in the criminal justice system in order to provide them with additional support in finding and retaining employment. The Delivery Plan will be the subject of a full public consultation as part of the next stage of the Programme for Government process over the coming weeks.

My Department also provides funding for third sector and community organisations that provide a range of training, education, and welfare advice for ex-prisoners.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities to outline whether (i) Urban Development Grant funding is allocated for the UDG Scheme for 2016/17; (ii) funding will be released for 2016/17; (iii) additional funding will become available for 2017/18, and at what level.

(AQW 5156/16-21)

Mr Givan: The budget for Urban Development Grant funding for 2016/17 is £700,000.

Funding will be released in 2016/17 for those projects that have been successful in the approval process and that have incurred eligible expenditure.

At this point my Department cannot confirm financial information beyond the 2016/17 financial year. Work is ongoing to determine budget requirements for 2017/18-2020/21 period; however the outcome of the Budget 2016 planning exercise will not be available until later in the financial year.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) the number of freedom of information requests to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland; (ii) how many were answered fully; (iii) how many were answered partially; and (iv) how many were not answered and deemed as vexatious, in each of the last three years to date.

(AQW 5158/16-21)

Mr Givan: The number of freedom of information requests to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, how many were answered fully, how many were answered partially, those not answered and the number of requests deemed vexatious is provided in the attached table – Annex A.

Annex A

Year	Total Number of Requests Received	No of Requests fully answered	No of requests partially answered	No of requests not answered deemed vexatious
2013-141	10	2	0	0
2014-152	58	11	15	4
2015-163	49	4	8	4

Note

- 1 For the 2013-14 year 8 FOI requests were dealt with through; withdraws, closed after no response, no information covered by request held, or deemed exempt under the relevant exemptions used.
- 2 For the 2014-15 year 28 requests were dealt with through; withdraws, closed after no response, no information covered by request held, or deemed exempt under the relevant exemptions used.
- 3 For the 2015-16 year 33 requests were dealt with through; withdraws, closed after no response, no information covered by request held, or deemed exempt under the relevant exemptions used.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Communities whether the decision to close Cookstown, Newcastle and Ballynahinch Jobs and Benefits Offices (i) was rural proofed before the decision was made; and, if not (ii) when this will be completed.

(AQW 5159/16-21)

Mr Givan: On 20th September 2016, my Department commenced a public consultation exercise on proposals to close a number of Social Security Offices and JobCentres.

As part of this consultation exercise my officials have engaged with colleagues in the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for advice on the rural proofing of the proposals. The outcome of these discussions has informed the development of a draft Rural Impact Assessment Screening document. Once finalised, the document will be made available.

However, my Department acknowledges that office closures will impact on existing users and will therefore keep the need for a rural impact assessment under review during the consultation process.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Communities whether an economic assessment was carried out for the towns that are scheduled to have Jobs and Benefits Office closures.

(AQW 5160/16-21)

Mr Givan: There are no proposals to close Jobs & Benefits offices.

However, my Department is aware of wider concerns regarding the impact of the proposed closures of the Cookstown, Newcastle and Ballynahinch Social Security Offices and JobCentres on job opportunities and the local economy. In order to assess the economic impact of the proposals a Regulatory Impact Screening is currently being completed to determine whether a Regulatory Impact Assessment is required.

My Department will also use any evidence provided in the response to the public consultation exercise into the proposed office closures to inform the Regulatory Impact Screening.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Communities whether an assessment was carried out detailing how many towns do not have adequate broadband provisions to enable digital access to Universal Credit.

(AQW 5161/16-21)

Mr Givan: An assessment has not been carried out to detail how many towns do not have adequate broadband provisions to enable digital access to Universal Credit.

Department for Economy statistics state that approximately 99% of premises in Northern Ireland are able to get a broadband service of 512kbps (kilobits per second) using fixed line broadband.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Communities, as part of the Welfare Reform, (i) whether it is projected that staffing in the Working Age group will decrease by 2022; and (ii) the extent in reduction of staffing.

(AQW 5162/16-21)

Mr Givan: At present, it is too early to determine if staffing levels in the Working Age group will decrease by 2022. However, it is projected that over the next 5 years, there will be an increase in staffing in the first three years, because of the need to operate dual social security benefit systems, before a decline over the following two years before moving into a steady state position. Work is ongoing to determine what the overall workforce requirements will be longer term.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Communities to detail the percentage of female staff that will be affected by the reorganisation and closures of the rural office network, broken down by office.

(AQW 5163/16-21)

Mr Givan: Based on the latest available figures, the gender breakdown for each of the potentially impacted offices is:

Office	Gender				Total	
	Female		Male			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Ballynahinch	10	66.7	5	33.3	15	100.0
Cookstown	23	88.5	3	11.5	26	100.0
Newcastle	18	85.7	3	14.3	21	100.0

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities whether an Equality Impact Assessment (i) will need to be completed; or (ii) will be completed, regarding the proposed relocation of Social Security Offices and Jobs and Benefits Offices.

(AQW 5199/16-21)

Mr Givan: On 20th September 2016, the Department commenced a public consultation exercise on proposals to close a number of Social Security Offices and JobCentres. There are no proposals to relocate any Jobs & Benefits offices.

As part of the consultation exercise the Department also published an Equality Screening document which indicates that the proposals would not have a differential impact on any Section 75 categories. However, my Department will use any evidence provided in the response to the consultation to inform a further screening of the policy to determine the need for an Equality Impact Assessment.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Communities to outline how young people access the National Citizen Service programme.

(AQW 5205/16-21)

Mr Givan: NI National Citizen Service (NI NCS) is delivered on behalf of DfC by a consortium of youth organisations, led by Co-operation Ireland. Young people can sign up to NI NCS in a number of ways;

- By visiting the website www.ncsy.es.co.uk
- By contacting Corinna Crooks, NI NCS Project Co-ordinator on mobile number 07900 922954 or by email ccrooks@cooperationireland; and
- Through facebook/NCSNORTHERNIRELAND or twitter @ncsni

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Communities (i) to detail the number of departmental and arm's-length body staff that exited under the Voluntary Exit Scheme, broken down by grade; (ii) how many of these posts were then suppressed; and (iii) (a) what proportion; and (b) how many posts were later (1) advertised; and (2) filled by internal promotion.

(AQW 5243/16-21)

Mr Givan: There have been a number of Voluntary Exit Schemes funded by the Public Sector Transformation Fund which was set up as part of the Stormont House Agreement. In relation to Departmental staff, the relevant scheme was the Northern Ireland Civil Service Voluntary Exit Scheme. This operated in the 2015/16 financial year only for the 12 Northern Ireland Civil Service departments in place at that time. As the Department for Communities only came into existence on 9 May 2016 and comprises elements of 5 different former Departments, it is not possible to answer this question in relation to Department for Communities staff. Information in relation to the numbers and grades of staff exiting from the former Departments can be found on the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme page on the Department of Finance website <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-civil-service-voluntary-exit-scheme>

The Department for Communities works with a range of Arm's Length bodies. A number of these have also operated exit schemes and the details for each are set out below.

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

3 staff exited - 1 Deputy Principal, 1 Staff Officer and 1 EO2. Two posts were suppressed and the Staff Officer post was partially suppressed (changed from full time to part time). A part time Staff Officer post was advertised ; no posts were filled by internal promotion.

Armagh Observatory and Planetarium

2 staff exited - 1 Grade 6 and 1 Deputy Principal. Both posts were suppressed; neither post was later advertised or filled by internal promotion.

Arts Council NI

7 staff exited - 1 Deputy Principal, 3 Staff Officers, 1 EO2 and 2 Administrative Officers. All posts were suppressed and none were later advertised or filled by internal promotion.

Sport NI

7.49 staff exited - 1 Deputy Principal, 1 Staff Officer, 1 EO, 3EO2s and 1.49 Administrative Officers. All posts were suppressed and none were later advertised or filled by internal promotion.

Libraries NI

19 staff exited - 1 Senior Administrative Officer, 5 Administrative Officers, 4 Senior Executive Officers, 7 Executive Officers, 1 Senior Clerical Officer and 1 Clerical Officer. In addition one Senior Clerical Officer was released under voluntary redundancy (funded by Libraries NI). All posts were suppressed and none were later advertised or filled by internal promotion.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

361 staff exited as shown in the table below. All positions vacated as a result of the Voluntary Exit Scheme have been suppressed. No positions vacated have been refilled on the basis of their original structure.

Grades	No. of staff exited under VES
LV01	8
LV02	39
LV03	33
LV04	87
LV05	54
LV06	34
LV07	29
LV08	5
LV09	8
TL02	27
TL03	13
TL07	3
TL08	3
Manual	18
Total	361

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities , pursuant to AQW 4696/16-21, to detail how the £94.5m of Financial Transactions Capital, allocated to the Department for Social Development in the financial year 2015-16, was spent. **(AQW 5248/16-21)**

Mr Givan: This money was allocated to the Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association (NICHA) to fund the provision of affordable, shared ownership homes across NI for four financial years (15/16 – 18/19). Twenty – five million pounds of this money was spent in the 15/16 financial year.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of new homes expected to be built in East Belfast by 2021. **(AQW 5255/16-21)**

Mr Givan: The Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) is formulated on a three year basis, so information on new social housing schemes is only currently available for the three year period 2016/17-2018/19.

There are currently 73 social housing units under construction in the East Belfast Parliamentary Constituency.

A further 313 social housing units are programmed to start on-site in the East Belfast Parliamentary Constituency as part of the SHDP 2016/17 to 2018/19 (127 units in 2016/17, 141 units in 2017/18 and 45 units in 2018/19).

Please be advised that schemes can be lost or slip to future programme years for a variety of reasons e.g. relating to delays in acquiring sites and/or failure to secure planning permission. Please note that the annual programme formulation process is currently underway for the new SHDP period 2017/18 to 2019/20, and further schemes may be added to the programme for the East Belfast Parliamentary Constituency. Additional schemes can also be added to the SHDP in-year through the purchase of Existing Satisfactory / Off-the-shelf properties.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities how the Northern Ireland Housing Executive monitors incidents of intimidation of racial minorities accepting social housing offers.

(AQW 5256/16-21)

Mr Givan: Where a social housing offer has been accepted and the tenant subsequently terminates his/her tenancy, the Housing Executive has monitoring mechanisms in place to collate information regarding the reasons for termination. These include circumstances where there is alleged intimidation.

If the intimidation takes the form of physical damage, the Housing Executive has monitoring information through use of the Hate Incident Practical Action (HIPA) scheme. The HIPA scheme is available across Northern Ireland to support victims of hate incidents in their homes. It is supported by the Department of Justice, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Housing Executive and the Department for Communities. The scheme is available to owner-occupiers, tenants in privately rented accommodation, Housing Executive properties and has recently been extended to cover Housing Association properties.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities how the Northern Ireland Housing Executive can support social housing tenants, with particular reference to racial minorities, to hold their tenancy free from intimidation.

(AQW 5257/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive acknowledges that hate harassment has been identified as a current issue in Northern Ireland. They promote a clear and strong message that they will not tolerate hate crime in any form on their estates and will take appropriate action to effectively address and eradicate hate crime motivated by someone's perceived Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, Religion, Political Opinion, Disability or Gender Identity.

Local Offices can help if a victim has no home, is in danger of losing their home or is afraid to go home because someone has been violent, or because of threats of violence likely to be carried out. Support can range from providing safe temporary accommodation, or advice and assistance on finding somewhere else to live.

The Housing Executive is currently rolling out a Housing Solutions and Support approach across the organisation which focuses on person-centred housing and homeless services, tailored to meet the needs of individual customers and support them to achieve sustainable housing solutions. This approach is being successfully used to support their customers who have experienced racist hate crime and incidents, utilising the expertise of other agencies where appropriate.

The Housing Executive also works in partnership with Northern Ireland Association for Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) to provide a floating support service which provides assistance to people whose tenancy may be at risk due to harassment or intimidation because of their ethnicity.

The Housing Executive's "Safer Together" Community Safety Strategy 2015-2017 recognises the devastating impact that hate harassment can have on victims. The organisation is committed to identifying and responding to hate incidents and, where possible, perpetrators will be dealt with through the Housing Executive's Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) process.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities to outline what discussions and collaboration takes place in communities to support social housing tenants, with particular reference to racial minorities that are experiencing intimidation and attacks on their property, to continue to hold their tenancy.

(AQW 5258/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's (NIHE) Race Relations Officer works closely with the minority ethnic community to ensure their services and support are tailored to the needs of their new communities.

The NIHE provide support to individual victims of racist hate crime to enable them to continue to hold their tenancy which will vary depending on their needs and wishes as well as a range of external factors and local circumstances. They work in partnership with the PSNI, local groups, and a range of other agencies to identify the level of any threat, the potential for repeat attacks and to see if a solution can be developed to support a tenant to sustain their tenancy.

They also support a range of initiatives to address hate harassment, anti-social behaviour and fear of crime in their estates. Examples of these are community safety warden schemes, street pastors, home security schemes, good morning services, diversionary activities, physical works to communal areas and intergenerational workshops.

Through partnership with Northern Ireland Association for Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) the NIHE provide a floating support service which gives assistance to people whose tenancy may be at risk due to harassment or intimidation because of their ethnicity.

If the intimidation takes the form of physical damage, the HIPA scheme (Hate Incident Practical Action Scheme) is available across Northern Ireland to support victims of hate incidents in their homes. It is supported by the Department of Justice, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the NIHE and my Department. The scheme is available to owner-occupiers, tenants in privately rented accommodation, NIHE properties and has recently been extended to cover Housing Association properties.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of occasions the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has awarded points to applicants on the basis of being intimidated, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5259/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has provided details of the number of homeless presenters, who gave the reason for presentation as intimidation, by category for the last five years as shown in the tables below. The tables also provide the number of presenters accepted as full duty applicants.

2011/12

Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	Accepted as Full Duty Applicants
Intimidation-Anti-social behaviour	44	30
Intimidation-Disability	2	2
Intimidation-Paramilitary	326	213
Intimidation-Racial	29	18
Intimidation-Sectarian	52	34
Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	9	6
Total	462	303

2012/13

Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	Accepted as Full Duty Applicants
Intimidation-Anti-social behaviour	75	46
Intimidation-Disability	1	0
Intimidation-Paramilitary	387	292
Intimidation-Racial	36	26
Intimidation-Sectarian	66	48
Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	21	15
Total	586	427

2013/14

Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	Accepted as Full Duty applicants
Intimidation-Anti-social behaviour	77	37
Intimidation-Paramilitary	472	293
Intimidation-Racial	39	18
Intimidation-Sectarian	65	32
Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	14	10
Intimidation-Disability	1	1
Total	668	391

2014/15

Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	Accepted as Full Duty Applicants
Intimidation-Anti-social behaviour	62	30

Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	Accepted as Full Duty Applicants
Intimidation-Paramilitary	433	312
Intimidation-Racial	47	33
Intimidation-Sectarian	35	19
Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	13	11
Total	590	405

2015/16

Reason for Homelessness	Presenters	Accepted as Full Duty Applicants
Intimidation-Anti-social behaviour	77	48
Intimidation-Disability	1	1
Intimidation-Paramilitary	433	325
Intimidation-Racial	23	14
Intimidation-Sectarian	39	21
Intimidation-Sexual Orientation	9	5
Total	582	414

To Note, A Full Duty Applicant is a person to whom the Housing Executive owes a duty under the Homelessness legislation, Article 10(2) of the Housing (NI) Order, 1988 to "secure that accommodation becomes available for his /her occupation".

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the number of social houses built in North Antrim in each of the last five years; (ii) the number of applications for social housing currently in the system; and (iii) the average time spent on the social housing waiting list.

(AQW 5260/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- i) There have been 174 new build social housing units completed in the North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency during the period 2011/12 – 2015/16 and 2016/17 to-date.

Year	Total Completions (New Build Only)
2011/12	16
2012/13	9
2013/14	101
2014/15	48
2015/16	0
2016/17 (to-date)	0
Total	174

This figure does not include the provision of new homes through the rehabilitation/re-improvement and acquisition of existing satisfactory/off-the-shelf properties which form the Social Housing Development Programme.

- ii) The number of applicants currently registered for social housing in the North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency as of September 2016 is as follows:

Total applicants on Waiting List	1,928
HS applicants in Housing Stress	1,238

iii) The average time spent on the social housing list is as follows:

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of Allocations in the year to 30th September 2016	Mean Average Months spent on the Waiting List at the Point of Allocation
North Antrim	355	18.5
Northern Ireland	7594	18.6

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities to outline the percentage of staff considered non-mobile in the Omagh Jobs and Benefits Office, broken down by gender.
(AQW 5265/16-21)

Mr Givan: The latest available figures for the Omagh Jobs & Benefits office show that 79.3% of staff are considered non-mobile.

81.2% staff considered non-mobile are female and 18.8% are male.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities whether his Department will survey their staff to ascertain the level of interest to transfer to work in Omagh.
(AQW 5266/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department has no plans to survey departmental staff as to whether they would be interested in transferring to a role in Omagh. Job opportunities in Omagh will be filled in line with the NICS Vacancy Management Policy which includes the use of Interest Circulars or Elective Transfer notices which are distributed across the NICS or through redeployment within the Department for Communities.

Interest is also sought from career breakers wishing to return to work or those staff on priority pools such as employees with welfare reasons or staff with disabilities who wish to move closer to home.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities whether his Department will explore the future delivery of new work in Omagh to protect the jobs in the Omagh Jobs and Benefits Office.
(AQW 5267/16-21)

Mr Givan: Minister is committed to the Department being a regional organisation which ensures that jobs are spread across Northern Ireland and are not Belfast focused. The model for the delivery of Universal Credit is a regional model with two of the three Service Centres located outside Belfast in Londonderry and Newry and a network of frontline Jobs & Benefit offices, including the Omagh office.

The Department is continuing to work to understand the impact of the introduction of Universal Credit in September 2017 on the existing Jobseeker's and Income Support Benefit Processing Centres and Telephony Support Units. Until this work is completed it is not possible to confirm the staffing impacts for the Omagh office.

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister for Communities whether there is provision in his departmental budget to provide free swimming lessons for children aged five and under.
(AQW 5275/16-21)

Mr Givan: There is no provision in my Departmental budget to provide free swimming lessons for children.

Under the Recreation and Youth Service (NI) Order 1986, District Councils are responsible for leisure and recreational provision within their own areas. Any decision to provide free swimming for children aged five years and under rests with the relevant council.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Communities whether an Equality Impact Assessment (i) will need to be completed; or (ii) will be completed, particularly on non-mobile grades and all section 75 categories, regarding the proposed relocation of Social Security Offices and Jobs and Benefits Offices.
(AQW 5297/16-21)

Mr Givan: On 20th September 2016, the Department commenced a public consultation exercise on proposals to close a number of Social Security Offices and JobCentres. There are no proposals to relocate any Jobs & Benefits offices.

As part of the consultation exercise the Department also published an Equality Screening document which indicates that the proposals would not have a differential impact on any Section 75 categories both in terms of service users and staff. However, my Department will use any evidence provided in the response to the consultation to inform a further screening of the policy to determine the need for an Equality Impact Assessment.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities to outline where the additional £100,000 to the Musical Instruments for Bands Programme announced in a recent press release, will come from within his departmental budget.

(AQW 5298/16-21)

Mr Givan: The work of bands, those involved in music in this sector has the potential to add wider value in terms of community cohesion, economic regeneration and social inclusion. The bands sector increasingly reaches across communities and is an area that merits support in a sustained way.

Arts Council NI have confirmed that 94 applications were received showing the popularity of the programme.

Sixty eight applications have been deemed eligible to meet the requirements. Whilst Arts Council can meet 48 of the applications within the initial allocation, a further £98k is required to meet the remaining 20 applications.

The additional £98k was funded from within the Departments budget allocation for the year.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the departmental funding available to people with a disability or special needs for art.

(AQW 5302/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department for Communities funding for the Arts is mainly disbursed through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI).

ACNI has advised that while they don't have any specific funding streams for people with a disability, however, they target artists with disabilities in the profiling of their Support for Individual Artists Programme.

ACNI also funds the core costs for several arts and disability organisations. These include the Arts and Disability Forum, a disabled-led development agency working towards cultural equity for disability/ deaf people; Open Arts that provides a variety of high quality activities across a range of art forms, ensuring both participation and artistic excellence for people with disabilities; and Drake Music which supports access to independent music making for children and adults with complex disabilities.

In addition, ACNI funds the core costs for several organisations that provide a high level of creative engagement for people with disabilities including Streetwise Community Circus, Kids in Control and Replay Theatre Company.

My department is also developing a new Culture and Arts Strategy a key aim of which will be to secure improved health and wellbeing for all citizens and it will support key indicators towards achieving Programme for Government outcomes.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities , pursuant to AQW 3882/16-21, whether the reference to the Housing Executive's priority being non-traditional properties includes flats or maisonettes previously owned by the Housing Executive and sold under the House Sales Scheme to the sitting tenant.

(AQW 5314/16-21)

Mr Givan: 'Non-traditional properties' are those properties in the Housing Executive's stock that are of system-built construction; these would include, for example, Aluminium Bungalows and dwellings of No Fines, Orlit or Timber Frame construction.

This stock includes flat/maisonette blocks in which individual dwellings have been sold under the Housing Executive's House Sales Scheme.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities , pursuant to AQW 4008/16-21, what consideration is given to tenants' finances when projected increases in service charges are made by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and then withdrawn.

(AQW 5315/16-21)

Mr Givan: The amount of services charge applied reflects the costs associated with the upkeep of the building and as such does not take into consideration the leaseholder's finances.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities to detail the annual cost of the Steps 2 Success scheme since its inception.

(AQW 5316/16-21)

Mr Givan: Although the Steps 2 Success employment programme commenced in October 2014, the first expenditure did not occur until November 2014.

The total cost of the programme to date is £25.6m, broken down by programme year as follows:-

- Year 1 - From November 2014 to October 2015 - £15.9m
- Year 2 - From November 2015 to September 2016 - £9.7m (there is still expenditure for October 2016 to be included in Year 2).

Mr Carroll asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment on the disparity in religious backgrounds of the referrals to the Steps 2 Success scheme, as 50 per cent come from a Catholic background and 35 per cent from a Protestant background.

(AQW 5317/16-21)

Mr Givan: Steps 2 Success is a programme aimed at helping longer term claimants of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) to get a job. Claimants of other benefits can also participate on the programme.

As over 99% of Steps 2 Success participants are required to participate on the Programme as a condition of continued entitlement to benefit, the breakdown by community background will directly reflect the breakdown of the JSA claimant count.

Community background of JSA claimants is self reported and not all claimants disclose this information. Approximately 9% of participants on the Steps 2 Success programme have an unknown community background.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities whether his Department's proposal to remove a significant number of posts in the Omagh Jobs and Benefits Office has been subjected to a full Equality Impact Assessment; and whether this proposal will have a disproportionately negative impact on female staff.

(AQW 5347/16-21)

Mr Givan: The staffing levels within Working Age Services in Omagh Jobs & Benefit office will be impacted following the implementation of the new Finance Support Service as the work currently carried out by the Crisis Loan tele-claims team will cease with the introduction of Discretionary Support.

An Equality Impact Assessment screening exercise was completed for the Discretionary Support sites selection and this was published on 29 September 2016. The findings of the assessment were that there was no need for a full Equality Impact Assessment.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities to publish the business case, or any such related documents, relating to his Department's decision to reduce the number of posts in the Omagh Jobs and Benefits Office.

(AQW 5348/16-21)

Mr Givan: The staffing levels within Working Age Services in Omagh Jobs & Benefit office will be impacted following the implementation of the new Finance Support Service as the work currently carried out by the Crisis Loan tele-claims team in Omagh will cease with the introduction of Discretionary Support. An Outline Business Case for the new Discretionary Support Service has been completed and approved by the Department for Communities Modernisation Board and the Department of Finance. However, the Department does not routinely publish business cases.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 3670/16-21, to detail the number of people classified as a full duty applicant that were removed from the housing executive's waiting lists as a result of death in each of the last 12 months.

(AQW 5352/16-21)

Mr Givan: The table below provides a breakdown, by month, of the number of applicants registered as homeless who were subsequently removed from the waiting list as a result of death in each of the last 12 months.

Month	Number removed from the waiting list as a result of death
September 2015	4
October 2015	9
November 2015	5
January 2016	3
February 2016	5
March 2016	3
April 2016	3
May 2016	4
June 2016	4
July 2016	7
August 2016	3
September 2016	3
Total	53

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities how many cases of anti-social behaviour were recorded by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for (i) Holywood; (ii) Bangor; (iii) Donaghadee; and (iv) Millisle.

(AQW 5363/16-21)

Mr Givan: Anti-Social Behaviour cases are recorded on a Local Office basis. Bangor Office includes Holywood and Newtownards Office includes Donaghadee and Millisle.

ASB Figures 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016

- Bangor – 150
- Newtownards – 170

ASB Figures 1 April 2016 – 30 September 2016

- Bangor – 74
- Newtownards – 84

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) the community organisations that receive funding through Neighbourhood Renewal; and (ii) the funding each community organisation has received since 2014.

(AQW 5364/16-21)

Mr Givan: Details of those community organisations that receive funding through Neighbourhood Renewal have been deposited in the Assembly Library. This includes detail of the amount of funding awarded for 2014/15, 2015/16 and the allocation for 2016/17.

Expenditure figures for 2014/15 and 2015/16 have been confirmed as final, whilst figures for 2016/17 are allocation figures as determined by Contracts for Funding.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) the community organisations that receive funding through the Community Investment Fund; and (ii) the funding that each organisation has received since 2014.

(AQW 5365/16-21)

Mr Givan: Details of the organisations and the funding they received through the Community Investment Fund (CIF) since 2014 is provided at the attached Annex A.

Annex A

The community organisations that have receive funding through the Community Investment Fund; and (ii) the funding that each organisation has received since 2014 to present.

Community Organisation Receiving Funding from CIF	Sum of Government Awarded Amount
ABC Community Network	£ 190,611.41
Ards Development Bureau & Community Network	£ 177,214.40
Ashton Community Trust	£ 137,806.00
Atlas Womens Centre	£ 191,182.02
Ballybeen Womens Centre	£ 206,693.81
Ballymoney Community Resource Centre	£ 189,434.80
Ballynaveigh Community Development Association	£ 191,800.59
Carrickfergus Community Forum	£ 175,861.80
Causeway Rural & Urban Network	£ 204,677.60
Chrysalis Womens Centre	£ 153,948.08
Confederation of Community Groups Newry & Mourne	£ 192,367.00
Cookstown & District Womens Group	£ 30,000.00
County Armagh Community Development	£ 203,941.30
Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership	£ 137,010.40
East Belfast Community Development Agency	£ 133,072.30
Falls Community Council	£ 192,600.10
First Steps Womens Group	£ 181,748.06
FOCUS	£ 148,805.17

Community Organisation Receiving Funding from CIF	Sum of Government Awarded Amount
Footprints Womens Centre	£ 206,372.74
Foyle Womens Information Network	£ 137,831.20
Greater Shantallow Area Partnership	£ 191,982.50
Greenway Womens Group	£ 206,746.80
Hollywood Family Trust	£ 178,372.40
Larne Community Development Project	£ 143,099.10
Magherafelt Womens Group	£ 192,283.32
North Down Community Network	£ 143,898.34
North West Community Network	£ 166,688.00
Randalstown ARCHES Association Ltd	£ 151,114.90
Rathlin Development & Community Association	£ 97,000.00
South Tyrone Empowerment Programme	£ 129,750.84
Strathfoyle Womens Group	£ 191,293.44
The Fermanagh Trust	£ 160,296.70
The Resurgam Community Development Trust Ltd/Resurgam Youth Initiative	£ 75,000.00
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum	£ 175,374.28
Waterside Women's Centre	£ 143,995.96
Windsor Womens Centre Women Too	£ 192,201.82
Womens Centre Derry	£ 206,737.00
Grand Total	£ 6,128,814.18

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) the community organisations that receive core funding costs; and (ii) the funding that each organisation has received since 2014.

(AQW 5366/16-21)

Mr Givan: The attached table sets out the organisations that received core funding costs and the funding each has received since 2014.

Table 1

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Housing Rights Service	£2,182,500.00	HAB
Total Housing Affordability Branch	£2,182,500.00	
16th NI Seaview Presbyterian Girls Brigade	£900.00	VCD
1st Ballykelly Boys' Brigade	£900.00	VCD
1st Castledawson Boys Brigade	£1,800.00	VCD
1st Castlerock Scout Group	£850.00	VCD
1st Coleraine Boys Brigade	£2,700.00	VCD
1st Cullybackey Guides	£650.00	VCD
1st Cullnady Boys Brigade	£1,600.00	VCD
1st Dungiven Boys Brigade	£2,081.00	VCD
1st Enniskillen Guides	£840.00	VCD
1st Faughanvale Girl Guiding Unit	£2,100.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
1st Garvagh Boys Brigade	£2,668.00	VCD
1st Inniskilling Scouts	£900.00	VCD
1st Kilbride Boys Brigade	£1,200.00	VCD
1st Lisburn Boys Brigade	£957.00	VCD
1st Maghaberry Scout Group	£850.00	VCD
1st Maghera Boys Brigade	£300.00	VCD
1st Magheraculmoney Scouts	£1,050.00	VCD
1st Magherafelt Boys Brigade	£700.00	VCD
1st Moneymore Guide Company	£833.00	VCD
1st Presbyterian Church Broughshane Sunday School	£520.00	VCD
1st Raloo Boys Brigade	£2,300.00	VCD
1st Saintfield Youth Council (BB, GB & Youth Club)	£1,000.00	VCD
1st Tandragee Scout Group	£1,200.00	VCD
220th Castledawson Girls Brigade	£1,600.00	VCD
228th Tobermore Girls Brigade	£1,630.00	VCD
22nd Old Boys Football Club	£1,500.00	VCD
258th Culnady Girls Brigade	£1,700.00	VCD
2nd Ahoghill Boys Brigade	£1,000.00	VCD
2nd Limavady Boys Brigade	£2,500.00	VCD
32nd Belfast Boys Brigade	£2,200.00	VCD
33rd Derry Ballinascreen Scouts	£1,200.00	VCD
362nd Raloo Girls Brigade	£1,000.00	VCD
3rd Larne Boys Brigade Company	£969.00	VCD
4th Fermanagh Scouts	£1,845.00	VCD
7th Bangor Scout Group	£1,300.00	VCD
Abbey Historical Society/The Whitehouse Preservation Trust	£900.00	VCD
Abbeytots Parent & Toddler Group	£2,190.00	VCD
ABC Community Network	£190,611.41	VCD
Accolade (All Communities Art Communication)	£2,300.00	VCD
Acorn Womens Group	£2,700.00	VCD
Action Deaf Youth	£1,500.00	VCD
Active Listening Ltd	£1,499.00	VCD
Advice NI	£2,819,436.14	VCD
African & Caribbean Support Organisation NI (ACSONI)	£900.00	VCD
Age Concern Castledearg	£1,200.00	VCD
Aghagallon Community Centre	£2,350.00	VCD
Aghalee Taekwondo Club	£1,120.00	VCD
Aghanloo Flute Band	£2,100.00	VCD
Albert Foundry Football Club	£1,100.00	VCD
All Nations Ministries	£800.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
All Saints Crossdermott Bowling Club	£876.00	VCD
Altamuskin Community Association	£1,050.00	VCD
AMIGOS Together Belfast Free Spanish Lessons	£1,120.00	VCD
Andersonstown Celtic Football Club	£1,100.00	VCD
Annaclone Summer Scheme	£1,104.00	VCD
Annaghmore GAC	£700.00	VCD
Annalong Cultural Education Society	£1,250.00	VCD
Antrim Festival Group	£900.00	VCD
Antrim Hockey Club	£2,112.00	VCD
Antrim Reminiscence Group	£2,000.00	VCD
Antrim to Gaza	£1,150.00	VCD
Antrim Youth Information and Counselling Centre	£2,700.00	VCD
Aodh Ruadh Dun Geanainn Ladies GAC	£900.00	VCD
Apprentice Boys Of Derry Parent Club	£950.00	VCD
Arboretum Regeneration Castlewellan (ARC)	£1,250.00	VCD
Arbour House Project	£2,700.00	VCD
Ardaluin Regeneration Trust	£1,380.00	VCD
Ardinariff Historical and Cultural Society	£2,400.00	VCD
Ardmore Cricket & Football Club	£1,300.00	VCD
Ardoyne Holy Cross boxing club	£1,250.00	VCD
Ards Development Bureau & Community Network	£177,214.40	VCD
Ardstraw & Baronscourt Youth Council	£1,800.00	VCD
Ardstraw Community Playgroup	£2,550.00	VCD
Ardtree & Desertcreat Senior Citizens Group	£2,140.00	VCD
Area Ten North Derry County Darts	£1,500.00	VCD
Armagh Child Contact Centre	£2,498.00	VCD
Armoy Community Association	£14,015.65	VCD
Armoy Over 55's Club	£825.00	VCD
Arthritis Care Strabane	£1,300.00	VCD
Artigarvan Youth Club	£820.00	VCD
Artillery Youth Centre (Greater New Lodge Youth Forum)	£600.00	VCD
Ashgrove Primary Parent Teacher Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Ashton Community Trust	£137,806.00	VCD
Assistance Dogs Northern Ireland	£900.00	VCD
Association of Charitable Foundations	£20,000.00	VCD
Atlas Womens Centre	£331,740.25	VCD
Atticall Community Association	£1,150.00	VCD
Augher Stars Youth	£1,110.00	VCD
Aughintober Regeneration	£900.00	VCD
Aughlisnafin Youth Club	£650.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Aughnahooray LOL 343B	£700.00	VCD
Aughrim LOL 711	£750.00	VCD
Ballela GAC	£1,000.00	VCD
Ballinamallard United Football Club	£1,490.00	VCD
Ballinamallard United Youth FC	£1,200.00	VCD
Ballinascreen Historical Society	£800.00	VCD
Ballinascreen Spred Group (Special Needs Adults)	£2,700.00	VCD
Ballinrees Bowling Club	£1,200.00	VCD
Ballinrees Pipe Band	£1,950.00	VCD
Ballybeen Womens Centre	£734,945.37	VCD
Ballycastle Concern Group	£1,100.00	VCD
Ballycastle McQuillans GAC	£900.00	VCD
Ballycastle United Youth Academy	£1,920.00	VCD
Ballyclare Family Focus: Ballyclare Family Support & Resource Network	£1,200.00	VCD
Ballydougan Patchwork and Craft Group	£1,100.00	VCD
Ballykeel Together Development Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Ballykelly Boxers	£1,900.00	VCD
Ballykelly Community and Youth Association	£1,100.00	VCD
Ballykelly Mens Shed	£1,200.00	VCD
Ballykelly Primary School	£800.00	VCD
Ballykinlar Cross Community Preschool Ltd	£1,100.00	VCD
Ballymac Friendship Trust Limited	£12,202.32	VCD
Ballymena & District Carers Group	£2,500.00	VCD
Ballymena and Antrim Athletic Club	£1,500.00	VCD
Ballymena Area Childrens Contact Service	£2,200.00	VCD
Ballymena ME & Fibromyalgia Support Group	£1,412.00	VCD
Ballymena United Allstars Ladies Football Club	£1,200.00	VCD
Ballymoney Community Resource Centre	£189,434.80	VCD
Ballymoney United Youth Academy	£2,350.00	VCD
Ballymoughan Flute Band	£1,000.00	VCD
Ballynaveigh Community Development Association	£211,800.95	VCD
Ballynagross FC	£2,245.00	VCD
Ballynahinch Child Contact Centre	£1,200.00	VCD
Ballyoran Community and Arts Group	£840.00	VCD
Ballyspallen Cricket Club	£2,500.00	VCD
Balnamore Community Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Banbridge Amateur Swimming Club	£1,500.00	VCD
Banbridge Rangers Football Club	£1,100.00	VCD
Banbridge Senior Citizens Club	£1,500.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Banbridge Special Olympics	£800.00	VCD
Bann Valley Arts & Historical Society	£1,150.00	VCD
Bann Valley Community Group	£1,500.00	VCD
Barn United Youth Football Club	£2,080.00	VCD
Barnamaghery Rural Society	£1,500.00	VCD
Beal Cu ORaballaigh GAA Club	£700.00	VCD
Beautiful Minds	£699.00	VCD
Bee Heard	£1,200.00	VCD
Belfast 89FM	£1,194.00	VCD
Belfast City BMX Club	£964.00	VCD
Belfast Cranes Special Olympics Club	£704.00	VCD
Belfast Lough Sailability	£2,500.00	VCD
Belfast Platform for the Arts	£2,492.00	VCD
Belfast Running Club	£1,350.00	VCD
Bellaghy RBP 573	£700.00	VCD
Bellaghy Village Regeneration	£600.00	VCD
Bellaghy Womens Group	£835.00	VCD
Belnaleck Art McMurrrough's GFC	£1,050.00	VCD
Benbradagh Community Support	£783.00	VCD
Benburb District Community Association	£800.00	VCD
Beneath His Wings	£1,200.00	VCD
Benedy Community Association	£2,300.00	VCD
Beragh Red Knights GAC	£1,800.00	VCD
Beragh Youth Club	£1,636.00	VCD
Bertie Peacock Youth FC	£1,500.00	VCD
Birches Action Rural Network	£2,700.00	VCD
Blast Community Fitness	£900.00	VCD
Bloomfield Community Association	£2,700.00	VCD
Bloomfield Football Club	£1,400.00	VCD
Boho Womens Group	£2,290.00	VCD
Bonds Glen Cricket Club	£1,500.00	VCD
Border Arts	£2,650.00	VCD
Born 2 Run Events	£2,550.00	VCD
Bovalley Community Association	£2,050.00	VCD
Brackaville Owen Roes GFC	£1,345.00	VCD
Branial Community Church	£1,600.00	VCD
Bready & District Ulster Scots Development Association	£1,100.00	VCD
Bredagh GAC	£2,700.00	VCD
Breffni Club	£1,200.00	VCD
Bridging Divides	£500.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Brigade Cricket Club	£500.00	VCD
Bright Early Mens Club	£600.00	VCD
Bright Lights	£2,650.00	VCD
Brocagh & District Regeneration Group	£1,000.00	VCD
Broughderg Area Development Association	£2,700.00	VCD
Brown Square Residents Association	£1,076.00	VCD
Bruces True Blues Accordion Band	£1,700.00	VCD
Brunswick Accordion Band	£1,500.00	VCD
Building Ballysally Together	£2,700.00	VCD
Building Change Trust Ltd	£225,239.44	VCD
Building Communities Ltd	£1,980.00	VCD
Burnfoot Community Development Association	£2,580.00	VCD
Burnside and District Community Group	£620.00	VCD
Bushmills Residents & Environmental Forum	£2,500.00	VCD
Business in the Community NI	£34,804.41	VCD
Cairncastle Ulster-Scots Cultural Group	£2,360.00	VCD
Camara Education UK	£1,350.00	VCD
Camowen Farmers Combined Ltd	£1,000.00	VCD
Camowen Partnership Ltd	£1,775.00	VCD
Campsie Residents Association	£2,150.00	VCD
Cancer Connect	£1,300.00	VCD
CAP (Christians Against Poverty)	£1,200.00	VCD
Cappagh Badoney Comhaltas Branch	£2,325.00	VCD
Care For The Family	£52,431.47	VCD
Carey Faughs GAC	£1,100.00	VCD
Carnagat Area Community Association	£1,050.00	VCD
Carncourt Variety Club	£1,300.00	VCD
Carniny Amateur & Youth FC	£1,200.00	VCD
Carnlough Community Association	£4,860.99	VCD
Carrick Connect	£450.00	VCD
Carrickcruppen GAC	£2,590.00	VCD
Carrickfergus Community Cultivation	£980.00	VCD
Carrickfergus Community Forum	£175,861.80	VCD
Carrowshee Park/Sylvan Hill Community Association	£2,210.00	VCD
Carryduff Regeneration Forum	£1,200.00	VCD
Castle Juniors	£2,700.00	VCD
Castledawson Part Music Flute Band	£1,450.00	VCD
Castlederg Youth Forum	£2,650.00	VCD
Castlemara Community Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Castlereagh Lifestyle Forum	£1,200.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Castlerock Community Association	£2,300.00	VCD
Castlewellan Town FC	£1,500.00	VCD
Catalyst Arts Limited	£2,400.00	VCD
Causeway Archers Cushendall	£1,270.00	VCD
Causeway Befrienders	£1,500.00	VCD
Causeway Cardiac Support Group	£1,610.00	VCD
Causeway Community Tennis Club	£1,200.00	VCD
Causeway Friends of The Elderly	£966.00	VCD
Causeway Rural & Urban Network	£204,677.60	VCD
Causeway Volunteer Centre	£103,887.10	VCD
Cavehill Antrim Road Regeneration	£1,000.00	VCD
Cavehill Primary School - Parent Teacher Association	£2,300.00	VCD
Central Belfast Child Contact Centre	£900.00	VCD
Ceres Europe (NI) Ltd	£2,130.00	VCD
Cheol Taekwondo Academy	£2,272.00	VCD
Chernobyl Children Internal Foyle Branch	£1,000.00	VCD
Cherryvalley Youth Group	£1,220.00	VCD
Children for Peace (CFP) Belfast / Kansas City	£1,200.00	VCD
Chirpy Chicks Playgroup	£1,200.00	VCD
Christ Church Presbyterian Church/ Christ Church Youth Council	£2,350.00	VCD
Chrysalis Womens Centre	£217,342.24	VCD
Church Hill Community Development Association	£1,150.00	VCD
Churches Community Work Alliance	£354,956.40	VCD
Churches In Co-operation	£2,700.00	VCD
Churches Ministry Of Healing: The Mount	£2,700.00	VCD
Churchlands Golden Gloves	£2,300.00	VCD
Churchtown Community Association	£2,690.00	VCD
City of Armagh Cricket Club	£2,364.00	VCD
City Of Derry Young Farmers Club	£2,290.00	VCD
Clady GFC	£1,200.00	VCD
CLEAR Psoriasis	£1,500.00	VCD
Clogher Eire Og GFC	£1,370.00	VCD
Cloghogue Pitch Putt Friendship Group	£1,200.00	VCD
Clonduff Playgroup	£1,350.00	VCD
Clonoe Boxing & Youth Club	£800.00	VCD
Cloughmills Community Action Team	£1,950.00	VCD
Cloughskelt Rural & Cultural Association	£1,194.00	VCD
Coach House Regeneration Limited	£2,700.00	VCD
Coagh Community Crossroads Club	£930.00	VCD
Coagh Sports Centre	£1,300.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Coagh United FC	£1,300.00	VCD
Coalisland & District Development Association Ltd	£2,090.00	VCD
Coleraine Borough 50 (plus) Forum	£1,658.00	VCD
Coleraine FC	£776.00	VCD
Coleraine Historical Society	£1,879.00	VCD
Coleraine Ulster-Scots Regeneration Group	£1,050.00	VCD
Colin Safer Neighbourhood Project	£1,000.00	VCD
Colin Valley Football Club	£2,170.00	VCD
Comber Regeneration Community Partnership CRCP	£1,500.00	VCD
Comber Youth For Christ Ltd (The Net Youth Project)	£754.00	VCD
Community and Voluntary Services	£1,500.00	VCD
Community Restorative Justice Newry/Armagh	£1,500.00	VCD
Community Unity Volunteers	£448.00	VCD
Confederation of Community Groups Newry & Mourne	£192,367.00	VCD
CONNECT	£2,350.00	VCD
Connect Christian Counselling Service	£700.00	VCD
Conradh na Gaeilge Craobh an Iúir	£1,000.00	VCD
Cookstown & District Womens Group	£30,000.00	VCD
Cookstown & Magherafelt Volunteer Centre	£229,095.04	VCD
Cookstown Community Arts Project (CCAP)	£1,200.00	VCD
Cookstown Community Police Liason Committee	£1,200.00	VCD
Cookstown MS Help Support	£485.00	VCD
Cookstown Youth FC	£2,700.00	VCD
Coolessan Community Organisation	£2,700.00	VCD
Coonian/Cooneen Community Assoc	£1,000.00	VCD
Co-operation Ireland	£1,149,478.00	VCD
Corkley Development Association	£1,450.00	VCD
COS for Autism Families	£1,150.00	VCD
Cosy Club	£1,200.00	VCD
Counselling All Nation Services (CANS)	£2,700.00	VCD
County Armagh Community Development	£203,941.30	VCD
County Down Community Games	£1,500.00	VCD
Crafts With Love	£2,490.00	VCD
Craigavon & Banbridge Home Accident Prevention Group	£1,048.00	VCD
Craigavon and Banbridge Volunteer Centre	£97,978.06	VCD
Craigavon Sport Leisure Users Group (SLUG)	£800.00	VCD
Craigyhill Senior Citizens Club	£1,050.00	VCD
Cranagh & Aghagallon Club	£2,290.00	VCD
Cranagh Community Association	£1,375.00	VCD
Cranagh Football Club	£1,375.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Craobh an Luir	£750.00	VCD
Creating Space	£1,200.00	VCD
Creative Holistic Art as Therapy	£1,040.00	VCD
Cregagh Wanders Youth FC	£1,500.00	VCD
Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership	£137,010.40	VCD
Creggan Tours Activities Ltd	£1,400.00	VCD
Crewe United Football & Sports Club	£1,500.00	VCD
Crilly Cultural Group	£740.00	VCD
Crossdernott Youth Club	£850.00	VCD
Crossmaglen Community Association	£1,499.00	VCD
Crossover Basketball N.I.	£1,300.00	VCD
Crumlin Road Presbyterian ROC Club	£600.00	VCD
Crusaders Youth Academy	£2,220.00	VCD
CRUSE Bereavement Care (Armagh/Dungannon)	£2,700.00	VCD
CRUSE Bereavement Care (North Down & Ards)	£2,700.00	VCD
CRUSE Bereavement Care Omagh	£1,050.00	VCD
Cullybackey Development Association	£720.00	VCD
Culmore Scouts	£720.00	VCD
Culnady Rural Development Association	£470.00	VCD
Curragh Hall Development Association	£2,299.00	VCD
Curragh Silver Band	£1,300.00	VCD
Curran Heritage Culture Community Association	£1,700.00	VCD
Currynierin Community Association	£800.00	VCD
CWA Brass Band	£1,680.00	VCD
Daisy Support Group	£1,000.00	VCD
Davinas Ark	£1,500.00	VCD
Dawn Womens Group	£2,201.00	VCD
Dean Clarke Foundation	£1,000.00	VCD
Dennett Anglers Association	£800.00	VCD
Derganagh Training and Development Association	£800.00	VCD
Derramore Presbyterian Church	£1,000.00	VCD
Derramore Presbyterian Church Bowling Club	£430.00	VCD
Derramore Presbyterian Church PW (Womens Group)	£620.00	VCD
Derry & Raphoe Action	£2,200.00	VCD
Derry and Raphoe Youth Board (DRY)	£1,000.00	VCD
Derrygannon Community Association	£1,900.00	VCD
Derrygannon Crafts & Heritage Soceity	£1,500.00	VCD
Derrylaughlan Kevin Barrys GAC	£700.00	VCD
Derrylin O'Connells GAC	£2,000.00	VCD
Derrynoose GAC	£1,200.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Derrytrasna Playgroup	£700.00	VCD
Dervock Parent Toddlers Small Grant	£945.00	VCD
Desertmartin Accordion Band	£1,300.00	VCD
Development Trusts NI	£604,051.66	VCD
Diamond Rural Development Group	£2,587.00	VCD
Disability Action NI	£30,000.00	VCD
Disability Equality Group NI	£2,700.00	VCD
Dockside's Senior Men's Group	£2,296.00	VCD
Dollingstown Ulster Scots Cultural & Heritage Society	£2,335.00	VCD
Don Boscós Football Club	£1,200.00	VCD
Donagh Development Association	£2,290.00	VCD
Donagh Wee Folk Playgroup	£1,425.00	VCD
Donaghadee Commerce and Development Group	£800.00	VCD
Donaghadee Football Club	£1,630.00	VCD
Donaghcloney Rural Needs Development Group	£800.00	VCD
Donaghey Parents Association	£640.00	VCD
Donaghmore & District Community Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Donaghmore Historical Society	£1,500.00	VCD
Donegal Celtic FC	£1,280.00	VCD
Donegal Pass Community Forum	£1,200.00	VCD
Donemana Cricket Club	£1,000.00	VCD
Donemana Haven	£2,450.00	VCD
Dorsey Emmets GAC	£990.00	VCD
Dorsey Senior Citizens	£360.00	VCD
Douglas Bridge Cross Community Assoc Ltd	£1,350.00	VCD
Doula-Vision Northern Ireland	£1,150.00	VCD
Down Chinese Martial Arts Association	£1,300.00	VCD
Down Special Olympics Club	£900.00	VCD
Downpatrick Community Collective	£1,200.00	VCD
Downpatrick FC	£1,200.00	VCD
Dramability	£911.00	VCD
Draperstown Celtic FC	£1,500.00	VCD
Dromara Village FC	£1,200.00	VCD
Dromboughil Community Association	£1,815.00	VCD
Dromore Diocesan Youth Commission	£1,000.00	VCD
Dromore Youth For Christ	£1,350.00	VCD
Drumachose Boys Brigade	£1,485.00	VCD
Drumbo Amateur Football Club	£800.00	VCD
Drumduff & Drumnakilly Community Association	£2,390.00	VCD
Drumlegagh Women's Group	£1,015.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Drumlough & Ballygorian Rural Development Association	£2,700.00	VCD
Drumlough Community Association	£2,075.00	VCD
Drumnaleg Community Association	£840.00	VCD
Drumsurn Community Association	£2,330.00	VCD
Dunaghy Flute Band	£2,670.00	VCD
Dunamoney Community Group	£800.00	VCD
Dunamore Community Association	£1,155.00	VCD
Dunbarton Bowling Club	£730.00	VCD
Duncairn Community Gardens	£1,050.00	VCD
Dunclug Youth Forum	£1,300.00	VCD
Dundonald Boy's Football Club	£750.00	VCD
Dundonald Sea Cadets	£2,600.00	VCD
Dundrum Cross Community Playgroup	£2,400.00	VCD
Dungannon Branch of the National Autistic Society	£460.00	VCD
Dungannon Thomas Clarkes GFC	£1,025.00	VCD
Dungiven Celtic Youth FC	£2,300.00	VCD
Dungiven Retirement Club	£1,710.00	VCD
Dungoyne Boys FC	£2,600.00	VCD
Dunmurry Community Association	£915.00	VCD
Dupont Retirees Club The Rec Club	£2,450.00	VCD
Dylan Quinn Dance Theatre	£1,360.00	VCD
East Antrim Battalion Boys Brigade	£500.00	VCD
East Antrim National Graves Association	£1,290.00	VCD
East Belfast Alternatives	£1,900.00	VCD
East Belfast Community Counselling	£1,500.00	VCD
East Belfast Community Development Agency	£133,072.30	VCD
East Belfast Community, Historical and Cultural Association	£400.00	VCD
East Belfast Mission	£13,026.51	VCD
Edenderry Community Development Association	£1,050.00	VCD
Edenderry Residents' Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Edgarstown Residents Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Educational Shakespeare Company	£2,700.00	VCD
Eglinton Annual Show Committee	£1,490.00	VCD
Eglinton Building Bridges	£1,016.00	VCD
Eglinton Cricket Club	£1,950.00	VCD
Eglinton Womens Institute	£1,650.00	VCD
Eire OG Hurling Club Carrickmore	£1,000.00	VCD
Elevate Youth Fellowship MPDA	£1,200.00	VCD
Emerald ABC	£1,100.00	VCD
Emergency Medical Care Mid Ulster	£1,000.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Emergency Medical Services	£1,500.00	VCD
Empire Residents Association	£1,500.00	VCD
Enagh Rural Development Association	£1,077.00	VCD
Enagh Seniors Group	£900.00	VCD
Enniskillen Athletic Football Club	£1,500.00	VCD
Enniskillen Lakelanders Amateur Swimming Club	£1,500.00	VCD
Enterprise North West	£35,261.20	VCD
Epworth Playgroup	£1,500.00	VCD
Erne Gaels GAC	£630.00	VCD
Escolinha De Lingue Portugesa	£900.00	VCD
Evolve	£1,150.00	VCD
Eye Feel Good Outdoors	£740.00	VCD
Factory Community Forum	£1,000.00	VCD
Falcon Dinner Club	£680.00	VCD
Falls Community Council	£192,600.10	VCD
Falls Women's Centre	£157,761.02	VCD
Far and Wild	£1,480.00	VCD
Faughanvale Boys Brigade	£700.00	VCD
Feeny Community Association	£2,700.00	VCD
Fellowship of Good Counsel (Columba Community)	£2,300.00	VCD
Fermanagh Film Club	£1,184.00	VCD
Fermanagh Genealogy Centre	£1,100.00	VCD
Fermanagh Rose of Tralee	£2,200.00	VCD
Fermanagh Stroke Support Group	£1,200.00	VCD
Fermanagh Voluntary Association Of The Disabled	£1,445.00	VCD
Fermanagh Womens Network	£1,418.00	VCD
Ferry School Of Dance	£600.00	VCD
Fibromyalgia Support North Down & Ards	£2,700.00	VCD
Fight Academy Ireland	£850.00	VCD
First Fermanagh GAA	£1,000.00	VCD
First Limavady Fellowship Club	£880.00	VCD
First Steps Womens Group	£300,788.18	VCD
Fivemiletown District Cultural & Sports Association	£1,500.00	VCD
Flying Horse Ward Community Forum	£1,150.00	VCD
FOCUS	£148,805.17	VCD
Footprints Womens Centre	£528,190.92	VCD
Foreglen Community Association	£1,000.00	VCD
Fountain Foodbank	£1,200.00	VCD
Fountain Street Community Development Association	£1,350.00	VCD
Fox Lodge Cricket Club	£2,026.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Foyle and Bann Shipping Association	£1,185.00	VCD
Foyle Child Contact Centre	£1,162.00	VCD
Foyle Cruse Bereavement Care	£1,500.00	VCD
Foyle Parents and Friends Association	£1,250.00	VCD
Foyle Special Olympics	£990.00	VCD
Foyle Womens Information Network	£137,831.20	VCD
Friendly Care Group	£2,630.00	VCD
Friends of Glenariffe	£2,050.00	VCD
Friends of Hollybush	£2,260.00	VCD
Friends of St Dallans	£1,100.00	VCD
Friends of Termoncanice Parent Teacher Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Friends of 1st Presbyterian Church Newtownards	£2,300.00	VCD
Friendship for Integrated Development Association Northern Ireland (FIDA NI)	£2,500.00	VCD
Fuse Youth	£2,700.00	VCD
G A P Community Centre	£1,200.00	VCD
Gaelscoil Léim an Mhadaidh	£2,350.00	VCD
Garvagh & District Community Association	£490.00	VCD
Garvagh Womens Network	£1,200.00	VCD
Gateway Club Cookstown	£1,200.00	VCD
Gelvin Area Community Association Ltd	£1,619.00	VCD
Gillygooley 2nd Youth	£1,200.00	VCD
Gilnahirk Mens Group	£900.00	VCD
Girlguiding North Antrim	£1,350.00	VCD
Girlguiding South Antrim	£2,400.00	VCD
Girlguiding Tyrone	£775.00	VCD
Giving Life Opportunities to Women (GLOW)	£1,400.00	VCD
Gleann Amateur Boxing Club	£2,300.00	VCD
Gleann FC	£1,300.00	VCD
Glebe Cross-Community Development Assoc	£1,200.00	VCD
Glebe Rangers Football Club	£1,482.00	VCD
Glen Rural Community Group Armoy	£2,300.00	VCD
Glenanne Horse and Pony Club	£1,500.00	VCD
Glenavy Conservation and District Angling Club	£2,696.00	VCD
Glenbank Community Association	£1,800.00	VCD
Glencolin Residents Association	£2,700.00	VCD
Glendowan F.C.	£1,500.00	VCD
Glenelly Community Family Club	£1,400.00	VCD
Glengormley Amateur Boxing Club	£1,300.00	VCD
Glengormley Ambulance & Rescue Unit	£2,700.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Glenravel & District Community and Residents Association	£1,300.00	VCD
Glenshane Care Association Ltd	£2,500.00	VCD
Glenshane Community Development Ltd	£2,700.00	VCD
Glenshesk GAC	£1,200.00	VCD
Glentimon Cultural Development Association	£1,368.00	VCD
Glentoran Academy	£2,100.00	VCD
Glor na Mona	£1,200.00	VCD
Goal Line Youth Trust	£2,150.00	VCD
Golden Millennium Club	£1,200.00	VCD
Good Morning Ballymena	£2,454.00	VCD
Good Morning Down	£2,700.00	VCD
Good Morning East Antrim	£628.00	VCD
Good Morning Magherafelt	£18,138.43	VCD
Gortin Ageing Well	£2,615.00	VCD
Gortnaghey Community Association	£2,195.00	VCD
Gran Quilters	£1,810.00	VCD
Granaghan & District Womens Group	£2,500.00	VCD
Grange Youth and Community Group	£1,200.00	VCD
Greater Andersonstown Safer Neighbourhood Project	£2,300.00	VCD
Greater Shantallow Area Partnership	£191,982.50	VCD
Greencastle Rovers Football Club	£1,180.00	VCD
Greenisland Boys Football Club	£1,494.00	VCD
Greenisland FC	£950.00	VCD
Greenway Womens Group	£401,284.18	VCD
Greyabbey & District Community Association	£680.00	VCD
Greysteel Community Association	£2,400.00	VCD
Groomsport Village Association	£1,100.00	VCD
Halftown Residents Association & Youth Group	£800.00	VCD
Hanging Rockers Climbing Club	£1,200.00	VCD
Hannahstown Community Association	£2,400.00	VCD
Happy Faces NI	£1,410.00	VCD
Harbour Community Group	£1,325.00	VCD
Harmony Hill Community Group	£1,500.00	VCD
Harryville Partnership Initiative	£35,070.68	VCD
Hilden Community Association	£700.00	VCD
Hillcrest Trust Ltd	£1,500.00	VCD
Hillhall Regeneration Group	£1,610.00	VCD
Hillsborough Boys Football Club	£2,180.00	VCD
Hillstown Rural Community Group	£1,200.00	VCD
Hilltown Community Association	£2,700.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Holy Family Youth Centre	£700.00	VCD
Holywell Trust	£4,000.00	VCD
Hollywood Family Trust	£178,372.40	VCD
Hollywood Shared Town	£1,500.00	VCD
Homeplus NI Ltd	£2,400.00	VCD
Home-Start Antrim	£1,975.00	VCD
Home-Start Ards Comber & Peninsula Area	£760.00	VCD
Home-Start Armagh & Dungannon	£2,700.00	VCD
Home-Start Causeway	£2,040.00	VCD
Home-Start Clogher Valley	£1,000.00	VCD
Home-Start Craigavon	£550.00	VCD
Home-Start Lakeland	£2,700.00	VCD
Home-Start Lisburn/Colin	£2,650.00	VCD
Home-Start Omagh District	£1,000.00	VCD
Home-Start South & East Belfast	£1,200.00	VCD
Hope 4 ME & Fibro NI	£2,680.00	VCD
Hope of Eglinton LOL 764	£2,350.00	VCD
Hope Summer Camp Limavady	£1,200.00	VCD
Huntingtons Disease Association NI	£1,500.00	VCD
Indian Senior Citizens Club	£2,700.00	VCD
Institute Football Club	£1,500.00	VCD
InVOLve	£1,500.00	VCD
Irish Disabled Fly Fishing Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Irish Football Association	£117,778.76	VCD
Irish Rugby Football Union Ulster Branch	£176,358.00	VCD
Jack & Jill Community Playgroup	£2,480.00	VCD
Joanmount Open Door	£1,200.00	VCD
Kabalikat in North West	£2,700.00	VCD
Kairos Centre	£2,700.00	VCD
Katesbridge Community Association	£3,936.00	VCD
Katesbridge Ladies Rural Group	£2,536.00	VCD
Keady Michael Dwyers GFC	£600.00	VCD
Kells Connor Cougars	£1,430.00	VCD
Kells Connor Youth	£1,000.00	VCD
Kells and Connor Community Improvement Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Kevin Lynch Hurling Club	£1,000.00	VCD
Kilclief Ben Dearg GAC	£1,200.00	VCD
Kilcoo Community Association	£1,100.00	VCD
KILCOO GAA	£1,170.00	VCD
Kilcooley Womens Centre	£114,440.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Kilcronaghan Community Association	£2,191.00	VCD
Kildoag and District Women's Group	£2,270.00	VCD
Kildress Kare	£1,995.00	VCD
Kilkeel Community Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Kilkeel Sea Cadets	£1,500.00	VCD
Killen Parent and Toddler	£2,500.00	VCD
Killeter & District Development Trust	£2,600.00	VCD
Killicomaine Residents Group	£2,400.00	VCD
Killough Community Association	£1,000.00	VCD
Killowen Community Association	£1,875.00	VCD
Killyclooney Cricket Club	£-	VCD
Killyleagh Yacht Club	£2,180.00	VCD
Killynure Community Association	£1,170.00	VCD
Kindred Spirits	£1,190.00	VCD
King Street Parent Toddler Group	£1,460.00	VCD
Kingdom Mens shed	£1,050.00	VCD
Kingdom of Dalriada Ulster Scots Society	£950.00	VCD
Kittys Road Community Association	£2,416.00	VCD
Knights Wheelchair Basketball Club	£1,200.00	VCD
Knockmore Community Association	£500.00	VCD
Knockmoyle Youth Committee	£840.00	VCD
Knocknagin Hall Committee	£1,195.00	VCD
Knocks Community Association	£2,282.00	VCD
LA Project	£1,200.00	VCD
Lagan Rivers Trusts	£1,300.00	VCD
Lagmore Meadows Residents Association	£1,700.00	VCD
Lakeland Credit Union	£675.00	VCD
Laochra Bhricre Hurling Club	£900.00	VCD
Larne Community Development Project	£143,699.10	VCD
Larne Sea Cadets	£1,200.00	VCD
Larne Youth	£700.00	VCD
Laurencetown Rural Benefit Partnership	£3,600.00	VCD
Laurencetown Summer Scheme	£2,200.00	VCD
LCC Community Trust	£27,299.36	VCD
Learmount Community Development Group Ltd	£2,000.00	VCD
Lecale Conservation	£1,500.00	VCD
LGBT Northern Ireland	£517.00	VCD
Liberty Church	£2,300.00	VCD
Life NI	£900.00	VCD
Lilac Cancer Support Group	£1,300.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Limavady Community Development Initiative	£4,900.00	VCD
Limavady Recreation Club	£1,000.00	VCD
Limavady Senior Citizens	£800.00	VCD
Limavady Volunteer Centre	£95,817.40	VCD
Limavady War Project	£2,450.00	VCD
Limavady Wolfhounds GAC	£700.00	VCD
Lincoln Courts Youth and Community Association	£600.00	VCD
Lisbarnett & Lisbane Community Association Ltd	£500.00	VCD
Lisbellaw United FC	£720.00	VCD
Lisburn Chinese Ladies Group	£2,350.00	VCD
Lisburn Downtown Centre For Community Care	£800.00	VCD
Lisburn Ladies Football Club	£900.00	VCD
Lisburn Outlook	£1,130.00	VCD
Lisburn Taekwondo Club	£1,800.00	VCD
Lisnafin / Ardnalee Trust Cross Community Development Association	£2,000.00	VCD
Lisnaward Rural Association	£600.00	VCD
Little Acorns Playgroup	£1,200.00	VCD
Little Castle Playgroup	£960.00	VCD
Little Dippers Swimming Club	£1,200.00	VCD
Little Rascals Community Playgroup	£1,050.00	VCD
Little Treasures Playgroup	£1,400.00	VCD
Lough Neagh Rescue Ltd	£2,382.00	VCD
Loughgall Football Club	£1,500.00	VCD
Loughinsholin Cultural Music Group	£2,100.00	VCD
Loughmacrory & Murrins District Angling Association	£2,250.00	VCD
Loughmacrory Community Development Association	£900.00	VCD
Loughshore Care Partnership	£2,700.00	VCD
Loughside Football Club	£2,300.00	VCD
Love Hockey Ireland	£720.00	VCD
Love Music Hate Racism NI	£1,200.00	VCD
Lower Andersonstown Mothers Support Group	£2,700.00	VCD
Lurganville & District Community Group	£600.00	VCD
Macosquin Senior Citizens Club	£2,170.00	VCD
MADD MUSIC	£2,100.00	VCD
Madden Raparees GFC	£760.00	VCD
Maghera Cross Community Link	£1,780.00	VCD
Maghera Snooker Club	£1,100.00	VCD
Maghera Sons of William Flute Band	£1,400.00	VCD
Maghera Youth Connect	£1,500.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Magherafelt & District Road Safety Committee	£1,800.00	VCD
Magherafelt Sky Blues FC	£2,460.00	VCD
Magherafelt Womens Group	£333,048.65	VCD
Magheralin Community Association	£900.00	VCD
Magheramason Community Development Association	£2,500.00	VCD
Magilligan Community Association	£2,450.00	VCD
Magilligan Community Playgroup	£1,200.00	VCD
Maiden City Motor Club Ltd	£750.00	VCD
Maiden City Soccer Academy	£2,450.00	VCD
Mallusk Harriers	£1,134.00	VCD
Marconi Radio Group	£1,500.00	VCD
MATT (Men About The Town)	£2,700.00	VCD
Mayobridge District Forum	£1,450.00	VCD
MCS Taekwondo Club	£2,300.00	VCD
McStravick i Ltd	£1,700.00	VCD
Meet N Eat Friendship Club	£2,478.00	VCD
Meeting Point Luncheon Club	£1,130.00	VCD
Melmount & East Banks Estates Community Associations Forum	£2,700.00	VCD
Memory Making Ltd	£2,700.00	VCD
Mens Action Network	£1,500.00	VCD
Mens Advisory Project	£1,500.00	VCD
Mid Ulster Amateur Swimming Club	£2,700.00	VCD
Mid Ulster Athletic Club	£1,450.00	VCD
Mid Ulster Community and Arts Trust (MUCAT)	£2,700.00	VCD
Middletown & District Comm Dev Assoc	£1,220.00	VCD
Milford Buildings Preservation Trust	£2,700.00	VCD
Millburn Community Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Millisle Youth Forum	£2,300.00	VCD
Milltown Rural Development Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Mind Skills Training and Coaching	£1,200.00	VCD
Moira Friendship Group	£1,500.00	VCD
Moneydig Rural Network Group	£1,250.00	VCD
Moneyneena & District Development Group	£1,200.00	VCD
Moneyreagh & District Community Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Monkstown Amateur Boxing Club	£875.00	VCD
Mornington Community Project Limited	£2,700.00	VCD
Mossley Hockey Club	£1,200.00	VCD
Mount Eagles Drive Action Group	£2,365.00	VCD
Mountfield Pipe Band	£1,500.00	VCD
Mountfield Scottish Country Dancers	£1,500.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Mountjoy United Juniors	£2,700.00	VCD
Mourne Partnership	£1,000.00	VCD
Movilla Abbey Coffee House	£2,200.00	VCD
Moygashel Community & Cultural Association	£700.00	VCD
MS Society Newry, Mourne & Armagh Branch MS Society	£2,600.00	VCD
Muckamore Cricket & Tennis Club	£800.00	VCD
Muintirevlin Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann (CCE)	£1,000.00	VCD
Mummers Foundation	£-	VCD
Murlough Athletic Club	£2,300.00	VCD
Na Magha Hurling and Camogie Club	£1,250.00	VCD
Na Shamrocks Hurling Club	£1,125.00	VCD
Naiscoil an Traonaigh	£2,400.00	VCD
Naiscoil na Deirge	£2,688.00	VCD
Naomh Padraig Juvenile GAA Club - North Antrim	£600.00	VCD
New Dawn Training	£1,000.00	VCD
Newbuildings United FC	£1,500.00	VCD
Newcastle Arts Festival	£620.00	VCD
Newhill Community Project	£1,000.00	VCD
Newhill FC	£2,700.00	VCD
Newington Football Club	£950.00	VCD
Newpoint Players	£1,200.00	VCD
Newry & Mourne Sea Kayaking & Canoe Club	£2,014.00	VCD
Newry Maritime Association	£2,700.00	VCD
Newtownabbey Arts Cultural Network	£2,700.00	VCD
Newtownabbey kickers	£800.00	VCD
Newtownabbey Men Sheds	£1,200.00	VCD
Newtownards Sea Cadets	£2,700.00	VCD
Newtownbutler Playgroup	£1,300.00	VCD
Newtowne Football Club	£1,200.00	VCD
Newtownstewart Flute Band Red Hand Defenders	£1,000.00	VCD
Newtownstewart Highland Dancers	£1,900.00	VCD
Newtownstewart Leisure Complex Ltd	£1,200.00	VCD
NI Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux	£369,358.00	VCD
NI Cruise	£2,680.00	VCD
NICVA	£2,105,332.00	VCD
Nifty Over Fifties	£1,200.00	VCD
North Antrim Bands Forum	£900.00	VCD
North Antrim Cultural & Musical Society (NACMS)	£2,550.00	VCD
North Ballymena Community Cluster	£270.00	VCD
North Down & Ards Road Safety Committee	£2,319.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
North Down Boxing Club	£2,700.00	VCD
North Down Community Network	£143,898.34	VCD
North Star Basketball Club	£1,500.00	VCD
North West Community Network	£166,688.00	VCD
North West Cricket Union (Ireland)	£1,215.00	VCD
North West Football Centre (NWFC)	£2,050.00	VCD
North West Junior Zone Bowlers	£800.00	VCD
North West Migrants Forum	£1,300.00	VCD
North West Mountain Rescue Team	£703.00	VCD
North West Red Squirrel Group	£950.00	VCD
North West Tongues, Tones & Tappin	£2,600.00	VCD
North West Umpires Scorers Association	£675.00	VCD
Northend United Youth Football Club	£880.00	VCD
Northern Counties Development Association	£600.00	VCD
Northern Cricket Union of Ireland	£1,500.00	VCD
Northern Ireland Muslim Family Association	£1,200.00	VCD
Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network	£2,400.00	VCD
Northwest Counselling	£750.00	VCD
Oak Partnership	£1,200.00	VCD
OConnors Glack GAA	£955.00	VCD
Off the Cuff Community Theatre Group	£2,214.00	VCD
Oisins CLG	£700.00	VCD
Old Warren Community Association	£700.00	VCD
Omagh Arts Committee	£1,180.00	VCD
Omagh Child Contact Centre	£2,000.00	VCD
Omagh Enterprise Company	£38,044.50	VCD
Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group	£2,700.00	VCD
Omagh Spires Special Olympics	£1,000.00	VCD
Omagh Volunteer Centre	£100,973.86	VCD
Omagh Wheelers Cycling Club	£1,150.00	VCD
Omagh Womens Area Network	£1,850.00	VCD
O'Neills GFC An Port Mor	£1,150.00	VCD
Open Door T/A The Hub BT80	£1,200.00	VCD
Ophir Rugby Football Club	£2,350.00	VCD
Opportunity Arts NI	£1,650.00	VCD
Order Of Malta Ambulance Corps Derry Unit	£1,200.00	VCD
Order of Malta Strabane Unit	£2,500.00	VCD
Ormeau Road Boxing Club	£1,500.00	VCD
Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland	£36,000.00	VCD
Over The Hill Music Collective	£1,075.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Owen Roe GAC Coleraine	£790.00	VCD
P.O.C.A. Parents of Older Children with Autism	£1,200.00	VCD
Palliative Transport Service	£1,200.00	VCD
Parent and Toddlers @ First Magherafelt	£650.00	VCD
Parent Teacher Association UK	£33,268.00	VCD
Parents & Friends Of Cookstown Primary School	£2,450.00	VCD
Pawzitive	£1,500.00	VCD
Peaceful Futures South Armagh	£510.00	VCD
Peadar O Doinin GAA Club Forkhill	£1,650.00	VCD
Phoenix Cycling Club	£1,500.00	VCD
PIPS Newcastle District	£1,200.00	VCD
Play Tots Mother & Toddler Group	£395.00	VCD
Polish Association County Down	£1,200.00	VCD
Pomeroy Development Projects Limited	£350.00	VCD
Pomeroy Players	£500.00	VCD
Pomeroy Plunketts GAC	£950.00	VCD
Pomeroy Resource Centre	£900.00	VCD
Pomeroy Social Activity Group	£1,200.00	VCD
Pomeroy Women's Institute	£820.00	VCD
Portadown Ladies Hockey Club	£1,200.00	VCD
Portadown Panthers	£370.00	VCD
Portadown Phoenix Players	£900.00	VCD
Portavogie Rangers Youth Football Club	£2,126.00	VCD
Portglenone Community Mens Shed	£1,179.00	VCD
Portglenone Enterprise Group	£1,500.00	VCD
Portrush Heritage Group	£1,120.00	VCD
Portstewart Community Association	£1,500.00	VCD
Pottinger Historical and Cultural Society	£600.00	VCD
Preventing Addiction Larne	£925.00	VCD
Pride of the Park Flute Band	£700.00	VCD
Quilly Rural Development Group	£2,550.00	VCD
Radio Coalisland	£1,050.00	VCD
Rainbow Club - Carrickmore	£2,500.00	VCD
Ramoan Friendship Group	£1,500.00	VCD
Randalstown ARCHES Association Ltd	£151,114.90	VCD
Rascals Playgroup Gortin	£1,240.00	VCD
Rascals Playstation Day Care Centre	£2,290.00	VCD
Rasharkin Community Association	£2,180.00	VCD
Rasharkin Community Centre Ltd	£1,175.00	VCD
Rasharkin Womens Group	£1,900.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Rathfriland Elim Church	£2,000.00	VCD
Rathfriland Football Club	£900.00	VCD
Rathlane Care Farm	£1,200.00	VCD
Rathlin Development & Community Association	£97,000.00	VCD
Ravara Productions	£1,200.00	VCD
REACH Across	£1,100.00	VCD
Realta na Cromoige	£1,080.00	VCD
Redburn/Loughview Community Forum	£2,700.00	VCD
Redrock Development Partnership	£1,485.00	VCD
Redrock Development Partnership (Tuesday Club)	£1,200.00	VCD
Restore Community Group	£2,700.00	VCD
Richmount Playgroup	£2,300.00	VCD
Richmount Rural Community Association	£2,550.00	VCD
Ridgeway Rovers FC	£1,850.00	VCD
Riding for the Disabled Association (Coleraine & District Group) Ltd	£1,500.00	VCD
River Bann and Lough Neagh Association Company	£2,280.00	VCD
Rockin by the River	£2,220.00	VCD
Roe Angling Limited	£1,040.00	VCD
Roe Valley Artists and Musicians Collective	£1,200.00	VCD
Roe Valley Folk Club	£2,580.00	VCD
Roe Valley Football Club	£1,500.00	VCD
Roe Valley Residents Association (New Beginnings YC)	£2,350.00	VCD
Rosario Youth Club	£1,900.00	VCD
Rouskey Community & Development Association	£2,700.00	VCD
Rowallane Community Hub	£1,040.00	VCD
R-Space Gallery CIC	£2,500.00	VCD
Safer Activities For Everyone (S.A.F.E.)	£1,200.00	VCD
Saintfield Development Association	£600.00	VCD
Salisbury Special Olympics Club	£965.00	VCD
Salterstown Flute Band	£800.00	VCD
Samaritans Ballymena	£1,090.00	VCD
Samaritans Bangor & North Down	£2,314.00	VCD
Samaritans Derry Branch	£1,825.00	VCD
Samaritans Newry	£2,369.00	VCD
Sandholes Community Group	£1,670.00	VCD
Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club	£700.00	VCD
Santos Football Club	£2,700.00	VCD
Sarsfields Community Hall Management Group	£1,010.00	VCD
Schomberg Fife & Drum	£640.00	VCD
SCOPE	£900.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Scotch Street Youth Club	£2,700.00	VCD
Seacourt Youth Club	£1,500.00	VCD
Seagoe Football Club	£1,695.00	VCD
Seagoe Ministries Ltd	£1,390.00	VCD
Seagoe Youth Group	£1,200.00	VCD
Seapark AC	£1,000.00	VCD
Seven Towers Cultural, Community and Educational Association	£800.00	VCD
Shankill United Football Club	£2,340.00	VCD
Shankill Womens Centre	£144,202.00	VCD
Shantallow East Children's Support Group	£650.00	VCD
Shantallow Men's Support Group	£800.00	VCD
Shantallow Social Support Group	£900.00	VCD
Shantallow Womens Group	£700.00	VCD
Shantallow Youth Intervention Group	£500.00	VCD
Shared History Interpretive Project	£2,540.00	VCD
SHE (Seymour Hill Empowered)	£1,200.00	VCD
Shelagh Youth Club	£1,130.00	VCD
Shopmobility Ballymena Ltd	£500.00	VCD
Shopmobility Carrickfergus	£1,900.00	VCD
Shopmobility Cookstown	£1,450.00	VCD
Shopmobility Enniskillen	£2,200.00	VCD
Shopmobility Magherafelt	£500.00	VCD
Silver Lights	£1,500.00	VCD
Sion Mills Community Association	£1,750.00	VCD
Sion Mills Community Forum	£2,350.00	VCD
Sion Swifts FC	£1,230.00	VCD
Sirocco Works Football Club	£1,200.00	VCD
Sirocco Youth Football Club	£600.00	VCD
Sixmilecross Enterprise Limited	£1,100.00	VCD
Sixtowns Cross Community Group	£1,200.00	VCD
Solas	£64,179.33	VCD
Somerton Road Youth Club	£2,600.00	VCD
Something Special	£1,200.00	VCD
South Lough Neagh Regeneration Association	£1,200.00	VCD
South Tyrone Empowerment Programme	£129,750.84	VCD
South Tyrone Ulster Farmers Union	£750.00	VCD
South West Age Partnership	£1,360.00	VCD
Southwest Carers Forum	£1,085.00	VCD
Special Education Needs Advice Centre	£1,500.00	VCD
Sperrin Cultural Awareness Association	£1,000.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Sporting Hearts	£1,000.00	VCD
Sports and Leisure Users Group	£2,460.00	VCD
Springfarm & District Community Association	£650.00	VCD
Springfield Star Blackmountain	£1,500.00	VCD
Springtown Amateur Boxing Club	£1,096.00	VCD
St Agnes Amateur Boxing Club	£1,300.00	VCD
St Agnes Senior Social Club	£1,500.00	VCD
St Aidans Magilligan GFC	£1,045.00	VCD
St Brigids Afterschool Club	£1,200.00	VCD
St Brigids Art Society	£1,200.00	VCD
St Canice's GAC	£2,870.00	VCD
St Colms GAC Ballinascreen	£2,466.00	VCD
St Comgalls Youth Centre	£300.00	VCD
St Ergnats Moneyglass GAC	£725.00	VCD
St Eugenes GAC Castlederg	£2,500.00	VCD
St John Bosco ABC	£680.00	VCD
St John Bosco Amateur Boxing Club	£1,050.00	VCD
St John Bosco Community Association	£2,700.00	VCD
St John Vianney Youth Centre	£2,600.00	VCD
St Johns Amateur Boxing Club	£1,000.00	VCD
St Joseph St Marys Banagher Conference of St Vincent de Paul	£450.00	VCD
St Malachys GAC (Belfast)	£1,200.00	VCD
St Malachy's GAC (Castledawson)	£1,000.00	VCD
St Malachy's Youth Centre	£2,500.00	VCD
St Mary's Youth Club Aughlisnafin	£1,090.00	VCD
St Matthews FC	£2,290.00	VCD
St McCartans Ladies GFC	£900.00	VCD
St Michael's Youth Club	£900.00	VCD
St Oliver Plunkett Football Club	£1,875.00	VCD
St Patricks Community Band	£800.00	VCD
St Patricks Football Club	£1,100.00	VCD
St Patricks Parish Clogherny & Seskimore	£1,720.00	VCD
St Patricks Young Mens Football Club	£2,700.00	VCD
St Pauls GAC	£1,800.00	VCD
St Peters Youth Club Lurgan	£750.00	VCD
St Swithins Craft Class	£400.00	VCD
St. Joseph's G.A.C. Craigbane	£1,350.00	VCD
Star Breakers	£550.00	VCD
Stedfast association NI	£1,000.00	VCD
Steelstown Brian Og's G.A.A. Club	£2,700.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Stendhal Festival Ltd	£2,200.00	VCD
Stewartstown Amateur Dramatic Society	£2,200.00	VCD
Stewartstown Community Group	£550.00	VCD
Strabane Lifford Mens Education and Health Group	£600.00	VCD
Strabane & District Special Olympics	£675.00	VCD
Strabane & Lifford LGBT Group	£1,300.00	VCD
Strabane Athletic FC	£880.00	VCD
Strabane Community Unemployed Resource Centre	£400.00	VCD
Strabane Ethnic Community Association	£2,550.00	VCD
Strabane Health Improvement Project	£950.00	VCD
Strangford Festival Committee	£1,200.00	VCD
Strathfoyle Womens Group	£232,377.00	VCD
Stravaganza Production company	£1,500.00	VCD
Street Safe	£966.00	VCD
Street Soccer NI	£1,200.00	VCD
Sunflowerfest Unlimited CIC	£1,050.00	VCD
Superstars Club	£2,500.00	VCD
Survivors of Suicide Support Group	£1,200.00	VCD
Synergy Ireland Ltd	£1,160.00	VCD
Synergy@JVC	£600.00	VCD
TAG (The Active Group)	£2,700.00	VCD
Talking Newspaper Association Mid-Ulster	£900.00	VCD
Tattyreagh GAC	£1,200.00	VCD
Team Aspie	£1,195.00	VCD
Ted Clarke Memorial Fund Community Outreach Group	£1,000.00	VCD
Templepatrick Cricket Club	£580.00	VCD
The Armagh Rhymers Educational & Cultural Organisation	£650.00	VCD
The Big House Ireland	£2,680.00	VCD
The Brain Injury Foundation	£1,000.00	VCD
The Cabbage Patchers	£2,700.00	VCD
The Churches Voluntary Work Bureau Ltd	£228,190.31	VCD
The Coast Office Watersports Club	£1,400.00	VCD
The Compassionate Friends	£820.00	VCD
The Conservation Volunteers	£42,157.03	VCD
The Den Youth Club	£850.00	VCD
The Dojo	£2,480.00	VCD
The Drummond Centre Project Limited	£2,345.00	VCD
The Fermanagh Trust	£160,296.70	VCD
The Fitzone Foundation	£1,005.00	VCD
The Garden Yard	£1,500.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
The Gasyard Development Trust	£1,500.00	VCD
The Glens Community Association	£2,350.00	VCD
The Harry Gregg Foundation	£20,307.20	VCD
The Helping Hand	£2,700.00	VCD
The Hubb Community Resource Centre	£2,400.00	VCD
The Keady Clachan Community Group	£1,362.00	VCD
The Lambeg Project	£700.00	VCD
The Lena Mackrel Community Poetry Competition	£2,500.00	VCD
The Lively Bunch	£1,400.00	VCD
The Molly & Mia Foundation	£750.00	VCD
The O-Bon on the Foyle Festival Group	£955.00	VCD
The Open Door Ballymoney	£760.00	VCD
The Open Door Centre	£2,000.00	VCD
The Pink Ladies Breast Cancer Support Group	£1,500.00	VCD
The Plum Club	£825.00	VCD
The Reach (Portadown)	£1,950.00	VCD
The Rectory Residents Association	£605.00	VCD
The Resurgam Community Development Trust Ltd/Resurgam Youth Initiative	£426,679.86	VCD
The Right Key/Recovery Cafe	£1,188.00	VCD
The Rivers Community Project	£2,250.00	VCD
The Royal British Legion	£1,500.00	VCD
The Saturday Club	£2,360.00	VCD
The Space NI	£1,200.00	VCD
The Sperrin Choir	£2,200.00	VCD
The Star Amateur Boxing Club	£1,500.00	VCD
The Tuesday Club	£2,656.00	VCD
The Tuesday Group	£1,200.00	VCD
The Upbeat Agency	£1,200.00	VCD
The Welcome Project	£2,300.00	VCD
The Well Project	£1,500.00	VCD
The Young Foundation	£147,971.40	VCD
The Zacchaeus Outreach Project	£2,070.00	VCD
Three Spires Scout Group	£1,200.00	VCD
TIDY Randalstown	£800.00	VCD
Tirgan Community Association	£2,357.00	VCD
Tobermore Baptist Youth Fellowship	£700.00	VCD
Tobermore Community Projects	£900.00	VCD
Tobermore United Football Club	£1,100.00	VCD
Tobin Youth Centre	£2,500.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Together One Voice	£750.00	VCD
Tools for Solidarity	£1,500.00	VCD
Tools for Solidarity Downpatrick	£2,700.00	VCD
Toome Initiatives Group	£1,500.00	VCD
Topstar Kickboxing Club	£1,395.00	VCD
Tots at the Bridge	£2,700.00	VCD
Townparks Residents Association	£2,678.00	VCD
Traad & Ballyronan Ballinderry Development Association	£1,080.00	VCD
Train To Be Smart	£1,276.00	VCD
Training For Women Network Ltd	£867,390.45	VCD
Trendsetters Irvinestown	£2,680.00	VCD
Trillick Arts and Cultural Society	£980.00	VCD
Trillick Senior Citizens	£609.00	VCD
Tristar Boys FC	£2,000.00	VCD
Tuesday Break	£1,075.00	VCD
Tullyally Community Partnership	£1,000.00	VCD
Tullygarley Community Development Group	£370.00	VCD
TWG Plus	£2,374.00	VCD
Twinkle Tots Parent and Toddler Group	£200.00	VCD
Tyrone Donegal Partnership	£380,674.39	VCD
Tyrone's Ditches Pipe Band	£560.00	VCD
Ullans Speakers Association	£52,670.52	VCD
Ulster Council Gaelic Athletic Association	£117,153.76	VCD
Union Road Mums Tots	£700.00	VCD
Unit T	£1,150.00	VCD
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum	£175,374.28	VCD
Upper Lough Erne Tourism Development Association	£650.00	VCD
Upperlands Community Development Ltd	£1,700.00	VCD
Urban Soul	£1,400.00	VCD
Via Wings	£1,500.00	VCD
Victoria Action Group	£645.00	VCD
Victoria Bridge Cross Community Forum	£2,400.00	VCD
Vineyard Compassion Ltd	£29,960.43	VCD
Voices: Republican Women Ex-Prisoners Group	£900.00	VCD
Volunteer Investment Project	£600.00	VCD
Volunteer Now	£1,025,385.57	VCD
Walkway Community Association	£440.00	VCD
Wandsworth Community Association	£1,500.00	VCD
War Years Remembered	£730.00	VCD
Waringstown Presbyterian Church Community Ministry	£600.00	VCD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Waterside Women's Centre	£251,436.47	VCD
We Go Together Support Group	£1,200.00	VCD
Weast Chernobyl	£1,140.00	VCD
Welcome Trust Ltd	£2,700.00	VCD
West Belfast District Scout Council	£620.00	VCD
Wheatfield Primary School	£910.00	VCD
Whitecity Community Development Association	£2,400.00	VCD
Whiterock/Westrock Residents Association	£1,430.00	VCD
Windsor Womens Centre Women Too	£521,449.71	VCD
Windyhall 50 Club	£1,805.00	VCD
Windyhall Community Association	£2,050.00	VCD
Windyhall Youth Club	£2,200.00	VCD
WISE OWLS	£1,000.00	VCD
Wolfe Tones GAC (Bellaghy)	£2,400.00	VCD
Women Making Waves	£1,200.00	VCD
Women of St Ergnats and Moneyglass Community	£600.00	VCD
Womens Centre Derry	£298,600.56	VCD
Womens Common Path Network	£1,200.00	VCD
Womens World	£1,130.00	VCD
Woodlands Pre-School (Previously Donemana)	£2,500.00	VCD
World Of Owls Centre	£800.00	VCD
Yew Trust Ltd	£1,500.00	VCD
Total Voluntary and Community Division	£22,395,880.67	VCD
174 Trust	£33,256.98	BRD
An Droichead Limited	£165,327.97	BRD
Andersonstown Traditional & Contemp Music	£42,400.96	BRD
Ardmonagh Family And Community Group	£298,936.00	BRD
Ardoyne Youth Providers Forum	£570,707.06	BRD
Arts For All	£28,118.49	BRD
Ashton Community Trust	£651,706.93	BRD
Ballysillan Community Forum	£274,360.72	BRD
Belfast Activity Centre	£338,036.12	BRD
Belfast City Council	£168,114.39	BRD
Belfast Community Sports Development Network	£123,639.02	BRD
Blackie River Community Groups	£370,383.84	BRD
Blackmountain Action Group	£180,726.12	BRD
Bryson Multi-Cultural Resource Centre (An Munia Tober)	£255,836.46	BRD
Cancer Lifeline	£253,387.99	BRD
Carrick Hill Residents Assoc.	£122,672.64	BRD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Charter N.I.	£56,553.84	BRD
Charter NI	£112,475.50	BRD
Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum	£682,219.06	BRD
Clonard Neighbourhood Development Partnership	£47,810.54	BRD
Colin Neighbourhood Partnership	£1,732,896.98	BRD
Community Restorative Justice Ireland	£617,921.89	BRD
Conway Education Centre	£724,530.41	BRD
Divis Joint Development Committee	£391,196.64	BRD
Donegall Pass Community Forum	£458,845.17	BRD
East Belfast Community Development Association	£1,664,916.32	BRD
Eastside Partnership	£567,722.86	BRD
EPIC	£515,777.30	BRD
Falls Community Council	£846,390.67	BRD
Falls Womens Centre	£446,519.51	BRD
Farset Youth & Community Development Ltd	£417,251.05	BRD
Footprints Womens Centre	£50,566.80	BRD
Forum For Action On Substance Abuse	£643,876.48	BRD
Gems Northern Ireland Limited	£66,532.00	BRD
Glen Community Parent/Youth Group	£198,113.88	BRD
Glenbank Community Association	£52,675.74	BRD
Glencolin Residents Association	£88,777.04	BRD
Grace Women's Development Limited	£213,186.03	BRD
Greater Shankill Partnership Board	£454,287.80	BRD
Greater Village Regeneration Trust	£1,645,386.29	BRD
Hobby Horse Playgroup	£183,209.80	BRD
Ionad Uibh Eachach	£261,319.73	BRD
Jigsaw Community Counselling	£65,099.44	BRD
Lenadoon Community Forum	£303,149.20	BRD
Lenadoon Women's Group	£114,239.20	BRD
Ligoniel Improvement Association	£418,455.11	BRD
Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group	£295,296.26	BRD
Lower Shankill Community Association	£184,608.44	BRD
Markets Development Association	£247,032.90	BRD
Mount Vernon Community Development Forum	£339,661.60	BRD
New Life Counselling Service	£466,282.75	BRD
Newtownabbey Borough Council	£88,529.15	BRD
Newtownards Road Women's Group Limited	£267,546.56	BRD
North Belfast Advice Partnership	£390,286.80	BRD
North Belfast Employment Centre	£116,110.55	BRD
North Belfast Partnership	£813,146.95	BRD

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
North Belfast Womens Initiative	£108,121.36	BRD
North City Business Centre	£67,000.00	BRD
Northern Ireland Alternatives	£968,599.68	BRD
Our Lady of Mercy Girl's School	£4,000.00	BRD
Pobal	£16,605.00	BRD
Rathcoole Churches Community Group	£37,252.16	BRD
Rathcoole Primary School	£18,785.63	BRD
Roden Street Community Development Group	£315,890.60	BRD
Shankill Womens Centre	£521,357.58	BRD
Skainos Limited	£32,364.24	BRD
South Belfast Partnership Board	£356,361.23	BRD
Springfield Charitable Association	£26,093.36	BRD
St Andrew's Community Action Group	£6,595.79	BRD
Stadium Youth & Community Project	£263,106.42	BRD
Star Neighbourhood Centre	£402,746.29	BRD
Streetbeat Youth Project	£232,531.90	BRD
Suffolk Community Forum	£95,327.97	BRD
Synergy@JVC	£154,285.16	BRD
Tullycarnet Community Support Services Limited	£236,982.70	BRD
Tullycarnet Neighbourhood Collective	£130,000.00	BRD
Tullycarnet Primary School	£253,175.00	BRD
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum	£550,996.11	BRD
Upper Ardoyne Community Partnership	£120,800.48	BRD
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited	£2,925,462.03	BRD
Vine Community And Advice Centre	£453,883.68	BRD
West Belfast Parent Youth Support Group	£180,582.70	BRD
West Belfast Partnership Board	£458,842.83	BRD
West Kirk Community Project	£54,086.12	BRD
Willowfield Parish Community Association	£89,352.92	BRD
Wishing Well Family Centre	£148,453.09	BRD
Womens Tec	£78,918.00	BRD
Total Belfast Regeneration Division	£30,436,575.96	BRD
Ballee Comm Childcare	£36,716.25	RDO
Ballykeel Together Development Association	£35,687.50	RDO
Barnardos	£230,021.34	RDO
Building Ballysally Together	£43,569.00	RDO
Community Restorative Justice Newry & Armagh	£153,195.63	RDO
Devenish Partnership Forum	£671,991.66	RDO
Focus on Family	£777,963.10	RDO

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Grange Youth & Comm Group	£16,500.81	RDO
Harryville Men's Shed Group	£35,586.91	RDO
Kilcooley Community Forum	£48,100.48	RDO
Kilcooley Forum	£94,108.86	RDO
Kilcooley Womens Centre	£133,817.36	RDO
Miltown Superadults	£17,055.40	RDO
Newry & Mourne Enterprise Agency	£125,624.52	RDO
NI Alternatives	£118,582.78	RDO
Oasis Caring in Action	£106,071.35	RDO
OGRAS	£120,612.43	RDO
Strathroy Community Association	£111,810.66	RDO
Supporting Communities	£37,626.82	RDO
West Bann Development	£427,628.27	RDO
Total Regional Development Office	£3,342,271.13	RDO
4R's Reuse Workshop	£174,770.24	NWDO
An Gaelaras	£25,262.06	NWDO
Aras Cholmcille Trust Ltd	£22,844.33	NWDO
Ballymagroarty/Hazelbank Community Partnership	£431,102.85	NWDO
Bloody Sunday Trust	£21,087.02	NWDO
Bogside & Brandywell Initiative	£646,831.48	NWDO
Cathedral Youth Club	£108,962.88	NWDO
Caw Community Playgroup	£4,125.00	NWDO
Caw/Nelson Drive Action Group	£212,561.07	NWDO
Clooney Estate Residents Association	£270,046.62	NWDO
Community Restorative Justice	£159,991.66	NWDO
Community Restorative Justice	£318,298.66	NWDO
Creggan Country Park Enterprises Ltd	£188,825.28	NWDO
Creggan Pre-School & Training Trust Ltd	£352,017.74	NWDO
Currynierin Community Association	£8,354.39	NWDO
Dove House Community Trust	£339,811.18	NWDO
Drumachose Primary School	£12,000.00	NWDO
Dry Arch Children's Centre	£12,000.00	NWDO
Dunluce Family Centre Ltd	£391,353.50	NWDO
Enterprise North West Ltd	£14,952.00	NWDO
Fountain Primary School	£20,681.57	NWDO
Fountain Street Community Development Association	£129,039.21	NWDO
Foyle Womens Aid	£22,762.16	NWDO
Galliagh Community Development Group	£116,646.59	NWDO
Gasyard Development Trust	£143,470.95	NWDO

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Gasyard Wall Feile	£87,940.32	NWDO
Gingerbread NI	£75,145.84	NWDO
Glen Development Initiative	£269,129.03	NWDO
Greater Shantallow Area Partnership	£928,103.31	NWDO
Hillcrest House Ltd	£78,383.87	NWDO
Hillcrest Trust	£285,071.19	NWDO
HURT	£29,082.24	NWDO
Inner City Trust	£17,649.58	NWDO
Irish Street Community Association	£215,747.88	NWDO
Leafair Community Association	£209,019.08	NWDO
Liberty Consortium	£132,800.72	NWDO
Liberty Consortium	£67,334.02	NWDO
Lisnafin/Ardnalee Trust Cross CDA	£89,880.33	NWDO
Melmount EBA Community Assoc Forum	£126,119.16	NWDO
NW Play Resource Centre	£42,611.16	NWDO
Old Library Trust	£52,668.00	NWDO
Older People NW (Age Concern Derry)	£229,913.52	NWDO
Outer West Ltd	£68,015.18	NWDO
Outer West Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership Ltd	£136,373.94	NWDO
Pink Ladies Breast Cancer Support Group	£39,226.60	NWDO
Resource Centre Derry	£225,158.26	NWDO
Roe Valley Residents Association	£120,200.99	NWDO
Rosemount & District Welfare Rights Group	£362,647.78	NWDO
Shantallow Community Residents Association	£686,426.85	NWDO
Springhill Park Community Development Association	£90,627.30	NWDO
St Columb's Cathedral	£28,854.96	NWDO
Strabane & District Caring Services	£44,042.04	NWDO
Strabane & Lifford LGBT Group	£42,120.19	NWDO
Strabane Community Project	£89,619.14	NWDO
Strabane Community Unemployed Group	£61,516.68	NWDO
Strabane Ethnic Community Association	£145,835.29	NWDO
Strabane Local Strategy Partnership	£38,817.56	NWDO
Strabane Sigerson's GAA	£89,616.08	NWDO
The Glens Community Association	£232,947.08	NWDO
The Koram Centre	£70,197.52	NWDO
The Koram Centre, Counselling, Psychotherapy and Psycho Social Support Ltd	£140,352.08	NWDO
The Old Library Trust	£105,163.92	NWDO
The Pink Ladies Cancer Support Group	£70,927.67	NWDO
The Resource Centre Derry	£275,425.53	NWDO

Organisation Name	Total Awarded for Salaries, Running Costs and Programme Costs for the period 2014-2017	DfC Branch
Top of the Hill 2010	£64,378.10	NWDO
Triax	£64,895.64	NWDO
Triax	£190,000.00	NWDO
Triax Ltd	£129,618.96	NWDO
Waterside Area Partnership	£79,523.50	NWDO
Waterside Neighbourhood Partnership Ltd	£478,300.64	NWDO
Total North West Development Office	£11,255,227.17	NWDO

Mr Logan asked the Minister for Communities how many people are recorded as homeless in North Antrim.
(AQW 5368/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) has advised that homelessness data is recorded by the local NIHE office to which a household presents as homeless. The information provided covers Antrim, Ballycastle, Ballymena and Ballymoney local NIHE offices.

The Housing Executive has advised that the number of homelessness presenters in North Antrim in 2015/16 was 1,333 of which 885 were accepted by the Housing Executive as full duty housing applicants.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Communities whether any departmental disciplinary hearings or attendance management meetings are held outside Belfast.
(AQW 5377/16-21)

Mr Givan: In my department, a departmental disciplinary hearing is conducted by Departmental Human Resources (DHR) and may exceptionally be held outside Belfast depending on the circumstances of the case. Attendance management meetings may be conducted by line managers or DHR depending on the type of meeting required during the management of a sickness absence case. Meetings conducted by line managers are often held outside Belfast, while meetings conducted by DHR are held outside Belfast only in exceptional circumstances.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities to (i) outline how many listed buildings have been de-listed in each of the last three years; and (2) provide the reasons for each.
(AQW 5378/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) 2013 – 56 buildings were delisted;
 - 2014 – 13 buildings were delisted;
 - 2015 – 35 buildings were delisted;
 - 2016 – 13 buildings have been delisted to date.
- (ii) The reason for delisting is that, following a review as part of the Second Survey, these buildings were found to no longer meet the statutory test of being of 'special architectural or historic interest'. Of the 56 buildings delisted in 2013, one listed building was redesignated as a Scheduled Monument, as this was considered to be the more appropriate designation.

Mr Logan asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) any schemes by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in North Antrim to replace windows, doors or kitchens; (ii) the particular areas that will benefit; and (iii) the time frame.
(AQW 5380/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has provided the following list of schemes that include window, door or kitchen replacement in North Antrim in 2016/17 and 2017/18. Schemes from 2018/19 onwards will be developed as part of the Housing Executive's new 10 Year Investment Plan.

It should be noted that start dates for schemes not yet commenced may be affected by a number of factors, including available funding and programme review.

Scheme	Dwellings	Timeframe
Dunloy Kitchens	62	April 2016

Scheme	Dwellings	Timeframe
Ballycastle External Cyclical Maintenance (ECM, includes some door and window replacement)	130	May 2016
Carnary ECM (Includes door and window replacement)	196	June 2016
Ballintoy/ Liscolman Kitchens (includes some doors and windows)	14	July 2016
Cullybackey/ Portglenone Kitchens	75	August 2016
Ballycastle Kitchens*	42	August 2016
Ballymena North & Rurals ECM (Includes door and window replacement)	313	November 2016
Ballymoney Kitchens	52	February 2017
Ballycastle Kitchens	60	March 2017
Cullybackey/ Kells ECM (may include door and window replacement subject to condition)	322	June 2017
Bushmills Kitchens	94	August 2017
Ballymena Multi Element Improvement	25	September 2017
Carnary/ Cloughmills/ Balnamore Kitchens	118	March 2018

* Scheme includes 20 dwellings not in North Antrim.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities for an update on how art collections, currently housed in the Ulster Museum, will be displayed within communities, villages, schools and libraries.

(AQW 5382/16-21)

Mr Givan: National Museums NI (NMNI) is and will be arranging for the display of different parts of its art collections within communities, villages, schools, libraries and other venues through a range of community outreach programmes and initiatives. Details of these programmes and initiatives and an update on their progress is set out at Annex A.

Annex A

Range of programmes and initiatives to extend public access to National Museums NI's art collections

- **'Engage with Art':** this NMNI art access project was launched in early 2016 and delivered in the Londonderry Together Building United Communities (TBUC) Urban Village in partnership with a multi-generational community group from the Gasyard Centre, and funded by the Strategic Investment Board's Urban Villages Initiative. Original prints and drawings from the art collections were taken out to the community centre and the community group also visited the Ulster Museum to meet curators and explore exhibitions.
- **'Community Curated Touring Exhibition':** this new partnership project between NMNI and Libraries NI involves all five TBUC Urban Village areas and will commence before December 2016. This new project will involve community groups visiting NMNI sites and stores, and selecting favourite objects from across a range of collections including art, which the groups will curate into a photographic exhibition to tour to libraries and community centres across Northern Ireland in 2017.
- **'Culture Night 2016':** as part of this community programme NMNI took art collections into a pub in Belfast's Cathedral Quarter, alongside history and science objects, bringing museum collections to a broader range of more diverse audiences.
- **'Touring Exhibitions':** this NMNI programme of Touring Exhibitions was launched in 2015 following discussions with the local museum sector. An exhibition of artworks titled Art of the Liner: The Work of Kenneth Shoesmith 1890-1939, is available to local museums and the venue of The Braid (Mid-Antrim Museum), Ballymena has been secured for 2017.
- **'Out & About, Museums in Your Community':** focuses on taking stored museum collections, including art, into communities. Collections-focused workshops and handling sessions, which included art, have been held in libraries located within TBUC Urban Village areas. Year 2 of "Out & About" was launched during Community Relation & Cultural Awareness Week 2016.
- **'Creative Community Connections':** this art focused project was launched in April 2016 and is a collaborative project between NMNI and Derry and Strabane Museum and Visitor Service. The project, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, will encourage local communities to engage with NMNI's art collections, specifically the recently-gifted Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) collection of over 1,000 art works. Community groups in Londonderry will explore and handle modern and contemporary art, learn from local artists and co-curate exhibitions with NMNI.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities to outline his Department's plans to replace the Steps to Success Programme.

(AQW 5383/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department is about to embark on an engagement process with all interested parties to review the full range of programmes and services (including employment programmes) that are currently in place to assist unemployed and economically inactive people access the labour market. This engagement will be designed to assist the Department prepare a comprehensive and holistic range of programmes and services to assist people, in all circumstances, to prepare for and to move into employment and to help employers fill their job vacancies and grow their businesses.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the Urban Regeneration Areas plan for the Upper Long Streets in the New Lodge area, including the plans for homes above Edlingham Street to Hallidays Road.

(AQW 5384/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that the regeneration of a portion of the Upper Long Streets (Hillman, Upper Meadow, Spamount and Stratheden Streets) in the New Lodge area is well underway following an Economic Appraisal of housing conditions in the area.

Phase 1, which will deliver 31 new dwellings, is on site and will be followed by a second phase of 58 dwellings. The regeneration is taking place in the area of the affected streets between Lepper Street and Edlingham Streets. There are at present no regeneration plans beyond this area.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities to outline the eligibility criteria for people that have epilepsy and no warning grand mal seizures in relation to the Personal Independence Payment.

(AQW 5385/16-21)

Mr Givan: Entitlement to Personal Independence Payment is based on the effects of disability on a person's life and not on any particular or specific disability, illness or treatment received. The Personal Independence Payment assessment was designed so that it treats people as individuals, considering the impact of their impairment or health condition on their everyday life. The assessment is designed to treat all health conditions and impairments fairly, including for those with epilepsy.

Entitlement to Personal Independence Payment considers the claimants individual circumstances and the impact of their health condition or impairment on their ability to carry out a range of key everyday activities. A key consideration is not just whether the claimant can complete the activities but that they can do so safely, to an acceptable standard, repeatedly and in a reasonable time period.

In relation to claimants who have fluctuating conditions, such as epilepsy, the assessment is not a 'snapshot' of any one day. Instead it considers the claimant's ability to carry out activities over a period of time, a one year period, and considers the impact where they apply on over 50 per cent of days within this period.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities what arrangements have been made in his Department to promote co-operation, as required by Section 2(2) of the Children's Services Co-operation Act.

(AQW 5388/16-21)

Mr Givan: A senior official within my Department has been formally designated as the Departmental Children's Champion. They are already working alongside colleagues in the Department of Education to support them in drafting the new Children and Young People Strategy and will represent my Department in meetings with other Departmental children's representatives to ensure the needs of Children and Young People are considered as required by the Children's Services Co-Operation Act.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline the work his Department has done to support the Armed Forces veterans' community.

(AQW 5392/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department is committed to working closely with armed forces veterans' representative groups and individuals to ensure that they receive all the help they require with assistance in making claims, and also with making transitions within the benefits system.

My officials have engaged with senior representatives from the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) and Royal Irish Aftercare Service. This engagement has included attendance at an Aftercare staff training event to provide an overview of the Improving Benefit Uptake campaign and how help and support can be accessed through the 'Make the Call' Benefits Advice line and through my Department's Community Outreach Service. In addition, officials have offered to attend relevant family group meetings to provide information on these services.

Officials have also delivered a presentation on Welfare Changes to the Aftercare Service. The Aftercare Service has shared the Veteran's Handbook with my Department's officials and we signpost to the Aftercare Service.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) introduced a new financial support scheme from 8 April 2013 for seriously injured service personnel and veterans – Armed Forces Independence Payment (AFIP). As the AFIP scheme relates to the armed forces it is an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and falls outside the competence of the Assembly. Eligibility to

the scheme is determined on a UK-wide basis by the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency. However, as a consequence of the scheme the MoD brought forward amendments to legislation falling under various Departments to provide access to passported benefits for AFIP recipients. Officials in my Department worked closely with the MoD to ensure that AFIP recipients here have access to passported benefits/schemes in the same way as AFIP recipients in the rest of the UK.

The review of social housing allocations currently being undertaken by my Department has set out the expectation that, in applications for social housing and homelessness assistance, members of the Armed Forces veterans community should have the same access to social housing as any other citizen and must not be disadvantaged in that respect by the requirement for mobility whilst in service. This in accordance with the expectation set out in the Armed Forces Covenant. The review of allocations emphasises that, where applicants have served in Northern Ireland with the Armed Forces, this satisfies the local connection requirements and such applicants can therefore apply for housing and homelessness assistance here. The review highlights the fact that, while the Housing Executive processes applications from members of the Armed Forces community using the rules of the Housing Selection Scheme as it would for any other applicant, the Housing Executive has reminded its staff of the importance of dealing sensitively with such applicants, and that considerations of privacy and confidentiality should be respected in all cases.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities following the passage of the Licensing of Pavement Cafés Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, for his assessment of charging to facilitate cafés wishing utilise pavements as part of their business.
(AQW 5395/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Licensing of Pavement Cafés Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 introduced a statutory licensing scheme for the regulation of pavement cafés by district councils; this included provisions which enable the council to charge fees to offset the cost of administering the scheme.

It is a matter for each council to decide whether it wishes to charge a fee and, if so, the level of fees which it deems appropriate.

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister for Communities whether an Equality Impact Assessment will be completed and reported on before a decision is made regarding the proposed relocation of Social Security Offices and Jobs and Benefits Offices.
(AQW 5397/16-21)

Mr Givan: I would refer the member to my response to AQW 5049/16-21 tabled by Keith Buchanan which will soon be published in Hansard.

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister for Communities of the staff affected by the proposed reorganisation and closures of the rural Social Security Offices and Jobs and Benefits Offices network, what percentage are female, broken down by office.
(AQW 5398/16-21)

Mr Givan: I would refer the member to my response to AQW 5048/16-21 tabled by Keith Buchanan which will soon be published in Hansard.

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister for Communities whether the proposal to close three Social Security Offices in Cookstown, Newcastle and Ballynahinch, has been rural proofed.
(AQW 5399/16-21)

Mr Givan: I would refer the member to my response to AQW 5159/16-21 tabled by Colin McGrath which will soon be published in Hansard.

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister for Communities whether an economic impact assessment has been carried out on the towns where Social Security Office closures are being proposed.
(AQW 5401/16-21)

Mr Givan: I would refer the member to my response to AQW 5022/16-21 tabled by Naomi Long which will soon be published in Hansard.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the amount of grant aid paid to the Fold Housing Association for its development at Cumran Park, Clough, and (ii) whether there was a condition attached to the payment that street lighting would be provided to the rear of the development.
(AQW 5406/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- i) In June 2010, Fold Housing acquired 8 Off-the-Shelf properties at The Square, Clough. The total Housing Association Grant paid to Fold in respect of this scheme was £500,205.
- ii) There were no specific conditions attached to the payment of the Housing Association Grant relating to the provision of street lighting.

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Communities to list each function transferred to councils through the reform of local government; and the financial support that followed for each function.

(AQW 5423/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Transferred Functions Grant is the mechanism that supports the funding which underpins the following functions that transferred to local government on 1 April 2015:

DOE

- Local development plan functions; and
- Development control and enforcement.

DRD

- Off street parking (except Park and Ride and Park and Share); and
- Donaghadee Harbour.

DETI

- Start a Business Programme and Enterprise Shows;
- Youth Entrepreneurship (such as Prince's Trust and Shell Livewire);
- Social Entrepreneurship;
- Investing for Women;
- Neighbourhood Renewal funding relating to enterprises initiatives;
- Small scale tourism accommodation development;
- Providing business support including business start-up advice along with training and delivery of customer care schemes; and
- Providing advice to developers on tourism policies and related issues.

DCAL

- Armagh County Museum; and
- Local water recreational facilities

The funding mechanism was predicated on the functions and accompanying funding transferring at the same point in time. The funding was agreed by the then Ministers of the departments transferring functions. The Executive and the Assembly also agreed. The first year of this grant was 2015/16 and in subsequent years the annual amount of the grant payable to each council will increase/decrease in line with each council's non-domestic district rate for the relevant financial year.

When the DOE calculated the Transferred Functions Grant, which totalled £4,922,615 in 2015/16, the figure was obtained by combining each transferring Department's overall contribution to the grant. It would, therefore, be for those individual departments to provide the detailed breakdown regarding the financial support that followed each function.

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Communities (i) for an update on the Transferred Functions Grant, including the level of support provided in 2016-17; and (ii) whether he will commit to reviewing the level of support.

(AQW 5428/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Transferred Functions Grant (TFG) provides the funding for the functions that transferred from central to local government in April 2015. The level of the TFG, and the mechanism underpinning the grant, has the approval of the Executive and the Assembly.

This grant, administered by my Department, is based on a supplementary rating process for each council, which means that the level of the grant increases or decreases, annually in line with each council's district rate.

In April 2015 the level of the funding due to each council was converted to a derived Net Annual Value (NAV). Each council's derived NAV equals the original funding due to that council, divided by the relevant council's non domestic district rate. The derived NAVs were set in legislation in the Local Government (Transferred Functions Grant) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015. The TFG payable each year is calculated by multiplying the council's NAV by the district rate set for that council for that year.

A table showing the TFG payable for 2016/17 is set out below. This illustrates that Lisburn City and Castlereagh Borough District Council received £380,438 in 2016/17 which is 2.98% more than was paid in 2015/16. This percentage increase mirrors the increase in that council's district rate.

The funding due to each council was captured at the time of transfer and the mechanism allows the level of funding to fluctuate reflecting the council's rate increases/ decreases. Therefore there is no need to review the level of funding.

There are potentially other public services which may be best delivered at local level. Any decision on future transfers of functions to councils is a matter for Executive Ministers in conjunction with local government. This issue was discussed at a recent meeting of the Partnership Panel on 12 October 2016.

Where additional functions transfer, the NAV previously set in legislation will be increased to reflect the funding associated with any new functions. The level of funding associated with the functions already transferred would not be revisited or revised.

District Council	Transferred Functions Grant 2016/17 (£)
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough	847,234
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough	554,476
Belfast City	0
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough	362,758
Derry City and Strabane	331,293
Fermanagh and Omagh	504,831
Lisburn City and Castlereagh Borough	380,438
Mid and East Antrim Borough	802,054
Mid-Ulster	652,297
Newry, Mourne and Down	589,865
Ards and North Down Borough	401,931

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment of (i) the role Belfast plays in sustaining arts provision; (ii) whether his Department will ensure that the £150,000 awarded to local councils outside Belfast will, at a minimum, be matched within Belfast; and, (iii) whether the cuts to funding to arts organisations is a factor in the developing situation around the long term sustainability of arts organisations and venues.

(AQW 5429/16-21)

Mr Givan: Belfast has a crucial role to play in sustaining Arts provision and that is reflected in the funding, disbursed through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI), which is provided by my Department. Seventy-four of a total of 107 ACNI annually funded clients are based in Belfast, providing services to both Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland. In 2016/17 ACNI provided over £7,000,000 to these 74 organisations.

My Department also allocates a total of around £400,000 per year to the Community Festivals Fund (CFF) which is administered and match-funded by Local Councils. Belfast City Council (BCC) was allocated £75,900 from the CFF in 2016/17.

Although BCC has not been included in the Local Government Challenge Fund, since the fund's development, ACNI and BCC have been involved in discussions to agree a strategic approach to the needs of the core arts organisations in Belfast. This builds on the previous Creative & Cultural Belfast partnership which began in 2013/14 and to which each party committed £150k per year over a 3-year period. The programme was designed to challenge social exclusion by providing everyone in Belfast with the opportunity to experience high-quality culture, arts and heritage.

In the context of the current financial climate, all sectors have been required to make adjustments and to carefully evaluate the way they work. I understand that reductions to ACNI's budget may have an impact on the short, medium and long term sustainability of arts organisations but further reductions to funding cannot be ruled out in future. However, I fully recognise the value and the returns that the arts can bring and, in the eventuality of further cuts, my Department will continue to work with the Arts sector to offer what support we can. As continues to be the case, I would encourage arts organisations in seeking alternative ways of fundraising, such as sponsorship, rather than being wholly reliant on government grants, as this will make the organisations more sustainable in the long term.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for Communities (i) what plans he has for the regeneration of housing; and (ii) what are his plans in the meantime with regard to derelict and unused housing properties, in Dunclug in Ballymena.

(AQW 5451/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) It is my intention that the regeneration of housing in Northern Ireland will be aimed at providing people with high quality homes in balanced communities. I will provide new social and affordable housing, mixed use and mixed tenure developments and through the active asset management of existing Housing Executive stock will provide properties that are sustainable and fit for the future.

'Facing The Future: The Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-2017' sets out the role of Government to drive regeneration within communities, particularly those suffering from blight and population decline. The Building Successful Communities pilot is an example of innovative regeneration work being taken forward under the Housing Strategy.

- (ii) The Housing Executive has advised that it has 142 tenanted and 6 vacant properties within Dunclug Park and Dunclug Gardens. The area has experienced low demand for a number of years and as a result the Housing Executive has carried out a program of demolition which included medium-rise and end of terrace flats. The Housing Executive is currently considering the future of 6 further properties in Dunclug Park.

The Housing Executive will continue to invest in its homes in Dunclug, which are being included in the future Planned Maintenance Program for heating improvements, kitchen replacement and external upgrading.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 4302/16-21, whether (i) the eleven press officers are the entirety of his Department's information service; (ii) there are additional staff; and, if so, (a) how many; and (b) at what cost. **(AQW 5452/16-21)**

Mr Givan: The Department for Communities was established on 09 May 2016 and brought together functions and staff from other departments. Departmental Press Offices include both Executive Information Service (EIS) staff and administrative grades. There are currently four administrative staff employed in the Department for Communities Press Office. This equates to three full time equivalent staff. The cost of these staff from 09 May 2016 to 30 September 2016 is £41,345.17. Staffing levels are currently under review.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities to outline the (a) vacancy; and (b) occupancy rates of Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties in (i) Banbridge; (ii) Loughbrickland; (iii) Scarva; (iv) Rathfriland; (v) Moneyislane; (vi) Corbet; and (vii) Gilford.

(AQW 5473/16-21)

Mr Givan: The table below shows the total housing stock numbers and the current void properties within each area requested.

Common Landlord Area	Total Stock	Void
Banbridge Town	789	9
Corbet	8	0
Gilford	156	3
Loughbrickland	35	2
Rathfriland	192	1
Scarva	22	0
Ballyward (Inc Moneyislane)	9	0
Grand Total	1211	15

N.B. Moneyislane is a townland contained in Ballyward.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities whether GP's are paid to carry out Personal Independence Payment medical reports; and if so, how much per report.

(AQW 5503/16-21)

Mr Givan: Capita Health and Wellbeing who provide the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) Assessment service will request a General Practitioner's (GP's) Report in certain circumstances. Given that there is no contractual obligation on GPs to complete these reports for PIP, a fee of £33.50 is paid which is the same fee that applies across the rest of the United Kingdom. The same fee is also paid when a report is requested for Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities to clarify whether new medical evidence in relation to an unsuccessful Personal Independence Payment application can be considered.

(AQW 5504/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department would consider any new evidence, including medical evidence provided by the claimant in support of a reconsideration or appeal request following an unsuccessful claim to Personal Independence Payment, to establish if this changes the decision.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Communities to outline the qualifications and training required to undertake Personal Independence Payment medical assessments.

(AQW 5505/16-21)

Mr Givan: Personal Independence Payment (PIP) medical assessments are carried out by Healthcare Professionals working for Capita Health and Wellbeing, the PIP Assessment Provider in Northern Ireland. Healthcare Professionals recruited for the delivery of the service must have the following qualifications and experience:-

- (a) They are an occupational therapist, nurse (level 1), physiotherapist, paramedic or doctor;
- (b) They are fully registered with the relevant licensing body (doctors must have a licence to practise);
- (c) They have no sanctions attached to registration;
- (d) They have at least 2 years post full registration experience.

Having satisfied that requirement, a Disability Assessor undergoes an extensive 10 week training programme and can only carry out an assessment having successfully completed their training and clearly demonstrated they have met key competencies for performing the role. There is also an ongoing quality monitoring and support programme in place for Disability Assessors.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Communities whether he plans to investigate the cost and running of The Gobbins tourist project in Larne to ensure rate payers in Mid and East Antrim are receiving value for money.

(AQW 5509/16-21)

Mr Givan: As you are probably aware the Department of the Environment issued planning permission for the reinstatement of The Gobbins path in September 2009.

From 2011-2015 Larne Borough Council led a project to reopen The Gobbins path. The work was funded by the European Union's INTERREG IVA Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and administered by the North East Partnership, Larne Borough Council and the Ulster Garden Villages Limited.

The governance arrangements for The Gobbins project passed from Larne Borough Council to Mid & East Antrim Borough Council under local government reform. The financial statements for Larne Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2015 and for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2016 have been fully audited by the Local Government Auditor. No issues have been raised in relation to governance or financial matters in respect of The Gobbins. Similarly, no issues were raised in the Report to those Charged with Governance from the Local Government Auditor.

As councils are separate legal entities, management and governance arrangements associated with The Gobbins project, are the responsibility of Mid & East Antrim Borough Council. Therefore, I have no plans to investigate the cost and running of The Gobbins tourist project.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Communities to detail what driving qualifications are required for ministerial drivers when employed by (i) his Department; and (ii) him or his party.

(AQW 5531/16-21)

Mr Givan: Ministerial drivers are required to have a current driving license entitling them to drive a Group A vehicle under the Road traffic Act (Northern Ireland) 1970.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 4006/16-21, to outline the representation made to him by political representatives, including the date of receipt by his Department.

(AQW 5546/16-21)

Mr Givan: I can confirm that Carla Lockhart MLA contacted my office on the morning of 27 July 2016 in connection with the European Hockey League tournament at Banbridge Hockey Club.

Immediately following this, my officials were asked to explore the possibility of the Department providing funding towards activities that would support the development of hockey and promote participation as a result of the Club hosting this tournament.

That afternoon you sent an email at 16.39 to my Ministerial Private Office email account, seeking assistance for Banbridge Hockey Club to host the European Hockey League tournament.

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister for Communities whether there is provision in his budget for financial support for the SuperCupNI.

(AQW 5553/16-21)

Mr Givan: There is no current provision in my Departmental budget to support events such as the SuperCupNI.

I do however recognise that this tournament which began in 1983 has grown in terms of size and reputation and is widely recognised as the foremost annual youth football tournament in Northern Ireland. I have therefore recently agreed to meet the organisers of the tournament to explore how my Department can be of assistance to them in advance of next year's event.

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the timetable, including the period for public consultation, for the formulation of the new Social Strategy.

(AQW 5590/16-21)

Mr Givan: I plan to bring a draft Social Strategy to the Executive with the intention of having it issued for public consultation in the coming weeks, subject to Executive approval.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Communities to outline when a window replacement scheme will commence for the Alexander Road area of Limavady.

(AQW 5614/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Alexander Road area in Limavady is included in a Double Glazing scheme currently planned to start in February 2017.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for Communities to detail how much each local council are charging to premises under the Licensing of Pavement Cafés Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

(AQW 5708/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Licensing of Pavement Cafés Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 introduced a statutory licensing scheme for the regulation of pavement cafés by district councils; this included provisions which enable the council to charge fees to offset the cost of administering the scheme.

It is a matter for each council to decide whether it wishes to charge a fee and, if so, the level of fees which it deems appropriate.

My Department does not hold the information requested and the member may wish to contact individual councils in respect of this.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities to confirm that households with children, affected by the Benefit Cap of 31st May 2016, and currently in receipt of a supplementary payment, will receive an increased supplementary payment if their Housing Benefit is reduced further by the lower Benefit Cap, planned to be introduced on 7 November 2016.

(AQW 5767/16-21)

Mr Givan: I can confirm the Department will make provision to increase the welfare supplementary payment to mitigate the impact of a reduction in the benefit cap planned to be introduced from 7 November 2016. Households with children currently receiving a welfare supplementary payment will receive an increase if they continue to meet the conditions for eligibility.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Communities to outline why recipients of Disability Living Allowance are not warned that reporting a change in circumstances will automatically generate an application for Personal Independence Payments which they must complete or lose their entitlement.

(AQW 5999/16-21)

Mr Givan: All Disability Living Allowance (DLA) recipients have been advised every year, since 2013, that following the introduction of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in Northern Ireland, any working age claimant (age 16-64) who reports a change in their needs will be required to claim PIP. This information was included in their annual benefit uprating notification.

In addition, the Welfare Changes booklet, which was delivered to all households in Northern Ireland in May 2016, also made specific reference to this in the section relating to PIP where it stated 'New claims for Personal Independence Payment will be taken from 20 June 2016. From that date, people aged 16 to 64 years will no longer be able to claim DLA' If someone on DLA reports a change to their mobility or care needs on or after 20 June 2016 we will assess them for Personal Independence Payment instead of DLA'.

Since 20 June 2016 existing working age DLA claimants who are legally required to report changes and who contact the Department to do so are advised that the Department can no longer take any changes to DLA and that they have to make a claim for PIP. They are also advised that PIP is a new benefit that replaces DLA and this means the amount they receive in future could change to a higher or lower rate, last for a longer or shorter time, stay the same or stop altogether in line with the regulations covering the DLA and PIP benefits.

A written notification is also issued advising the claimant of this and of the timelines required to complete the associated PIP application form.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Communities what consideration is being given to the introduction of an online facility for completion of Personal Independence Payment applications.

(AQO 533/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- Early work is underway by the Department for Work and Pensions to develop a digital service for Personal Independence Payment which allows for online claims.

- From April 2016 this facility became available to a small number of claimants in a specific geographic area in Great Britain on a voluntary basis. This test and learn approach is intended to provide direct feedback and allow for ongoing improvements to ensure this new service is effective and secure before it is made widely available across the whole of the United Kingdom.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment of the impact of the cap on the Local Housing Allowance. (AQO 536/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- Since 2008, tenants in the private rented sector who are eligible to receive Housing Benefit have been subject to the Local Housing Allowance Cap. Since April 2016, this cap is subject to a four year freeze.
- The key feature of the Local Housing Allowance is that it is based both on the market rent levels for the area a claimant lives in as well as how many people live with the claimant..
- A clear and transparent set of Local Housing Allowance rates help tenants and landlords know how much financial help is available. When tenants know in advance the maximum amount of housing benefit available to them it allows them to make an informed choice regarding their housing options based on what they can afford.
- Housing Benefit claimants facing a shortfall in rent due to the application of the Local Housing Allowance are able to apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment to make up the difference between the contractual rent and their Housing Benefit entitlement. The Housing Executive currently has a Discretionary Housing Payment budget of £3,400,000
- In comparing Discretionary Housing Payment awards and payments over the period 1st April to 30th September for the last 2 years, there has been an increase in awards over the 2 periods of 155 and spend has increased by £282,336.
- It is not certain that the increases in awards and value of payments made are directly attributable to the freeze in Local Housing Allowance rates but it is likely that this will have been a contributory factor.
- There is no clear evidence of tenants moving property as a result of the freeze on Local Housing Allowance rent levels

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Communities what community benefit commitments were included in the tender from the successful contractor for the Windsor Park redevelopment. (AQO 537/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- The contracts for each of the Stadium Projects include terms for robust social clauses, targeted at sectors facing greatest inequalities within areas of greatest objective need, concerning employment of Long-Term Unemployed, apprenticeships, work placements and delivery of a specific number of practical proposals to benefit the community and to deliver social returns.
- The contractor for the Windsor Park project O'Hare and McGovern made an undertaking to deliver more than the identified five practical projects to deliver community initiatives and to return public benefits to the community e.g. school site visits and a charity fund raising event.
- All targets in relation to Long Term Unemployed, Apprentices and Placement Student positions have been achieved for the project.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Communities to outline the benefits of the Community Festivals Fund. (AQO 538/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- My Department produces an overall evaluation of the Community Festivals Fund (CFF) each year, which is published on the DfC website. This overall evaluation is based on the evaluations which each Council is required to submit at the end of each financial year.
- The reports provided by the Councils have demonstrated how the scheme has increased community engagement, provided training and development opportunities, increased visitor numbers and instilled a sense of civic pride in areas.
- Since administration of the CFF transferred to the councils in 2008, ten times more festivals are now being funded than previously and the funding of the festivals can be tailored to meet the local needs of the community.

Department of Education

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Education for an update on progress on the Shared Education Campus in Limavady. (AQW 3897/16-21)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): The Economic Appraisal (EA) for Limavady Shared Education Campus has been approved and the new Project Board has been established to take forward the design phase of the project. A Licence Agreement is nearing completion.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many post-primary schools use outside organisations to support the delivery of relationship and sexuality education; (ii) which organisations these schools use; and (iii) how much these schools pay these organisations in each year over the last ten years.

(AQW 4859/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) The Department does not routinely collate information on the use of external organisations by schools to support delivery of Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) or indeed delivery of any aspect of the curriculum. However, the Education and Training Inspectorate's report on RSE in post-primary schools, published in July 2011, does provide some quantitative information on the use of external agencies by schools (paragraph 4.15 of report refers).
- (ii) The ETI's report also names the main agencies being used by schools to support their RSE programme. The ETI's report can be accessed via the Inspectorate's website www.etini.gov.uk.
- (iii) The Department does not collate information on how much schools pay for the external organisations they engage to support their delivery of the curriculum.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's strategy and action plan for ensuring that all schools develop a policy on Relationship and Sexuality Education, including focus on LGBT+ rights, inclusivity and concerns.

(AQW 4896/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education (DE) does not have a strategy and action plan for ensuring that all schools develop a policy on Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE). While DE guidance requires all grant-aided schools to develop a policy on how they will address RSE within the curriculum, this is a policy matter which is devolved to schools. In August 2015, CCEA produced revised RSE guidance for schools which outlined the inclusive approach that is required for RSE, in particular the need to cover issues such as sexual orientation and gender identity.

DE Circular 2015/22, which issued in August 2015, reminded schools that they should have an RSE policy in place. In addition, DE Circular 2010/01, which issued in January 2010, advised schools of the need to take account of the Equality Commission's guidance when developing or reviewing their RSE policy, thereby ensuring that all children are 'treated with respect and dignity and are not treated any less favourably on grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation'.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to detail the budget allocated to the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity policy.

(AQW 4911/16-21)

Mr Weir: There is no budget allocation for implementation of the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity policy. Education providers are required to address community relations, equality and diversity through delivery of the curriculum and within existing resources.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education how the Shared Education Policy promotes good relations.

(AQW 4912/16-21)

Mr Weir: Shared Education provides the opportunity for children and young people from different community and socio-economic backgrounds to learn together. The curriculum provides a framework for exploring citizenship, cultural understanding, diversity and inclusion, human rights and social responsibility, equality and social justice, and democracy and active participation. Evidence shows that when given the opportunity through sustained contact, children and young people work well collaboratively and develop meaningful relationships with others of different faiths, cultures and backgrounds.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Education for an update on Post Special Educational Needs Provision in Education, Employment and Training for people with learning disabilities in East Antrim.

(AQW 4978/16-21)

Mr Weir: Under the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, the Department of Education (DE) ceases to have statutory responsibility for young people once they have attained the age of 19 years and are no longer a registered pupil at a school.

Whilst young people with statements of special educational needs (SEN) will have engaged in the statutory education transition planning process to prepare them for leaving school, DE has no statutory remit to make SEN provision in Education, Employment and Training for people with learning disabilities post-school.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the Education Authority business case that envisaged fifty senior/middle management redundancies, to outline why has there been 400 non-teaching redundancies, with more to follow.

(AQW 5001/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Business case for the establishment of the Education Authority (EA) projected only savings in respect of non school based headquarters staff as a result of economies realised by the replacement of the 5 former Education and Library Boards by a single organisation. The Business Case identified a reduction on the September 2014 baseline of staff 'in scope for savings' of 30 senior managers, 2 middle managers and 18 supervisory managers.

However, as a consequence of the EA budget allocation for 2015-16, the EA centre budget agreed by the Board faced pressures in the region of £26m. To help meet these efficiency targets, with the agreement of the Department, a Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) was initiated on 21 May 2015. The Scheme was funded from the Public Sector Transformation Fund.

To date 205 headquarters staff have left through the EA VES and a further 40 staff exits have been approved. Further exits remain under consideration.

EA is continuing to implement a VES in 2016/17 to support the delivery of 2016-17 financial savings plans in tandem with the implementation of new management structures for EA, reorganisation, restructuring and transformation of services on a regional basis, and service delivery requirements.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Education to detail the planned redundancies in the teaching and non-teaching sector over the next twelve months.

(AQW 5010/16-21)

Mr Weir: Decisions in relation to the staffing requirements for all school based staff, (teachers and support staff) including the need to make posts redundant, are a matter for each Board of Governors.

In respect of non-school based staff, the Education Authority (EA) intends to maximise its use of voluntary severance and the associated available funding in 2016/17 to contribute to the delivery of the EA 2016/17 Savings Delivery Plan. To date 40 staff have been agreed to exit under VES in 2016/17. It is planned to release further numbers of staff as the EA takes forward its transformation programme through functional leadership of Directors to streamline management structures and redesign the delivery services on a regional basis.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Education to detail the current class sizes for each Year from 1 to 7, broken down by each primary school in South Down.

(AQW 5030/16-21)

Mr Weir: A class breakdown of all primary schools in South Down, broken down by reception to P7, is as follows:

School	Class	R	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
All Childrens Integrated Primary School	HC	0	0	0	29	0	0	0	0	29
All Childrens Integrated Primary School	M H	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	21
All Childrens Integrated Primary School	MH	0	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	30
All Childrens Integrated Primary School	MI	7	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	30
All Childrens Integrated Primary School	MM	0	0	0	0	28	0	0	0	28
All Childrens Integrated Primary School	PM	0	0	0	0	0	33	0	0	33
All Childrens Integrated Primary School	PR	0	0	0	0	0	0	32	0	32
All Childrens Integrated Primary School	PS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	20
Annalong Primary School	AG	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	23	30
Annalong Primary School	GS	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
Annalong Primary School	JG	0	0	0	7	20	0	0	0	27
Annalong Primary School	KMCK	0	0	16	8	0	0	0	0	24
Annalong Primary School	LF	0	0	0	0	0	19	11	0	30
Annsborough Primary School	DMcC	0	6	5	0	0	0	0	0	11
Annsborough Primary School	LB	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	8	12
Annsborough Primary School	RF	0	0	0	5	5	9	0	0	19
Ballydown Primary School	AI	0	0	0	29	0	0	0	0	29
Ballydown Primary School	BG	0	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	30
Ballydown Primary School	DR	0	21	0	0	0	0	0	0	21
Ballydown Primary School	JD	0	0	0	0	15	15	0	0	30
Ballydown Primary School	JDW	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
Ballydown Primary School	JO	0	0	0	0	0	29	0	0	29
Ballydown Primary School	JW	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	0	31

School	Class	R	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Ballydown Primary School	KB	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	16	31
Ballydown Primary School	NH	0	0	15	14	0	0	0	0	29
Ballydown Primary School	PC	0	0	0	0	0	0	31	0	31
Ballydown Primary School	TR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	29	29
Ballyholland Primary School	AC	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	0	30
Ballyholland Primary School	AOH	0	32	0	0	0	0	0	0	32
Ballyholland Primary School	CD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	34	34
Ballyholland Primary School	CMA	0	0	0	0	0	0	35	0	35
Ballyholland Primary School	CQ	0	0	32	0	0	0	0	0	32
Ballyholland Primary School	POH	0	0	0	0	22	11	0	0	33
Ballyholland Primary School	SMG	0	0	0	0	20	13	0	0	33
Brackenagh West Primary School	DG	0	0	0	0	0	23	0	0	23
Brackenagh West Primary School	HW	0	0	0	0	29	0	0	0	29
Brackenagh West Primary School	KJA	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
Brackenagh West Primary School	MJP/AH	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	25
Brackenagh West Primary School	MR	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	24
Brackenagh West Primary School	PN	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	28
Brackenagh West Primary School	RG	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	25
Bronte Primary School	AF	0	0	0	0	19	9	0	0	28
Bronte Primary School	DT	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	0	28
Bronte Primary School	KMcN	0	0	0	0	0	20	8	0	28
Bronte Primary School	KY	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	28
Bronte Primary School	MF	0	0	0	27	0	0	0	0	27
Bronte Primary School	PA	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	25	31
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	BF	0	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	14
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	BR	0	0	15	0	0	0	0	0	15
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	CF	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	8	19
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	MA	0	0	0	9	13	0	0	0	22
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche	MAI	0	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
Carrick Primary School, Warenpoint	AD	0	0	32	0	0	0	0	0	32
Carrick Primary School, Warenpoint	AOH	0	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	24
Carrick Primary School, Warenpoint	AON	0	0	0	0	0	32	0	0	32
Carrick Primary School, Warenpoint	CK	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
Carrick Primary School, Warenpoint	DC	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
Carrick Primary School, Warenpoint	DS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	28	28
Carrick Primary School, Warenpoint	EG	0	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	25
Carrick Primary School, Warenpoint	KD	0	0	0	0	0	0	33	0	33
Carrick Primary School, Warenpoint	MMC	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	0	30
Carrick Primary School, Warenpoint	PM	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	0	30
Carrick Primary School, Warenpoint	SK	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	27
Carrick Primary School, Warenpoint	TC	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	0	31

School	Class	R	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Carrick Primary School, Warenpoint	TMCA	0	0	0	0	0	32	0	0	32
Carrick Primary School, Warenpoint	TT	0	0	0	0	0	0	34	0	34
Castlewellan Primary School	CMCK	2	4	6	0	0	0	0	0	12
Castlewellan Primary School	JMCC	0	0	0	4	4	1	0	0	9
Castlewellan Primary School	NMCL	0	0	0	0	0	7	7	8	22
Cedar Integrated Primary School	1LM	0	29	0	0	0	0	0	0	29
Cedar Integrated Primary School	2DMcG	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	24
Cedar Integrated Primary School	3KG	0	0	0	29	0	0	0	0	29
Cedar Integrated Primary School	4MM	0	0	0	0	29	0	0	0	29
Cedar Integrated Primary School	5JM	0	0	0	0	0	27	0	0	27
Cedar Integrated Primary School	6CH	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	24
Cedar Integrated Primary School	7TB	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	29	29
Christ The King Primary School, Ballynahinch	CB	0	19	6	0	0	0	0	0	25
Christ The King Primary School, Ballynahinch	DAM	0	0	8	17	0	0	0	0	25
Christ The King Primary School, Ballynahinch	GF	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	14
Christ The King Primary School, Ballynahinch	MD	0	0	0	0	0	13	6	0	19
Christ The King Primary School, Ballynahinch	VW	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	11	20
Cumran Primary School	1JM	0	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	20
Cumran Primary School	2ST	0	0	20	0	0	0	0	0	20
Cumran Primary School	3LC	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	19
Cumran Primary School	4EM	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	0	21
Cumran Primary School	5SL	0	0	0	0	0	28	0	0	28
Cumran Primary School	6LS	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	25
Cumran Primary School	7PM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	20
Downpatrick Primary School	AA	0	0	0	0	0	28	0	0	28
Downpatrick Primary School	CMCC	0	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	30
Downpatrick Primary School	DM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	23	23
Downpatrick Primary School	KB	0	0	0	0	0	0	23	0	23
Downpatrick Primary School	KC	0	24	1	0	0	0	0	0	25
Downpatrick Primary School	KF	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	28
Downpatrick Primary School	ST	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	24
Dromore Road Primary School	CMCE/ GM	0	13	9	0	0	0	0	0	22
Dromore Road Primary School	LE	0	0	0	12	10	0	0	0	22
Dromore Road Primary School	OG/KG	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	7	17
Dromore Road Primary School	SN	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	21
Drumadonnell Primary School	JB	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	30
Drumadonnell Primary School	JL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	32	32
Drumadonnell Primary School	JM	0	0	0	0	0	31	0	0	31
Drumadonnell Primary School	LR	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	0	31
Drumadonnell Primary School	LT	0	0	0	22	0	0	0	0	22

School	Class	R	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Drumadonnell Primary School	LYR	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	0	27
Drumadonnell Primary School	RB	0	0	0	0	29	0	0	0	29
Drumadonnell Primary School	RH	0	0	0	22	0	0	0	0	22
Gaelscoil Na mBeann	AMG	0	8	11	0	0	0	0	0	19
Gaelscoil Na mBeann	EL	0	0	0	11	9	0	0	0	20
Gaelscoil Na mBeann	NL	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	0	7
Glasswater Primary School	RM 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	14	21
Glasswater Primary School	RM 2	0	0	0	13	5	0	0	0	18
Glasswater Primary School	RM 4	0	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
Glasswater Primary School	RM 5	0	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	18
Glasswater Primary School	RM3	0	0	0	0	16	10	0	0	26
Grange Primary School	DH	0	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	17
Grange Primary School	GD	0	0	0	0	0	15	7	0	22
Grange Primary School	KS	0	0	0	5	16	0	0	0	21
Grange Primary School	RMM	0	0	16	7	0	0	0	0	23
Grange Primary School	SMK	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	15	22
Holy Cross Primary School, Kilkeel	BC	0	0	12	12	0	0	0	0	24
Holy Cross Primary School, Kilkeel	CT	0	0	0	0	18	10	0	0	28
Holy Cross Primary School, Kilkeel	CW	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Holy Cross Primary School, Kilkeel	JN	0	0	0	0	0	9	20	0	29
Holy Cross Primary School, Kilkeel	RD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	19
Iveagh Primary School	AB	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	24
Iveagh Primary School	JB	0	0	29	0	0	0	0	0	29
Iveagh Primary School	JM	0	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	24
Iveagh Primary School	JN	0	0	0	0	0	31	0	0	31
Iveagh Primary School	LJ	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	0	21
Iveagh Primary School	MH	11	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	25
Iveagh Primary School	MMC	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	0	17
Iveagh Primary School	NG	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	0	18
Iveagh Primary School	RL	0	0	0	32	0	0	0	0	32
Iveagh Primary School	RMK	0	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	27
Kilbroney Integrated Primary School	DM	0	0	0	22	0	0	0	0	22
Kilbroney Integrated Primary School	EN	0	0	0	0	23	0	0	0	23
Kilbroney Integrated Primary School	ES	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	8	20
Kilbroney Integrated Primary School	LR	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	25
Kilbroney Integrated Primary School	MT	0	0	0	0	0	16	0	0	16
Kilbroney Integrated Primary School	TMCC	0	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
Kilkeel Primary School	A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	31	31
Kilkeel Primary School	AN	0	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	22
Kilkeel Primary School	CA	0	0	21	0	0	0	0	0	21
Kilkeel Primary School	CHE	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	24

School	Class	R	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Kilkeel Primary School	CO	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	25
Kilkeel Primary School	D	0	0	0	0	22	0	0	0	22
Kilkeel Primary School	F	0	0	0	0	0	32	0	0	32
Kilkeel Primary School	G	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	0	21
Kilkeel Primary School	HE	0	0	0	0	23	0	0	0	23
Kilkeel Primary School	L	0	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
Kilkeel Primary School	M	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
Kilkeel Primary School	MCB	0	0	0	0	0	31	0	0	31
Kilkeel Primary School	MCK	0	0	0	23	0	0	0	0	23
Kilkeel Primary School	P	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	0	22
Kilkeel Primary School	Q	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	31	31
Kilkeel Primary School	R	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	0	22
Kilkeel Primary School	ST	0	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	22
Kilkeel Primary School	W	0	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
Killowen Primary School, Rostrevor	AC	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	19	30
Killowen Primary School, Rostrevor	ACU	0	0	4	17	0	0	0	0	21
Killowen Primary School, Rostrevor	DM	0	0	0	0	12	12	0	0	24
Killowen Primary School, Rostrevor	LE	5	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
Moneydarragh Primary School	MR	0	0	0	0	11	8	0	0	19
Moneydarragh Primary School	SMCC	0	0	10	11	0	0	0	0	21
Moneydarragh Primary School	SML	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	11	25
Moneydarragh Primary School	SR	0	13	2	0	0	0	0	0	15
Newcastle Primary School	1EB	0	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	20
Newcastle Primary School	2EH	0	0	13	0	0	0	0	0	13
Newcastle Primary School	3VT	0	0	0	18	0	0	0	0	18
Newcastle Primary School	4CB	0	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	24
Newcastle Primary School	5KS	0	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	14
Newcastle Primary School	6AD	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	25
Newcastle Primary School	7LD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	18
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	1DO	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	25
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	1KM	0	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	27
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	2LA	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	28
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	2LO	0	0	23	0	0	0	0	0	23
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	3CT	0	0	0	23	0	0	0	0	23
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	3PR	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	25
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	4CD	0	0	0	0	28	0	0	0	28
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	4LR	0	0	0	0	26	0	0	0	26
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	5DB	0	0	0	0	0	30	0	0	30
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	5MC	0	0	0	0	0	27	0	0	27
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	6AA	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	25
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	6CM	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	25

School	Class	R	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	7PB	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	17
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	7SM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	17
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	R 1/2	0	17	6	0	0	0	0	0	23
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	R 2/3	0	0	13	12	0	0	0	0	25
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	R 4/5	0	0	0	0	13	14	0	0	27
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School	R 6/7	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	13	25
Sacred Heart Primary School, Dundrum	P1/2	0	3	11	0	0	0	0	0	14
Sacred Heart Primary School, Dundrum	P3	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	11
Sacred Heart Primary School, Dundrum	P4/5	0	0	0	0	11	10	0	0	21
Sacred Heart Primary School, Dundrum	P6/7	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	9	12
Spa Primary School	1CW	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	30
Spa Primary School	2LK	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	25
Spa Primary School	3JM	0	0	0	29	0	0	0	0	29
Spa Primary School	4AF	0	0	0	0	29	0	0	0	29
Spa Primary School	5JA	0	0	0	0	0	23	0	0	23
Spa Primary School	6SG	0	0	0	0	0	0	23	0	23
Spa Primary School	7RG	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	21
St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick	P1/2	0	7	15	0	0	0	0	0	22
St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick	P1C	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	0	28
St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick	P3/4	0	0	0	14	11	0	0	0	25
St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick	P3N	0	0	0	29	0	0	0	0	29
St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick	P4	0	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	30
St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick	P5	0	0	0	0	0	31	0	0	31
St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick	P6	0	0	0	0	0	0	28	0	28
St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick	P6/7	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	11	22
St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick	P7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	28	28
St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick	Primary	0	0	29	0	0	0	0	0	29
St Bronagh's Primary School	EM/TC	0	0	0	0	20	0	0	0	20
St Bronagh's Primary School	GEE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	25
St Bronagh's Primary School	GM	0	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	33
St Bronagh's Primary School	MJ	0	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	22
St Bronagh's Primary School	OG	0	0	0	0	0	29	0	0	29
St Bronagh's Primary School	POH	0	0	0	26	0	0	0	0	26
St Bronagh's Primary School	UD	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	24
St Colman's Primary School, Annaclone	AM	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	28
St Colman's Primary School, Annaclone	CB	0	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	28
St Colman's Primary School, Annaclone	EQ	0	0	0	0	0	20	0	0	20
St Colman's Primary School, Annaclone	KD	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	21
St Colman's Primary School, Annaclone	KON	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	25
St Colman's Primary School, Annaclone	MM	0	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	25
St Colman's Primary School, Annaclone	SF	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	30

School	Class	R	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
St Colman's Primary School, Saval	AG	0	0	0	0	0	0	23	0	23
St Colman's Primary School, Saval	DH	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	27
St Colman's Primary School, Saval	EMCL	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	0	25
St Colman's Primary School, Saval	MK	0	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	28
St Colman's Primary School, Saval	MMCG	0	0	0	0	29	0	0	0	29
St Colman's Primary School, Saval	NMCG	0	34	0	0	0	0	0	0	34
St Colman's Primary School, Saval	OK	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	0	31
St Colmans' Primary School, Kilkeel	CG	0	0	0	0	0	0	29	0	29
St Colmans' Primary School, Kilkeel	DOC	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	19
St Colmans' Primary School, Kilkeel	GMC	0	0	0	0	0	19	0	0	19
St Colmans' Primary School, Kilkeel	GOH	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	19
St Colmans' Primary School, Kilkeel	JW	0	8	9	0	0	0	0	0	17
St Colmans' Primary School, Kilkeel	LMC	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
St Colmans' Primary School, Kilkeel	MML	0	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	30
St Colmans' Primary School, Kilkeel	MMP	0	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	22
St Colmans' Primary School, Kilkeel	PC	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	22	30
St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick	CC	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	21
St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick	CM	0	0	0	0	0	19	0	0	19
St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick	CO	0	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	30
St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick	GV	0	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	28
St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick	JH	0	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	30
St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick	MB	0	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	17
St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick	SA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	25
St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick	XX	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	AB	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	0	24
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	BD	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	0	25
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	BR	0	0	0	0	32	0	0	0	32
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	CD	0	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	28
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	CR	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	DM	0	0	0	26	0	0	0	0	26
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	EL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	31	31
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	ET	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	0	27
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	FMcG	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	28
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	HJ	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	0	24
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	MJM	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	24
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	NK	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	32	32
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	OM	0	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	20
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	PG/BC	0	0	27	0	0	0	0	0	27
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	RC	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	RO	0	0	0	26	0	0	0	0	26
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	SD	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	28

School	Class	R	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	SF	0	0	0	0	32	0	0	0	32
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	TR/CH	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
St Francis' Primary School, Drumaroad	P1	0	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
St Francis' Primary School, Drumaroad	P2/P3	0	0	10	13	0	0	0	0	23
St Francis' Primary School, Drumaroad	P4	0	0	0	0	16	0	0	0	16
St Francis' Primary School, Drumaroad	P5	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	0	15
St Francis' Primary School, Drumaroad	P6/7	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	14	23
St Joseph's Primary School, Ballycruttle	HH	0	0	0	0	10	9	0	0	19
St Joseph's Primary School, Ballycruttle	LC	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	9	17
St Joseph's Primary School, Ballycruttle	MH	5	4	7	4	0	0	0	0	20
St Joseph's Primary School, Ballymartin	AMQ	0	0	0	16	6	0	0	0	22
St Joseph's Primary School, Ballymartin	CMCD	0	0	0	0	0	14	7	0	21
St Joseph's Primary School, Ballymartin	JK	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	9	17
St Joseph's Primary School, Ballymartin	KM	0	13	9	0	0	0	0	0	22
St Joseph's Primary School, Carnacaville	AB	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	28
St Joseph's Primary School, Carnacaville	CMCC	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	0	25
St Joseph's Primary School, Carnacaville	HK	0	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	25
St Joseph's Primary School, Carnacaville	LM	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
St Joseph's Primary School, Carnacaville	MD	0	0	0	34	0	0	0	0	34
St Joseph's Primary School, Carnacaville	RM	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
St Joseph's Primary School, Carnacaville	SK	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	21
St Joseph's Primary School, Carnacaville	XX	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	19
St Joseph's Primary School, Killough	1-2	0	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	12
St Joseph's Primary School, Killough	3-4	0	0	0	6	6	0	0	0	12
St Joseph's Primary School, Killough	5	0	0	0	0	0	14	0	0	14
St Joseph's Primary School, Killough	6-7	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	9	19
St Joseph's Primary School, Strangford	CMcD	0	0	0	0	0	7	4	3	14
St Joseph's Primary School, Strangford	LF	0	0	0	9	11	0	0	0	20
St Joseph's Primary School, Strangford	SK	0	8	7	0	0	0	0	0	15
St Joseph's Primary School, Tyrella	AB	0	12	9	0	0	0	0	0	21
St Joseph's Primary School, Tyrella	AM	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	9	19
St Joseph's Primary School, Tyrella	JMV	0	0	0	0	14	10	0	0	24
St Joseph's Primary School, Tyrella	SMM	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	11
St Macartan's Primary School, Downpatrick	Y1	0	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	27
St Macartan's Primary School, Downpatrick	Y2	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	0	31
St Macartan's Primary School, Downpatrick	Y3	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	0	30
St Macartan's Primary School, Downpatrick	Y4	0	0	0	0	33	0	0	0	33
St Macartan's Primary School, Downpatrick	Y5	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	21
St Macartan's Primary School, Downpatrick	Y6	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	24
St Macartan's Primary School, Downpatrick	Y7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	27
St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewellan	CB	0	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	23

School	Class	R	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewella	CMCC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	25
St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewella	CS	0	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewella	DL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	18
St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewella	HS	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	24
St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewella	JC	0	0	0	0	0	0	33	0	33
St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewella	JEN	0	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	24
St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewella	JM	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	25
St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewella	KG	0	0	0	0	0	23	0	0	23
St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewella	NR	0	0	0	0	0	25	1	0	26
St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewella	OC	0	0	0	0	22	0	0	0	22
St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewella	RG	0	0	23	0	0	0	0	0	23
St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewella	SMCA	0	0	0	22	0	0	0	0	22
St Malachy's Primary School, Kilclief	CON	0	0	0	0	0	7	9	11	27
St Malachy's Primary School, Kilclief	EB	0	10	11	0	0	0	0	0	21
St Malachy's Primary School, Kilclief	ED	0	0	0	12	9	6	0	0	27
St Malachy's Primary School, Kilcoo	AMCE	0	0	18	10	0	0	0	0	28
St Malachy's Primary School, Kilcoo	EMCE	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	16	28
St Malachy's Primary School, Kilcoo	FB	0	0	0	13	16	0	0	0	29
St Malachy's Primary School, Kilcoo	JG	0	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	19
St Malachy's Primary School, Kilcoo	MM	0	0	0	0	0	22	7	0	29
St Mary's Primary School, Ardglass	JON	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	12	20
St Mary's Primary School, Ardglass	LM	0	0	0	0	0	17	0	0	17
St Mary's Primary School, Ardglass	MM	0	11	12	0	0	0	0	0	23
St Mary's Primary School, Ardglass	TQ	0	0	0	12	14	0	0	0	26
St Mary's Primary School, Aghlisnafin	BMC	0	3	23	0	0	0	0	0	26
St Mary's Primary School, Aghlisnafin	CM	0	0	0	0	23	0	0	0	23
St Mary's Primary School, Aghlisnafin	LG	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	15
St Mary's Primary School, Aghlisnafin	MC	7	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
St Mary's Primary School, Aghlisnafin	OME	0	0	3	25	0	0	0	0	28
St Mary's Primary School, Aghlisnafin	PHI	0	0	0	0	0	22	0	0	22
St Mary's Primary School, Aghlisnafin	SM	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	21
St Mary's Primary School, Dechomet	BD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	14
St Mary's Primary School, Dechomet	FOC	0	0	0	0	0	11	15	0	26
St Mary's Primary School, Dechomet	KOH	2	8	10	0	0	0	0	0	20
St Mary's Primary School, Dechomet	MME	0	0	0	11	9	0	0	0	20
St Mary's Primary School, Glassdrumman	AD	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	8	15
St Mary's Primary School, Glassdrumman	CAW	0	0	0	0	9	6	0	0	15
St Mary's Primary School, Glassdrumman	LME	0	6	4	6	0	0	0	0	16
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	AC	0	0	0	0	0	30	0	0	30
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	AMA	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	25
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	CM	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	21

School	Class	R	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	CML	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	21
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	DK	0	0	0	0	23	0	0	0	23
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	DM	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	12	31
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	EMN	0	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	24
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	JH	0	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	26
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	KP	0	0	0	27	0	0	0	0	27
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	LR	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	MM	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	0	30
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	MMC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	26
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	PS	0	0	27	0	0	0	0	0	27
St Mary's Primary School, Rathfriland	JF	0	0	17	11	0	0	0	0	28
St Mary's Primary School, Rathfriland	LF	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
St Mary's Primary School, Rathfriland	MMcC	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	8	25
St Mary's Primary School, Rathfriland	ND	0	0	0	0	17	0	0	0	17
St Mary's Primary School, Rathfriland	PM	0	0	0	0	0	20	0	0	20
St Matthew's Primary School, Magheramayo	JF	0	0	0	11	10	0	0	0	21
St Matthew's Primary School, Magheramayo	MD	0	7	19	0	0	0	0	0	26
St Matthew's Primary School, Magheramayo	RC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	15
St Matthew's Primary School, Magheramayo	ZS	0	0	0	0	0	13	4	0	17
St Nicholas' Primary School, Ardglass	EW	0	0	18	8	0	0	0	0	26
St Nicholas' Primary School, Ardglass	KB	0	0	0	11	16	0	0	0	27
St Nicholas' Primary School, Ardglass	MK	0	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
St Nicholas' Primary School, Ardglass	MMG	0	0	0	0	0	17	7	0	24
St Nicholas' Primary School, Ardglass	PG	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	14	23
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballymaghery	CM	0	0	0	0	0	0	29	0	29
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballymaghery	KF	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	0	21
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballymaghery	LMcA	0	0	0	27	0	0	0	0	27
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballymaghery	LS	0	0	0	0	20	0	0	0	20
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballymaghery	MMCN	0	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballymaghery	NT	0	0	0	0	0	31	0	0	31
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballymaghery	OR	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	24
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballymaghery	PMCC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	32	32
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballymaghery	SF	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	5	31
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballymaghery	SOH	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	25
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballymaghery	SON	0	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	23
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballymaghery	UQ	0	0	0	28	0	0	0	0	28
St Patrick's Primary School, Castlewellan	GM	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	6
St Patrick's Primary School, Castlewellan	JH	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	10	22
St Patrick's Primary School, Castlewellan	MD	0	0	0	10	11	0	0	0	21
St Patrick's Primary School, Castlewellan	TR	4	6	10	0	0	0	0	0	20
St Patrick's Primary School, Drumgreenagh	EM	0	0	16	7	0	0	0	0	23

School	Class	R	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
St Patrick's Primary School, Drumgreenagh	PK	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	12	20
St Patrick's Primary School, Drumgreenagh	PM	0	0	0	0	17	12	0	0	29
St Patrick's Primary School, Drumgreenagh	SL	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
St Patrick's Primary School, Legamaddy	1SMC	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	14
St Patrick's Primary School, Legamaddy	2NA	0	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	18
St Patrick's Primary School, Legamaddy	3EN	0	0	0	18	0	0	0	0	18
St Patrick's Primary School, Legamaddy	4ED	0	0	0	0	26	0	0	0	26
St Patrick's Primary School, Legamaddy	5HW	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	0	25
St Patrick's Primary School, Legamaddy	6SM	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	25
St Patrick's Primary School, Legamaddy	7OR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	28	28
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	BB	0	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	24
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	BOH	0	21	0	0	0	0	0	0	21
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	CF	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	7	33
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	CW	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	CW1	0	0	0	0	23	0	0	0	23
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	KV	0	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	30
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	LMK	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	25
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	MP	0	0	0	0	0	26	0	0	26
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	NM	0	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	30
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	OMK	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	33	33
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	PM	0	0	0	0	0	0	33	0	33
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	SC	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	25
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	SK	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	0	24
St Patrick's Primary School, Saul	P1	0	27	0	0	0	0	0	0	27
St Patrick's Primary School, Saul	P2	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	24
St Patrick's Primary School, Saul	P3	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	0	25
St Patrick's Primary School, Saul	P4	0	0	0	0	31	0	0	0	31
St Patrick's Primary School, Saul	P5	0	0	0	0	0	30	0	0	30
St Patrick's Primary School, Saul	P6	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	25
St Patrick's Primary School, Saul	P7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	28	28
St Paul's Primary School, Cabra	JT	0	0	0	12	11	0	0	0	23
St Paul's Primary School, Cabra	PP	0	0	0	0	0	9	12	0	21
St Paul's Primary School, Cabra	RC	0	13	12	0	0	0	0	0	25
St Paul's Primary School, Cabra	VJD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	13
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	1NB	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	30
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	1SH	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	0	28
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	2AP	0	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	30
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	2GS	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	0	31
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	3BH	0	0	0	29	0	0	0	0	29
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	3XX	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	24
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	4FT	0	0	0	0	29	0	0	0	29

School	Class	R	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	4SC	0	0	0	0	29	0	0	0	29
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	5CT	0	0	0	0	0	29	0	0	29
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	5DS	0	0	0	0	0	29	0	0	29
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	6CMD	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	0	26
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	6MMI	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	0	25
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	7DQ	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	26
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	7PF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	25
The Holy Family Primary School	1PB	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
The Holy Family Primary School	2GS	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	0	24
The Holy Family Primary School	3 LG	0	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	31
The Holy Family Primary School	4 CD	0	0	0	0	25	0	0	0	25
The Holy Family Primary School	5GD	0	0	0	0	0	29	0	0	29
The Holy Family Primary School	6 SMK	0	0	0	0	0	0	29	0	29
The Holy Family Primary School	7 CM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	31	31

Source: NI school census

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the number of departmental and arm's-length body staff that exited under the Voluntary Exit Scheme, broken down by grade; (ii) how many of these posts were then suppressed; and (iii) (a) what proportion; and (b) how many posts were later (1) advertised; and (2) filled by internal promotion.

(AQW 5044/16-21)

Mr Weir: The number of staff on my Department's payroll who left under the 2015/16 NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme (VES) is 91, as detailed in the table below.

Grade (including analogous)	Number of exits
Grade 6 and above	6
Grade 7	8
Deputy Principal	17
Staff Officer	12
Executive Officer 1	13
Executive Officer 2	12
Administrative Officer	17
Administrative Assistant	6
Total	91

The Department is now taking steps to regularise its staff structure post-VES and this process will confirm the final suppressions of posts consistent with VES reductions.

The number of arm's-length body staff exiting under the 2015/16 VES is broken down by grade in the table below:

Grade (including analogous)	Number of exits
Senior Management ASEO grade and above (and equivalent)	21
Middle Management Assistant Principal Officer to Education Officer (and equivalent)	53
Supervisory Management Executive Officer to Senior Administrative Officer (and equivalent)	67
Clerical and Support Clerical Officer and Senior Clerical Officer (and equivalent)	86
Total	227

All 227 posts were suppressed, and none of the 227 posts were later advertised or filled by internal promotion.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many (a) bus drivers; (b) relief drivers; (c) private hire drivers were employed in each Education Authority depot location; (ii) payments made to (a) full time drivers; (b) relief drivers; and (c) private hire drivers in that time.

(AQW 5080/16-21)

Mr Weir: Since its formation on 1 April 2015, the Education Authority (EA) has operated as a single organisation and no longer reports on a regional basis. The number of bus drivers, relief drivers and private hire drivers employed by the EA in 2015/16 is as follows:

- Bus Drivers – 682
- Relief Drivers – 78
- Private Hire Drivers – 14

Approximately £14m in total, including pension and national insurance contributions, was paid to these drivers in 2015/16. Costs are not held separately.

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the percentage; (ii) and number of children that achieved at least 5 GCSEs at grade A*-C in schools throughout South Down in each year from 1996 to 2016, broken down by (a) gender; (b) community background; and (c) socio-economic background.

(AQW 5110/16-21)

Mr Weir: Information on the attainment of school leavers in 2015/16 will be available in May 2017. Figures for 1995/96 and 2002/03 are not available.

Tables 1 to 3 below detail the number and percentage of school leavers resident in South Down who achieved at least 5 GCSEs at A*-C from 1996/97 to 2014/15.

Table 1: Number and percentage of school leavers resident in South Down⁽¹⁾ achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications) by gender, 1996/97 – 2014/15⁽²⁾

Year	School leavers resident in South Down achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications)					
	Boys		Girls		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2014/15	605	75.5	652	85.9	1257	80.6
2013/14	566	73.2	609	82.7	1175	77.9
2012/13	582	75.1	636	84.8	1218	79.9
2011/12	543	72.9	627	86.4	1170	79.5
2010/11	565	71.4	643	84.8	1208	78.0
2009/10	477	65.9	638	83.9	1115	75.1
2008/09	480	64.8	578	81.2	1058	72.8
2007/08	503	63.0	610	79.1	1113	70.9
2006/07	474	56.6	591	75.9	1065	65.9
2005/06	520	59.0	623	74.0	1143	66.3
2004/05	461	54.4	571	75.0	1032	64.2
2003/04	473	55.9	631	73.4	1104	64.7
2002/03 ⁽³⁾						
2001/02	398	49.0	565	72.4	963	60.5
2000/01	424	53.1	529	73.4	953	62.7
1999/00	390	48.6	561	71.2	951	59.8
1998/99	421	49.3	563	67.7	984	58.4
1997/98	391	47.1	518	66.8	909	56.6
1996/97	395	46.1	480	62.6	875	53.9

Source: School Leavers survey

Notes:

- 1 Assembly Area of pupil residence is based on the residential postcode of each individual pupil.
- 2 Excludes special and independent schools.
- 3 Due to considerable difficulties with new software installed in schools, the School Leavers survey was cancelled in 2002/03.

Table 2: Number and percentage of school leavers resident in South Down⁽¹⁾ achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications) by religion, 1996/97 – 2014/15⁽²⁾

Year	School leavers resident in South Down achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications)							
	Protestant		Catholic		Other ⁽³⁾		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%		
2014/15	305	79.8	911	80.5	41	87.2	1257	80.6
2013/14	245	72.7	878	79.7	52	74.3	1175	77.9
2012/13	248	79.7	918	79.6	52	85.2	1218	79.9
2011/12	246	75.7	886	80.4	38	86.4	1170	79.5
2010/11	288	77.0	879	78.5	41	74.5	1208	78.0
2009/10	229	75.8	842	74.7	44	80.0	1115	75.1
2008/09	242	74.0	765	72.0	51	81.0	1058	72.8
2007/08	232	73.2	850	70.1	31	75.6	1113	70.9
2006/07	210	65.0	812	66.0	43	69.4	1065	65.9
2005/06	239	63.2	871	66.9	33	76.7	1143	66.3
2004/05	221	65.4	791	63.5	20	83.3	1032	64.2
2003/04	253	67.6	820	63.5	31	77.5	1104	64.7
2002/03 ⁽⁴⁾								
2001/02	223	64.8	722	59.1	18	69.2	963	60.5
2000/01	228	68.3	704	60.7	21	77.8	953	62.7
1999/00	228	63.3	710	58.4	13	81.3	951	59.8
1998/99	204	58.3	764	58.5	16	55.2	984	58.4
1997/98	221	63.5	673	54.4	15	71.4	909	56.6
1996/97	202	53.7	667	54.4	6	27.3	875	53.9

Source: School Leavers survey

Notes:

- 1 Assembly Area of pupil residence is based on the residential postcode of each individual pupil.
- 2 Excludes special and independent schools.
- 3 Other includes Other Christian, No religion and Non-Christian.
- 4 Due to considerable difficulties with new software installed in schools, the School Leavers survey was cancelled in 2002/03.

Table 3: Number and percentage of school leavers resident in South Down⁽¹⁾ achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications) by Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME), 1996/97 – 2014/15⁽²⁾

Year	School leavers resident in South Down achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications)					
	Non-FSME		FSME		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2014/15 ⁽³⁾	1046	85.5	211	62.6	1257	80.6
2013/14	1063	82.9	112	49.6	1175	77.9
2012/13	1072	83.4	146	61.1	1218	79.9
2011/12	1043	83.4	127	57.7	1170	79.5
2010/11	1086	82.3	122	53.3	1208	78.0
2009/10	1034	79.8	81	42.9	1115	75.1
2008/09	985	78.2	73	37.6	1058	72.8
2007/08	1052	74.8	61	37.4	1113	70.9
2006/07	989	71.0	76	33.9	1065	65.9
2005/06	1047	71.6	96	36.9	1143	66.3
2004/05	934	70.1	98	35.5	1032	64.2
2003/04	1015	71.7	89	30.7	1104	64.7
2002/03 ⁽⁴⁾						
2001/02	875	66.4	88	32.0	963	60.5
2000/01	854	67.6	99	38.5	953	62.7
1999/00	853	63.8	98	38.6	951	59.8
1998/99	890	64.5	94	30.6	984	58.4
1997/98	821	62.6	88	29.8	909	56.6
1996/97	783	60.3	92	28.3	875	53.9

Source: School Leavers survey

Notes:

- 1 Assembly Area of pupil residence is based on the residential postcode of each individual pupil.
- 2 Excludes special and independent schools.
- 3 The increase in the number of FSME pupils in 2014/15 coincides with an extension of the eligibility for free school meals under the Working Tax Credit free school meal criterion which was extended to post-primary pupils from September 2014.
- 4 Due to considerable difficulties with new software installed in schools, the School Leavers survey was cancelled in 2002/03.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of primary and post-primary teachers that have received a precautionary suspension; (ii) the length of time they have been suspended; and (ii) the amount paid during this suspension, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5115/16-21)

Mr Weir: The number of primary and post-primary teachers on precautionary suspension and the amount paid in each of the last three years is shown in the table below.

Financial Years	Primary and Post Primary Teachers	Estimated amount paid during suspension
2013/14	28	£769,000
2014/15	23	£759,000
2015/16	29	£679,000

Note:

- Some suspensions transcend more than one financial year.
- Figures are in financial years.
- The figures for each of these years represent suspensions varying in duration.
- Amount paid during suspension as provided by the employing authority.

The length of each suspension has not been provided, as to do so may assist in identifying an individual. This is in accordance with the confidentiality principle of the Statistics Authority's Code of Practice on Official Statistics.

Figures do not include Voluntary Grammar Schools and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools as the information is not available for the period requested.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) number of teachers in primary and post-primary schools suspended from work; and (ii) number of teachers (a) that were reinstated; (b) that resigned; and (c) that were dismissed, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5118/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education does not employ teachers, and as such is not directly involved in employment matters, including the precautionary suspension of teachers. Teachers are employed by the relevant Board of Governors (BoG) for each school setting. Decisions on precautionary suspension are therefore a matter for the BoG, in conjunction with the relevant employing authority.

Details of the (i) number of teachers in primary and post-primary schools suspended from work in the last five years; and (ii) number of teachers (a) that were reinstated; (b) that resigned; and (c) that were dismissed are shown in the tables below as provided by the Education Authority and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

(i) Number of teachers in primary and post-primary schools suspended from work in the last five years:

Financial Years	Primary Schools	Post-Primary Schools	Total
2011/12	14	8	22
2012/13	22	10	32
2013/14	14	14	28
2014/15	10	13	23
2015/16	17	12	29

(ii) Number of teachers: (a) that were reinstated; (b) that resigned; and (c) that were dismissed in the last five years:

Number of Teachers Reinstated	Number of Teachers who Resigned	Number of Teachers Dismissed
91	6	8

Note:

- Information is not available in relation to Voluntary Grammar Schools and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools.
- Some suspensions will transcend more than one financial year.
- Figures are in financial years.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education to detail how much has been spent on the maintenance of the school bus fleet in each of the last seven years.

(AQW 5134/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that the information requested will take some time to collate and is not therefore available within the timescale requested.

I will arrange for officials to write to you again when the information becomes available.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education to detail how many buses were out of service through breakdowns in each of the last seven years.

(AQW 5135/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that the information requested will take some time to collate and is not therefore available within the timescale requested.

I will arrange for officials to write to you again when the information becomes available.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education to detail the average mileage for the school bus fleet.

(AQW 5136/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that the information requested will take some time to collate and is not therefore available within the timescale requested.

I will arrange for officials to write to you again when the information becomes available.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the mileage; and (ii) the age of the school buses that have incurred the highest ten incidences of maintenance costs in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5137/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that the information requested will take some time to collate and is not therefore available within the timescale requested.

I will arrange for officials to write to you again when the information becomes available.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education (i) to outline his Department's policy on educational child psychologists; and (ii) to detail how many are employed in each Education Authority region.

(AQW 5147/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) There is no policy as such regarding the educational psychology service but the Education Authority (EA) has a statutory duty to maintain an educational psychology service in order to assist in identifying and assessing the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- (ii) The numbers of Educational Psychologists employed in each Office (region) of EA, as of 3rd October 2016, are:

Education Authority Office	Number Employed (full-time and part-time)	Full Time Equivalent Number employed
Belfast	33	25.1
North Eastern (Ballymena)	26	22.7
Southern (Armagh)	37	30.8
South Eastern (Dundonald)	38	34.7
Western (Omagh)	27	22.6

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education whether the cost of referring a child to an educational psychologist is met by the school's budget.

(AQW 5148/16-21)

Mr Weir: The cost of referring a child to an EA educational psychologist is not met by the school's budget.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children referred to an educational psychologist, broken down by (i) Education Authority region; and (ii) primary or post-primary sector, in each of the last five academic years.

(AQW 5149/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that they cannot provide this data with confidence given the recent changes with its Educational Management System upgrade.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education (i) to outline the criteria that schools have to follow before a referral is made to an education psychologist; and (ii) whether there is a set number of referrals a school can make.

(AQW 5150/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) Due to the wide variation in the nature and complexity of children's special educational needs, it is not possible to devise a single set of criteria applicable to all children on which to decide on educational psychology involvement. Statutory guidance is available to assist schools in considering the circumstances of each child. This includes the 'Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (1998 and Supplement 2005)'.

In addition advisory resources are available to assist schools in considering the circumstances of each child, such as:

- 'Provisional Criteria for Initiating Statutory Assessments of Special Educational Needs and for Making Statements of Special Educational Needs';
- 'Good Practice Guidelines for Schools to meet the Special Educational Needs of Pupils at the School-Based Stages of the Code of Practice';

- 'Resource File for Schools to Support Children with Special Educational Needs'.

EA educational psychologists provide advice and support to schools in forming decisions as to the children for whom they wish to utilise the allocation of educational psychology time available to the school within the current capacity of the educational psychology service. This is achieved through direct consultation with the principal of the school and/or the school's special needs co-ordinator.

- (ii) Educational psychology is a statutory service. Priority is given within the service to providing the psychological advice required for statutory assessments of children's special educational needs (i.e. Stage 4 of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs). The educational psychology service also provides advice for non-statutory assessments at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice. Whilst there are no limits imposed on the number of children that may be referred to an educational psychologist for assessment at Stage 3, the Education Authority (EA) operates a time allocation model for Educational Psychology Services where each school receives an allocation of educational psychologists' time and then, in partnership with the EA, the school prioritises the children for assessment.

Working closely with their named Educational Psychologist, schools prioritise their pupils' needs based on the principles of consultation, equity of access and flexibility. If information is presented to the Educational Psychologist during consultation which indicates that a pupil has exceptional circumstances, such referrals will continue to receive priority.

The EA stresses that it applies the time allocation system in as flexible a manner as possible so that, whenever possible, if a child is in relatively urgent need of an assessment, the child will get an assessment even if the time allocated to the school has already been used up.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail the process and key considerations which his Department will undertake when assessing an Irish Medium Nursery's / Naíscóil's application for statutory recognition.

(AQW 5177/16-21)

Mr Weir: A Development Proposal (DP) is required to give effect to any significant change in education provision including the establishment of a statutory nursery school or unit. Examples of the Department's consideration of recent Irish-medium DPs are published on the DE website. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/development-proposal-decisions-2016>.

Guidance on the publication of a DP can be found at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/2014-21-publication-of-a-development-proposal.pdf>.

Every DP is considered on its individual merits. DPs relating to Irish-medium pre-school education provision are considered in the context of a range of factors, including recommendation 2 of the Review of Irish Medium Education (2009); the duty under Article 89 of the Education (NI) Order 1998; and the duty under Article 44 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986.

Consideration is given to, the:

- Case for Change submitted through the Education Authority;
- Consultation responses received as part of the DP process;
- Advice provided by the Education Authority and specifically, the local Pre-School Education Advisory Group (PEAG);
- NISRA statistics on live births in local areas and population projections;
- Sustainability assessment of the host school;
- Quality of education in the current voluntary provision;
- Existing pre-school provision in the area, including voluntary/ private pre-school playgroups, which offer funded places under the Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP);
- Relevant advice from the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), including ETI inspection reports;
- Local patterns of demand for pre-school provision (both Irish-medium and English-medium);
- Temporary Flexibility requests from pre-school settings in the local area;
- Area Plan; and
- Financial implications.

This list is not exhaustive. In addition, my Department's assessment of a DP takes account of all relevant Departmental policies and statutory duties. I make my decision on proposals taking account of all pertinent information.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many educational psychologists exist in his Department; and (ii) how many vacancies exist.

(AQW 5182/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) Number of Educational Psychologists employed by the Education Authority (EA) as of 3 October 2016:

Number Employed (full-time and part-time)	Full Time Equivalent Number Employed
161	136

- (ii) Number of vacancies as of 3 October 2016:

Education Authority Office	Number of Posts Vacant (full-time and part-time)	Full Time Equivalent Number of posts vacant
Belfast	2	1.7
North Eastern (Ballymena)	4.5	3
Southern (Armagh)	3	1.6
South Eastern (Dundonald)	0	0
Western (Omagh)	2	2

Note: The above numbers do not include long-term sick leave or maternity leave.

The EA has had resignations in recent months primarily from educational psychologists who have retired as well as those who have resigned from the service for personal reasons. The EA is commencing a further recruitment process in relation to these vacancies.

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister of Education (i) for an update on the planned capital works at Coleraine College; and (ii) whether there is a new build at the college's current site or a site nearby.

(AQW 5273/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) There are currently no planned capital works at Coleraine College.

The Education Authority (EA) currently holds the following requests for capital minor works at the School: General DDA accessibility improvements; Refurbishment of toilets; Site security improvements; Traffic management improvements. These will continue to be considered for inclusion in a programme of minor works as soon as the priorities and funding permit.

- (ii) There are no plans for a new school build for Coleraine College at this time. Given the substantial size of the current Major Capital Investment Programme, the Department is not planning for a further capital announcement, at present.

Should a further call for Major Capital projects be considered at some point in the future, it will be for the school's Managing Authority, in this case the Education Authority, to determine if the school is considered a strategic priority for submission at that time.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education detail the average age of the school bus fleet, broken down over the last seven years. **(AQW 5287/16-21)**

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that the information requested will take some time to collate and is not therefore available within the timescale requested.

I will arrange for officials to write to you again when the information becomes available.

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education to detail how much was allocated for the purchase of new school buses in each of the last seven years.

(AQW 5288/16-21)

Mr Weir: The amounts allocated to purchase new school buses in the last seven years were as follows:

	Amount (£)
2009/10	3.7m
2010/11	1.7m
2011/12	0.9m
2012/13	2.0m

	Amount (£)
2013/14	12.0m
2014/15	3.3m
2015/16	3.9m
Total	27.5m

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education to detail how many school buses were purchased in each of the last seven years.
(AQW 5289/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that the information requested will take some time to collate and is not therefore available within the timescale requested.

I will arrange for officials to write to you again when the information becomes available.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Education to detail which secondary schools his Department has approved class sizes in excess of twenty for the 2016-17 academic year in (i) Science; (ii) Technology and Design; (iii) Home Economics; (iv) Art and Design; (v) Physical Education; and (vi) Music.

(AQW 5290/16-21)

Mr Weir: I refer the member to my answer to AQW 4552/16-21 which he previously tabled and was published in the official report on 21 October 2016.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Education to outline how his Department monitors whether risk assessments are carried out before approving increased class sizes in practical subjects.

(AQW 5291/16-21)

Mr Weir: I refer the member to my answer to AQW 4551/16-21 which he previously tabled and was published in the official report on 21 October 2016.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of surplus school places.

(AQW 5294/16-21)

Mr Weir: At the time of the school census in October 2015 there were 66,556 available school places in Northern Ireland. This represents the number of places in schools available for children to apply for through the competitive admissions process.

Children with a statement of special educational needs (of which there were 11,444), children admitted following a successful appeal against the application of a school's admissions criteria, and children admitted by direction of the Exceptional Circumstances Body, are admitted outside the competitive admissions process to ensure they can attend the school identified as most appropriate for their needs, or that they were incorrectly turned away from.

To do otherwise would prevent many children attending the school most appropriate to their needs.

As a result, these children are excluded from the calculation of available places, as their attendance at a school is not considered when deciding whether that school has places available within its enrolment number.

Children attending preparatory schools (for which the Department does not set approved numbers) are also excluded whilst those enrolled above a school's enrolment number, through the approval of a temporary variation, are set to zero in the calculation, as to include them would mask available places in other schools.

In 2015/16 there were 361,037 approved places in Northern Ireland schools. There were 310,022 pupils enrolled in schools in total, including those admitted outside the competitive admissions process. Comparing these figures shows that there was 14.1% surplus capacity across the system as a whole, 8.3% across post-primary schools and 18.4% across primary schools.

The Sustainable Schools Policy envisages surplus capacity in the schools' estate being no more than 10% of the total capacity distributed across the system.

The Education Authority's draft Area Plan, which is currently out for public consultation, has identified one of the key issues to be addressed is reducing the number of available places.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education whether his Department (i) has undertaken a review of approved enrolments; and (ii) quantified how much surplus places cost.

(AQW 5295/16-21)

Mr Weir: In September my Department consulted with all grant aided primary and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland on their proposed admissions and enrolment numbers for September 2017. The views of schools are being considered to inform the setting of final, approved numbers for next year.

In response to recommendations in the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) and Public Accounts Committee (PAC) reports on Sustainability of Schools, the Department has recently written to all primary schools seeking views on how the accommodation provision correlates with both the school's approved and actual enrolments. This is a discrete exercise to address the NIAO and PAC recommendations and it will not be used to adjust the approved enrolment of any school as the statutory Development Proposal process is required for any significant change to an approved enrolment.

In terms of calculating the cost of surplus places, under the extant Common Funding Scheme grant aided schools do not receive funding for 'available' places or spare capacity. They are funded based on actual pupil numbers and the characteristics of those pupils. In addition, certain fixed costs will always be inescapable irrespective of school size and the number of surplus places a school may have and budgetary cover is required to reflect such costs.

I consider that the most effective driver for change will be through effective Area Planning and that the issue of surplus capacity will be addressed through this process.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Education to detail how many children with autism are not attending school due to lack of support services for children waiting to be statemented.

(AQW 5306/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA), which is responsible for identifying, assessing and, in appropriate cases, making provision for children with SEN, is not able to provide the information requested since data on pupil non-attendance is not collated according to the diagnostic category of a pupil. The reasons behind any child's non-attendance at school can be complex and varied, and this is no different for children with autism.

The EA has a range of services that support children who are experiencing difficulties in attending school and these supports are not dependant on a statement. Support packages are based on the assessed needs of the child, their views, the views of their parents and consultation with the school where they are enrolled. In cases where a child has autism and is finding attendance at school to be stressful, the EA's Autism Advisory Service, can help the school identify and address any difficulties that may be inhibiting attendance and advise on supporting strategies that should be considered for inclusion in the child's Individual Education Plan.

The Autism Advisory Service will also advise the school on reasonable and supportive adjustments that may be made to the child's learning and social environment. Where appropriate, specialist services also provide direct support to the child or young person to help them develop skills that will enable them to better manage the school's social and learning environment.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Education how many schools are currently on the formal intervention process.

(AQW 5324/16-21)

Mr Weir: As at 17 October 2016 the following schools, for which inspection reports have been published, are receiving support to address areas for improvement:

School

- | | |
|--|--|
| ■ Alexander Dickson Primary School, Ballygowan | ■ Rathore School, Newry |
| ■ Ballymacward Primary School, Lisburn | ■ St Brigid's Primary School, Altamuskin |
| ■ Ballytober Primary School, Bushmills | ■ St John the Baptist Primary School, Belfast |
| ■ Crossroads Primary School, Kilrea | ■ St Joseph's Primary School, Bessbrook |
| ■ Culmore Primary School, Londonderry | ■ St Joseph's Primary School, Holland Drive, Belfast |
| ■ Fivemiletown College | ■ St Joseph's Primary School, Lisburn |
| ■ Fleming Fulton Special School | ■ St Malachy's Primary School, Belfast |
| ■ Holy Cross Primary School, Attical | ■ St Mary's Primary School, Glasdrumman |
| ■ Killowen Primary School, Rostrevor | ■ St Mary's Primary School, Killyleagh |
| ■ Laurelhill Community College, Lisburn | ■ St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Strathfoyle |
| ■ Movilla High School, Newtownards | ■ St Tierney's Primary School, Roslea |
| ■ Park School and Educational Resource Centre, Belfast | ■ Tempo Primary School |
| ■ School | ■ Upper Ballyboley Primary School, Ballyclare |
| | ■ Wellington College, Belfast |

A list of schools receiving support during the current school year is published on the Department of Education website and may be accessed via the following link: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/schools-formal-intervention-process>

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Education to outline the reasons a school would be placed on the formal intervention process.

(AQW 5325/16-21)

Mr Weir: A school is eligible to receive tailored support through the Formal Intervention Process when an inspection by the Education and Training Inspectorate finds that the quality of education in the school meets any of the following criteria:

- (i) Following its first inspection a school needs to address urgently significant areas for improvement;
- (ii) A school reported as having 'important areas for improvement' at its first inspection is subsequently found to 'need to address urgently significant areas for improvement' following its first follow-up inspection; or
- (iii) A school reported as having 'important areas for improvement' at its first inspection remains at this performance level at its first and second follow-up inspection, i.e. the school has remained at this performance level for three consecutive inspections.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Education to outline the procedures that follow the placement of a school on the formal intervention process, including appeal procedures.

(AQW 5326/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) passes a copy of each school's inspection report to the Standards and Improvement Team (SIT). When a school, following its first inspection by the ETI, has been assessed as needing to address urgently significant areas for improvement SIT writes to the Education Authority (EA) (and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools in the case of Catholic Maintained schools), copied to the school, requesting the EA (and the CCMS where appropriate) to consult with the school to determine a management response to the main findings in the inspection report, together with an indication of how the school intends to address the areas for improvement. This management response should be submitted to the Department via the EA (or CCMS where appropriate) within 30 working days of the date of the Department's letter.

The EA (in liaison with the CCMS where appropriate) works with the school to prepare and implement an agreed post-inspection action plan detailing the actions that will be taken to address the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. A finalised action plan should be submitted by the school to the Department within 60 working days of the Department's letter. The action plan is forwarded to the ETI (District Inspector) for quality assurance and the Department writes to the school on the suitability or otherwise of the action plan; this correspondence will be copied to the EA and, where appropriate, the CCMS.

The school's progress in implementing the actions to address the areas for improvement is evaluated by ETI through the follow up inspection process.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education how many appeals have been made following decisions by the Education Authority on a statement.

(AQW 5328/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) is an independent body which considers, among other things, parental appeals against the decisions of the Education Authority (EA) about a child's special educational needs (SEN), where the parents of the child cannot reach agreement with the EA.

If the EA decides not to carry out a formal assessment of a child's educational needs at the request of a parent or a school, or if, after making an assessment, the EA proposes not to make a statement, the child's parent may appeal to SENDIST. A parent may also make an appeal to SENDIST against the contents of a statement.

SENDIST has advised that the number of appeals made to it during the period April 2015 to March 2016 was 145.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education how many educational psychologists are employed by the Education Authority to facilitate the statementing process for special educational needs assessments.

(AQW 5329/16-21)

Mr Weir: Whilst priority is given within the Educational Psychology service to providing the psychological advice required for statutory assessments of children's special educational needs (i.e. the statementing process), the service also provides advice for non-statutory assessments at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice. As such, there is not a separate cohort of Educational Psychologists that deals exclusively with statutory assessments.

The Education Authority has advised that the number of Educational Psychologists employed by it for the provision of advice for both statutory and non-statutory assessments, as of 3 October 2016, is:

Number Employed (full-time and part-time)	Full Time Equivalent Number Employed
161	136

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to outline the interim measures in place for schools with children waiting for a statement of special needs.

(AQW 5330/16-21)

Mr Weir: Where a child is undergoing statutory assessment at Stage 4 of the Code of Practice (CoP) on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN), the support received will vary according to the individual needs and circumstances of the child.

As the child is at Stage 4 of the CoP, any additional support perceived to be required by the pupil should be put in place and funded by the school until the statutory assessment is completed and, if a statement is made, the resources to be funded by the Education Authority (EA) are in place.

In exceptional cases and where a school has no available resources, and/or the statutory process is delayed, the EA may, at its discretion, put additional resources in place for a pupil at Stage 4 prior to the completion of the statutory assessment and a statement being made.

In some areas of SEN the EA provides support for pupils at Stage 3 of the CoP. The services/resources will continue to support the child throughout the statutory assessment process and until the resources that the statement may bring are in place.

The Health and Social Care Trust multi-disciplinary teams that support pupils in school may also offer short term support during the statutory assessment process. Schools can access these services directly. Many schools also access or fund resources available in the local community.

Schools can also access training from EA services and apply advice from the following documents until the resources follow from any statement issued:

- Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (1998 and Supplement 2005);
- Good Practice Guidelines for Schools to meet the Special Educational Needs of Pupils at the School-Based Stages of the Code of Practice;
- DE Resource File for Schools to Support Children with Special Educational Needs; and
- Supporting pupils with medication needs in mainstream schools.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to outline the formal support processes available for parents and pupils going through the special educational needs statementing process.

(AQW 5331/16-21)

Mr Weir: Support for parents of a child in school undergoing statutory assessment is likely to be operating at several levels.

In the first instance, the school principal and/or Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) must have permission to make an initial referral to the educational psychologist. In those cases that need to progress to statutory assessment, the school will then discuss and explain the process to the parent/s.

The educational psychologist is likely to have met with the parent to discuss the statutory advice, including an explanation of any further assessments that have been undertaken. The psychologist will answer any questions on the process of statutory assessment.

Once statutory assessment is underway, every child has a named officer from the Education Authority's (EA) special education teams that the parent can contact. In addition, the documentation that goes out to parents in regard to their child's statutory assessment includes information on the statutory assessment process and details of a parent website where frequently asked questions in regard to the statutory assessment process can be found.

The documentation also includes information on the Dispute Avoidance and Resolution Service (DARS) should the parent be unhappy at any stage of the process and wish to speak to an independent party or ask the DARS to mediate on their behalf.

Each local office of the EA has a SEN Advice and Information Officer who can be contacted by parents and who will either answer their queries, put them in touch with the appropriate person to answer their query or forward any information requested.

A child undergoing statutory assessment is at Stage 4 of the Code of Practice and the support received while undergoing statutory assessment will vary according to the individual needs of the child and the type of SEN.

As the child is at Stage 4, any additional support required by the pupil should be put in place by the school until the statutory assessment is completed. This support should remain in place until the EA decides to issue a statement of SEN and the resources outlined in part 3 (provision) in the statement and funded by the EA are in place.

In exceptional cases and where the school has no available resources, the EA may at its discretion put resources in place for a pupil at Stage 4 prior to the statement being made.

In some areas of SEN, the EA provides support for pupils at Stage 3 of the Code of Practice. The services/resources will continue to support the child throughout the statutory assessment process and until the resources that the statement may bring are in place.

The Health and Social Care Trust's multi-disciplinary teams that support pupils in school may also offer short term support during the statutory assessment process. Schools can access these services directly. Schools can also access Community resources for the pupil through, e.g. Family Support Hubs.

Schools can also access training from EA services and apply advice from the following documents until the resources follow from any statement issued:

- Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (1998 and Supplement 2005);
- Good Practice Guidelines for Schools to meet the Special Educational Needs of Pupils at the School-Based Stages of the Code of Practice;
- DE Resource File for Schools to Support Children with Special Educational Needs; and
- Supporting pupils with medication needs in mainstream schools.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Education to outline all formal communications between The Executive Office and the Department of Education on the Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998.

(AQW 5333/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department has had no formal communication with the Executive Office on this issue.

The Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998 FETO is the legislative responsibility of The Executive Office (TEO) and therefore any amendments to the legislation would be a matter for them to address.

I have however stated my commitment to deliver equality for all school sectors; this includes consideration of an end to the Article 71 Exception (the Exception) of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (FETO).

My officials are currently working with TEO to consider the matter further.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education whether his Department plans to bring forward amending legislation to remove Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Equal Treatment Order 1998.

(AQW 5338/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998 FETO is the legislative responsibility of The Executive Office (TEO) and therefore any amendments to the legislation would be a matter for them to address.

I have however stated my commitment to deliver equality for all school sectors; this includes consideration of an end to the Article 71 Exception (the Exception) of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (FETO).

My officials are currently working with TEO to consider the matter further.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister of Education what actions his Department is taking to ensure the removal of Ballyclare Youth Club does not adversely affect the provision of youth services in the area.

(AQW 5339/16-21)

Mr Weir: Funding to support the provision of regional and local youth organisations is an operational matter for the Education Authority (EA).

Youth provision in Ballyclare is currently provided based on assessed need and this is highlighted in the Local Area plan for the Newtownabbey/Carrick/Larne Area. In meeting the needs of this area plan generic youth services are provided through 24 part-time voluntary groups.

The EA Youth Service Mobile Youth Unit is also in operation two nights per week in Ballyclare situated in the Sixmile Leisure Centre Car Park. The purpose of this provision is to make contact with young people who are not engaged in generic youth services and to complete a three month consultation on the needs of young people within the Ballyclare area.

Following the consultation, the EA will again review youth provision in the Ballyclare area, based on assessed need and the results from the consultation with young people, to ensure resources are deployed accordingly.

The EA Youth Service is also represented on the Antrim and Newtownabbey Policing and Community Safety Partnership which will help to provide additional outreach provision and training opportunities to young people in Ballyclare.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 4172/16-21, to outline (i) why capital viability has not been achieved; and (ii) the discussions he has had with the Education Authority in relation to the school.

(AQW 5356/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department's "Schools for the Future – A Policy for Sustainable Schools" (SSP) requires new post-primary schools to achieve minimum intakes of 50 pupils in the first year, 80 in the second year and 100 each year thereafter in anticipation that a minimum enrolment of 500 in Years 8-12 will be achieved. The 2015/16 enrolment at Blackwater Integrated College was 213, which falls below the SSP minimum threshold. Therefore the school has not yet met the criteria to qualify for capital funding.

The school needs to be considered within the context of Area Planning to ensure sustainable provision of post-primary integrated education in this area.

Departmental officials have had discussions with the Education Authority in relation to urgent works at the school.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Education to outline the average number of pupils per classroom with a statement of special educational needs.

(AQW 5369/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department only holds data at a class level for primary schools only. In 2015/16, the mean number of pupils with a statement per class is as follows:

	Mean number of stated pupils in class	Mean number of pupils per class
Mainstream classes	0.6	24.5
Learning support centres	8.0	8.3
All classes including learning support centres	0.8	24.2

Source: NI school census

Notes:

1 Figures include pupils in reception and year 1-7 classes only

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 2060/16-21, how much of the €35.3m PEACE IV funding has been spent to date on Shared Education.

(AQW 5408/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) has not yet completed its application process to appoint delivery agents for the Peace IV Shared Education thematic area and consequently there has been no spend to date. Details of the SEUPB's application call timetable are available under the Peace IV section of their website (www.seupb.eu).

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education whether there are policies in place to support teachers and schools that have received personal attacks through social media.

(AQW 5410/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education is not the employer of teachers. The responsibility for the health, safety and wellbeing of teachers rests with their employers, their Board of Governors, in conjunction with the employing authority where relevant.

Teachers' Health and Wellbeing is a matter of the utmost importance. The teachers' health and safety working group of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC), meets regularly to discuss ongoing issues, including Social Media concerns, and the way forward.

Guidance on any abusive behaviour against teachers can be found in Circular TNC 2011/2.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of Education Authority staff that receive a salary of (i) over £150,000 per annum; (ii) £125,000 to £150,000 per annum; (iii) £100,000 to £125,000 per annum; and (iv) £75,000 to £100,000 per annum.

(AQW 5411/16-21)

Mr Weir: The information requested is provided in the table below:

Salary Band	£75,000 to £100,000	£100,001 to £125,000	£125,001 to £150,000	More than £150,001
No. of employees	10	*	0	0

* denotes figure fewer than 5 suppressed to avoid potential identification of individuals.

Mr Logan asked the Minister of Education whether teachers and classroom assistants are trained on the signs of mental health problems in children.

(AQW 5437/16-21)

Mr Weir: Consideration of pupil emotional health and wellbeing is included within initial teacher training.

Teachers and classroom assistants also receive training and support throughout their career on health and wellbeing matters from the Education Authority. Examples of the centre and school based training include:

- 'Promoting Mental Health in Schools: Developing a Whole-School Policy' – a one day course that explores the prevalence and management of mental health issues in schools and examines the role that schools can play in the promotion of mental health.
- 'Promoting Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing in Children and Young People' – a two day course which incorporates strengthening strategies to support socially and emotionally challenged pupils.

Further, my Department provides information and guidance to schools, through the 'iMatter' programme, to support school staff in identifying the signs of mental health problems in pupils.

In practice, teachers and classroom assistants who identify issues of concern in pupils refer the issue to the Designated Teacher for Child Protection for further action, which may include accessing support from the Education Authority or referral to social services, as appropriate.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of pupils per class; and (ii) the number of hours per class, for each special school nursery in 2016-17.

(AQW 5448/16-21)

Mr Weir: This information is not currently available. The Department collects this data via the Annual School Census. The collection of data for the school census started this month and will not be finalised until early March.

The most recent information for the 2015/16 academic year was included as part of AQW 4231/16-21.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to outline the criteria used to determine whether a school requires capital investment.

(AQW 5496/16-21)

Mr Weir: The criteria used to determine whether a school requires capital investment will depend on the Ministerial priorities and budget availability at any given time.

Before a project can be considered for capital investment, it must first be prioritised by the school's Managing Authority and submitted to the Department, in response to a call for projects.

The Department's 'Protocol for the Selection of Major Works Projects to Proceed in Planning' is then applied to all projects submitted. The Protocol includes a 'gateway' check to exclude any projects where uncertainties exist around sustainability, area planning and school size.

Those projects that are successful in the 'gateway' check are scored under the Department's Protocol, and ranked. Selection is then subject to the capital budget availability.

The Protocol is available on the Department's website at the following link <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/protocol-selection-major-works-projects>

The Department does not hold 'waiting lists' of capital projects which were previously unsuccessful in securing funding and there are no plans for a further capital announcement at present given the substantial size of the current Major Capital Investment Programme.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education when his Department will release funding for transport services for (i) new Education Authority buses; or (ii) the upgrade of the current fleet of buses.

(AQW 5567/16-21)

Mr Weir: The amalgamation of five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) to one regional organisation means the Education Authority (EA) must consider their entire fleet across the five former ELBs when determining their need for additional school vehicles to ensure the efficient and effective use of resources. Once the EA has established its requirements, a business case will be developed and bid placed with the Department.

In relation to the Department of Education's capital budget for 2017/18 onwards, discussions are currently ongoing with the Department of Finance to assess the requirements for my Department. Capital funding requirements for Home to School Transport will form part of this discussion.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to outline why there is a difference between figures quoted in the answer to AQW 4773/16-21 and figures quoted in the Draft Strategic Area Plan (section 2.3) relating to the number of primary schools currently in budget deficit.

(AQW 5626/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that figures provided in its Draft Strategic Area Plan refer to schools currently carrying a deficit in excess of 5% of their budget share or £75,000 (whichever is the lesser), i.e. outside the normal approval limits.

This information will be amended in the Education Authority's Draft Strategic Area Plan to reflect all schools in deficit.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Education whether (i) he will consult urgently with the Education Authority regarding the removal of the school crossing patrol officer from outside St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge in 2006; and (ii) he will press for an reassessment and reinstatement at this location.

(AQW 5650/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised that when the School Crossing Patrol officer at St Mary's Primary School retired from post in June 2005, the officer was not replaced as pedestrian controlled traffic lights had been introduced at this junction.

I also understand that while St Mary's has been temporarily relocated to premises adjacent to St Patrick's College to facilitate a new build on its existing site, a School Crossing Patrol officer currently operates at the entrance to the St Mary's temporary site.

When the new St. Mary's school re-opens the new site should be surveyed to ascertain if there is a need for a School Crossing Patrol officer.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) why the Education Authority has only published the draft School Outturn Statements for the Financial Year 2014-15 in the Southern region; and (ii) why it has not the finalised School Outturn Statements.

(AQW 5860/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority has advised me that due to the need to prioritise the delivery of operational demands, there has been a delay in finalising the 2014-15 outturn statements for the Southern Education and Library Board. Work is now progressing to finalise the Southern Education and Library Board's (SELB) 2014-15 statements.

Department for the Economy

Mrs Long asked the Minister for the Economy to outline (i) why self-employed parents, who have adopted a child, cannot receive statutory adoption pay; and (ii) what consideration has been made in allowing access to this pay.

(AQW 1376/16-21)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): Current UK wide arrangements do not extend the right to receive statutory adoption pay to self-employed parents, and my predecessors have historically opted to continue to maintain policies consistent with this position.

I have asked officials to review options in this policy area to enable me to determine whether there is a persuasive case for change.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the introduction of a post graduate loan scheme for local students.

(AQW 1904/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The preparatory work to introduce loans for Northern Ireland students starting Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma, taught and research Masters courses from September 2017 is progressing well. The loans will be up to £5,500 towards tuition fees for the entire course and students will be able to study on a full-time or part-time basis.

The necessary legislation will be brought to the Assembly Committee this autumn. The fine detail is currently being finalised with the Student Loans Company before the necessary IT systems are built so that students can start to apply for loans well in advance of their courses starting.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for the Economy, pursuant to AQW 1011/16-21, whether he will commit to reviewing support for adopters who are self employed with a view to bringing their rights in line with those of self employed parents.

(AQW 2131/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Statutory adoption pay is not currently available to self employed adopters anywhere in the UK.

I have asked officials to review options in this policy area to enable me to determine whether there is a persuasive case for change.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy whether SONI has the independent management structures necessary to perfect change promised in the SEM paper (SEM-16-041) of 29 July 2016; and how is this anticipated to change.

(AQW 2374/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: This will be a matter that the Utility Regulator will consider when working with the Systems Operator for Northern Ireland to implement changes.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for the Economy what action he is taking to promote Strabane as a location for potential inward investors.

(AQW 2435/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI is an active partner with Derry and Strabane District Council helping develop the local investment proposition and Community Plan to support attracting investment to the area. Invest NI continues to compete globally to attract inward investment to Northern Ireland as a whole. Where a potential investor indicates particular needs for a project, Invest NI will suggest possible suitable locations to best meet those needs. The decision as to where to locate however, ultimately remains with the investor.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for the Economy whether consideration has been given to the opening of a Small Business Research Initiative competition for the creation of an app which would map parade routes.

(AQW 2457/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The thematic area for Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) competitions is a matter for those Departments which choose to run competitions. The £1.1m SBRI Challenge Fund for 2016/17 sought SBRI proposals from all Departments. There were no proposals for the creation of an app which would map parade routes.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the funding awarded to higher education from the European Union in each of the last three years; and how this has benefited the local economy in financial terms.

(AQW 2469/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Northern Ireland higher education sector receives funding from the European Union through a variety of channels and programmes. My Department does not hold collective information on all sources of European funding awarded to the institutions.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for the Economy how much funding was spent on tourism in Fermanagh in each of the last five years, broken down by project.

(AQW 2472/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Tourism NI holds this information by Local Authority Area.

Over the last 5 years, Tourism NI has invested £978,475 in capital projects in the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area. This has been provided through financial assistance under the Tourism Development Scheme (TDS):

Year:	Project:	Funding:
2011/12	-	-
2012/13	Blessingbourne Mountain Bike Trail Centre Phase II	£118,857
2012/13	Garvaghey GAA Interpretative Project	£120,448
2012/13	Aughakillymaude Strawcraft Guild Centre	£ 40,670
2013/14	Heritage Gateway to Fermanagh	£698,500
2014/15	-	-
2015/16	-	-
	Total:	£978,475

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for the Economy to detail (i) how much funding has the Armagh City and District Council area received from Invest NI; and (ii) the jobs that have been created.

(AQW 2505/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The information that you requested can be found on Invest NI's website on the page entitled 'Our Performance'.

<http://www.investni.com/about-us/what-we-do/our-performance.html>

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the measures that he or his predecessor has taken to develop manufacturing in (i) Northern Ireland; (ii) South Down; and (iii) Downpatrick.

(AQW 2523/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest Northern Ireland offers a wide range of assistance to manufacturing companies with support for investment and job creation as well as a suite of programmes addressing all key aspects of business development and competitiveness. Over the last five years, between 2011/12 and 2015/16, Invest NI has made over 10,600 offers of assistance to manufacturing companies in Northern Ireland, involving financial support of over £274million. This has resulted in investment commitments of over £1.85 billion and the promotion of over 13,100 new jobs.

This included 618 offers of assistance in the South Down constituency, involving financial support of £9.42million, resulting in total investment commitments of £77.48million and the promotion of 606 jobs, including companies in the Downpatrick area such as Lynn's Country Foods, Lignum Interiors, Down Sauce Company and George Lowden Guitars.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy to outline why Ministerial oversight of the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme did not insist on a cap on the scheme, as in Great Britain.

(AQW 2527/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: There is no cap on the scheme in Great Britain.

In November 2015, my Department introduced a cap and a tiered tariff for the non-renewable RHI scheme. There is also a cap on the domestic scheme, introduced in 2014.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for the Economy to detail (i) the companies that receive funding from his Department to help provide broadband solutions in rural areas; and (ii) the amount each company has received in the last five years.

(AQW 2544/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: In the last 5 years my Department has channelled funding of £20,970,383 to a number of companies across Northern Ireland, to provide broadband solutions. Whilst I can confirm that the projects undertaken by DfE are focused primarily on rural areas, it is not possible to disaggregate expenditure on a rural/urban basis. The following table sets out expenditure by company and year:

Company	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/2016	2016/2017	Total
Onwave (Remote Broadband Services)	£1					£1
BT (Next Generation Broadband Project)	£3,571,365					£3,571,365
North West Electronics (NI Broadband fund)	£5,893			£35,542		£41,435
NET1 (NI Broadband fund)			£106,174			£106,174
H2o (NI Broadband fund)		£7,540				£7,540
*BT (NI Broadband Improvement Project)			£4,955,652	£4,917,789	£4,260	£9,877,701
BT (Superfast Rollout Project)				£5,000,000	£2,366,167	£7,366,167

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for the Economy to detail (i) the costs involved in the Gobbins Project, including the running costs and costs as a result of closures; and (ii) the cost of any structural works needed to upgrade the facility to adhere to health and safety standards.

(AQW 2551/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Gobbins Cliff Path is run and operated by Mid & East Antrim Borough Council and not by either the Department for the Economy or any of its Arm's Length Bodies or Agencies. Both the Department and Tourism NI have only funded elements of the project.

The overall project cost was circa £8.3 million covering three main elements – the lower cliff path and visitor centre, the viewing platforms, and the upper cliff top path. Tourism NI funded the upper cliff top path along with Larne Borough Council. Total project costs for this element were circa £350k, with Tourism NI contributing circa £175k.

Tourism NI does not hold detailed information on all of the costs involved in the Gobbins Project, including the running costs and costs incurred as a result of closures.

Tourism NI does not hold information relating to the cost of any structural works needed to upgrade the facility to adhere to health and safety standards. This information should be sought from Mid & East Antrim Borough Council.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for the Economy how many students from outside Europe received a place at a Higher Education Institution, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2610/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Statistics detailing the number of EU and non-EU domiciled applicants who received a place at a Northern Ireland institution in each of the last five years are available on my Department's website. A link to this information can be found below.

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/NI%20analysis%20of%202015-16%20UCAS%20accepted%20applicants.pdf>

My Department does hold specific information on applicants from countries within Europe but outside the European Union. These students are counted as non-EU applicants.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for the Economy how many students from a country in Europe but outside the European Union received a place at a Higher Education Institution, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2611/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Statistics detailing the number of EU and non-EU domiciled applicants who received a place at a Northern Ireland institution in each of the last five years are available on my Department's website. A link to this information can be found below.

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/NI%20analysis%20of%202015-16%20UCAS%20accepted%20applicants.pdf>

My Department does hold specific information on applicants from countries within Europe but outside the European Union. These students are counted as non-EU applicants.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for the Economy how many students from another EU member state received a place at a Higher Education Institution in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2612/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Statistics detailing the number of EU and non-EU domiciled applicants who received a place at a Northern Ireland institution in each of the last five years are available on my Department's website. A link to this information can be found below.

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/NI%20analysis%20of%202015-16%20UCAS%20accepted%20applicants.pdf>

My Department does hold specific information on applicants from countries within Europe but outside the European Union. These students are counted as non-EU applicants.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for the Economy what work his Department is undertaking to ensure that the Higher Education sector remains attractive and accessible to international students.

(AQW 2613/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Higher education institutions in Northern Ireland are autonomous and are responsible for attracting international students and ensuring accessibility at a local level. Each institution has developed its own international strategy

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for the Economy how many graduates in Northern Ireland did not begin a graduate job within one year of graduating, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2616/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Regarding question AQW 2616/16-21, my Department does not hold the information requested.

The answers to questions AQW 2617/16-21, AQW 2618/16-21 and AQW 2619/16-21 can be found in section 2 of my Department's annual Destinations Leavers Higher Education bulletin, available on the Department's website at the following link: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/destinations-leavers-higher-education>

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for the Economy how many graduates have left Northern Ireland to begin employment in another member state of the European Union, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2617/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Regarding question AQW 2616/16-21, my Department does not hold the information requested.

The answers to questions AQW 2617/16-21, AQW 2618/16-21 and AQW 2619/16-21 can be found in section 2 of my Department's annual Destinations Leavers Higher Education bulletin, available on the Department's website at the following link: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/destinations-leavers-higher-education>

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for the Economy how many graduates have left Northern Ireland to begin employment in a country outside the UK, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2618/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Regarding question AQW 2616/16-21, my Department does not hold the information requested.

The answers to questions AQW 2617/16-21, AQW 2618/16-21 and AQW 2619/16-21 can be found in section 2 of my Department's annual Destinations Leavers Higher Education bulletin, available on the Department's website at the following link: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/destinations-leavers-higher-education>

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for the Economy how many graduates have left Northern Ireland to begin employment in another region of the UK, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2619/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Regarding question AQW 2616/16-21, my Department does not hold the information requested.

The answers to questions AQW 2617/16-21, AQW 2618/16-21 and AQW 2619/16-21 can be found in section 2 of my Department's annual Destinations Leavers Higher Education bulletin, available on the Department's website at the following link: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/destinations-leavers-higher-education>

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for the Economy what is the current cost, inclusive of public funding and private contribution, of a place at a Higher Education Institution for an undergraduate programme.

(AQW 2620/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The cost of a full-time undergraduate place at the Northern Ireland universities varies according to which of four price groups the subject being taught falls into. The current annual cost, inclusive of public funding and private contribution, for each price group is set out below:

Price Group	Course Type	Annual Cost
A	Clinical stages of medicine and dentistry	£22,562
B	Laboratory based subjects (science, pre-clinical stages of medicine and dentistry, engineering and technology)	£12,690
C	Subjects with a studio, laboratory or fieldwork element	£10,974
D	All other subjects	£9,686

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on any capital investment in the North West Regional College, Strabane.

(AQW 2630/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: North West Regional College has invested approximately £200k over the last 2 years maintaining and upgrading the Strabane estate. The College is currently considering a number of options to progress a new development at the Strabane campus. The College has advised that preparation of the business case is at an advanced stage, but has not yet been finalised. Any proposals made will be fully considered by my Department in due course.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy why re-approval of the Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme was not sought from the Department of Finance and Personnel in April 2015.

(AQW 2642/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: There were insufficient administrative arrangements in place to ensure that re-approval was sought. Administrative and monitoring structures have now been put in place across the Department to ensure that something like this cannot recur in future.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for the Economy how his Department is promoting the Sperrins as a popular tourist destination.

(AQW 2648/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Sperrins regularly feature in the marketing activity of both Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland.

The area is featured online via Tourism Ireland's suite of international websites across 29 markets and has a series of dedicated pages on Tourism NI's Discover Northern Ireland website.

The Sperrins feature in Tourism Ireland's new film – Ten Amazing Places in Northern Ireland – which is currently being promoted via Tourism Ireland's social media platforms, Facebook, Twitter and on YouTube to over 3.6 million people worldwide and also across Tourism NI's digital channels including social media and top performing blogs.

Tourism NI also ensures the Sperrins are promoted by facilitating visits to the area by the international press, for example journalists from Great Britain and Canada attended the Bluegrass Music Festival held at the Ulster American Folk Park.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for the Economy how further education in the Omagh area is responding to the growing demand for software programmers.

(AQW 2665/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The South West College (SWC), the main provider of Further Education in the Omagh area, delivers a broad range of programmes in Information Technology (IT) and Computing.

A range of qualifications from Level 2 through to Level 5 are specifically dedicated to aspects of Software Development.

The demand for further education courses, to meet the need for software programming, includes the following, listed by level:

Level 2	C# Fundamentals for absolute beginners BTEC Extended Certificate in IT
Level 3	BTEC Subsidiary Diploma in IT BTEC Diploma in IT BTEC Extended Diploma in IT Access Diploma in IT
Level 4	OCR Software Development

Level 5	Foundation Degree in Science in Computing
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In addition to these courses, other programmes relevant to software development have been offered in the Enniskillen and Dungannon Campuses which attract many students from the Omagh area.

In the current academic year, SWC offers, under my Department's Higher Education Strategy Project 10 initiative, articulation to the BSc Honours Computing Systems. The focus of this pilot project is part-time bachelor degree programmes, which will provide a progression route for learners who have successfully completed their foundation degrees and who want to study for bachelor degrees locally and on a part time basis. Project 10 also aims to support delivery of the teaching provision in further education by offering higher level apprenticeships through a blended learning and teaching model.

The virtual college initiative is well developed in SWC and has provided over 20 internships in the last five years for software developers who work on live software development projects under the guidance of a qualified Software Developer.

Local school students also benefit from the Virtual Services Team's placement opportunities in Computer Science, which supports the students in using world class technology and equipment.

Relationships with industry are maintained through the College's employer placements, and its Industry Advisory Board allows the College to consult with and adapt to employer's needs when revalidating new qualifications.

Currently SWC has a Higher Level Apprenticeship programme in computing with 7 participants entering their second year. There will be an additional cohort this year as well, aiming to take on an additional 7 apprentices.

SWC continues to research new opportunities in this growing occupational area and offers new qualifications where demand exists in each year's curriculum planning exercise.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for the Economy what steps he is taking to promote Strabane business park.
(AQW 2720/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI proactively promotes Strabane Business Park to investors, both indigenous and those located internationally, through its commercial property database within the NI Business Information website. It is also included in property searches undertaken for investors in line with their particular business requirements.

In recent months Invest NI has had discussions with a range of businesses that have expressed an interest to the agency in locating to Strabane Business Park. The agency will continue to pursue these and any future suitable property interests.

As you will appreciate, however, I cannot direct investment to a specific location, this is a decision that can only be taken by the investor on the basis of their particular business needs and circumstances.

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for the Economy what steps he is taking to ensure local students that wish to study at Universities in the south of Ireland and that apply for student loans will not be disadvantaged financially due to the recent Brexit vote.
(AQW 2798/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The exchange rate used to convert the Student Contribution Loan value to sterling is the average Euro/ Sterling exchange rate provided by HMRC for the calendar year preceding the academic year in which the course starts. For academic year 2016/17, the sterling value of a €3,000 loan has been set at £2,180.70. A safeguard measure exists where if this is not sufficient to cover the Contribution Charge at the time of payment to the university, the Department for the Economy, via the Education Authority, covers the additional cost.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy what discussions he has had with economy Ministers in other regions to agree any commonality in negotiations with Her Majesty's Government over Brexit.
(AQW 2821/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I have not discussed the UK's exit from the European Union with the Economy Ministers of other regions. However, I have met with the Secretary of State for International Trade, Dr Liam Fox MP, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Mr Greg Clark MP, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, Mr David Davis MP, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr James Brokenshire MP, to discuss how best Northern Ireland's interests can be advanced in negotiations to exit the European Union.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy what proposals his Department is considering to prevent the local onshore wind energy industry from collapse following the closure of the Northern Ireland Renewable Obligations scheme.
(AQW 2823/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Although the Northern Ireland Renewable Obligations scheme is now closed to all new onshore wind, projects meeting the criteria for the three available grace periods set out in the closure legislation, can continue to accredit until 31 December 2018 for large scale and until 31 March 2019 for small scale. Once accredited, projects will be supported for 20 years or until 2037, whichever is the sooner.

In addition, within the coming months, I will be considering whether to seek Northern Ireland's inclusion in the Contract for Difference arrangements for large scale renewables.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy what progress has been made in benchmarking Invest NI against (i) UK Trade and Investment; (ii) Scottish Development International; and (iii) Enterprise Ireland /Industrial Development Agency, Ireland (a) staffing levels, (b) salary levels of senior staff, (c) output per employee, (d) jobs created and (e) jobs supported.
(AQW 2825/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI has been the focus of two in-depth reviews which included an examination of the organisation's role, remit and effectiveness compared to competitors.

In September 2009 the Independent Review of Economic Policy,

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/independent-review-economic-policy>, included analysis of Invest NI's operational effectiveness, findings and recommendations on organisational structure when compared to competitor agencies. Invest NI fully considered these recommendations and implemented improvements where appropriate in agreement with the then Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

A detailed NI Audit Office (NIAO) review of Invest NI's performance was released in March 2012, and was the subject of a Public Accounts Committee hearing and report.

The report, available at <https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/files/investnifinalpdf>, concluded that benchmarking the performance of economic development agencies is extremely difficult as the role and remit of each varies greatly, making direct comparisons difficult. For example, comparisons between UK Trade International, now Department for International Trade, and Invest NI would lack relevance as Invest NI is responsible for a much wider array of business support activities, making high-level comparison misleading.

Based on the evidence available, and where direct comparison was relevant, the NIAO report noted that Invest NI's administrative costs compared favourably to Scottish and Republic of Ireland agencies. NIAO concluded that the cost per capita of Invest NI's full operational programme was in line with Republic of Ireland's, that Invest NI's total spend per job created was lower than the Republic of Ireland and Scotland, and that Invest NI's administrative costs per job created were lower than Scotland and Republic of Ireland.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for the Economy what discussions he has had with Invest NI regarding Strabane business park.
(AQW 2837/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My officials within Invest NI keep me regularly informed of progress regarding Strabane Business Park.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for the Economy when he will answer AQW 2187/6-21.
(AQW 2874/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I answered this question on 16 September 2016.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for the Economy what funding is provided by his Department to help promote the sport of road racing as a tourist attraction.
(AQW 2898/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: In recent years, both Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland have undertaken promotional activity for Northern Ireland around motorsport events including the Circuit of Ireland, the North West 200 and the Ulster Grand Prix.

Road racing events have been financially supported through the Tourism NI's Tourism Event Funding Programme since 2010. Specifically, over the last 3 years, the total of financial assistance to road racing events is £1,195,900. Tourism NI's Financial support can enable the event organisers to promote and market their events to a wider audience.

Tourism Ireland, with funding of £324,000 from the Department for the Economy, secured footage of the 2016 Circuit of Ireland event on Eurosport and its affiliates, reaching a TV audience of about 30 million people worldwide in April this year. The aim was to maximise the tourism benefits of this important sporting event, highlighting the excitement and atmosphere, as well as the spectacular scenery of Northern Ireland, to motorsports fans and prospective visitors everywhere.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for the Economy what provisions are in place to assist people aged 19 and older, with learning disabilities, in the southern region of the Education Authority, who are attending a Further Education course.
(AQW 2904/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: In order to assist students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to access the range of mainstream and discrete educational provision made by all FE colleges, my Department provides an Additional Support Fund. This fund provides £4.5 million per annum to enable colleges to put in place the necessary technical and/or personal support required by an individual to attend further education. More information is available at www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/disability-support-college.

Other provisions in place to support students who may require additional financial assistance are Further Education Awards and The Hardship Fund. More information is available from the www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/further-education.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy whether his Department intends to provide a financial support package to the City of Derry Airport.

(AQW 2942/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: On 19 September 2016, the Executive announced a £7 million package for the North-West to assist development and growth around City of Derry Airport, including up to £4.5 million investment in capital works and up to £2.5 million in relation to route development.

My Department will be involved in discussions with other stakeholders, including Derry and Strabane District Council and the City of Derry Airport, on how the support package will be utilised.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy whether he has approached HM Government regarding the preparation and submission of an application for assistance from the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund to support employees affected by the recent job losses in the manufacturing sector.

(AQW 2947/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Officials in my Department have consulted with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and with HM Treasury on the European Globalisation Fund. Whilst this Fund is designed to add to national, regional and local assistance, advice from the DWP is that European Union Member States are responsible in the first instance for tackling trade adjustment redundancies.

As the UK Government already offers a broad range of personalised support to workers made redundant which could not be duplicated or substituted by the Fund, it is therefore unlikely that any application to the Fund would be successful.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy how his Department is supporting Further Education in West Tyrone.

(AQW 2972/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Two Further Education colleges, South West College and North West Regional College, have campuses in West Tyrone at Omagh and Strabane respectively. These offer a wide range of economically relevant provision for all age groups and abilities, tailored to meet local needs.

My Department provides a block grant allocation each year to the colleges to support this provision and in 2014/15, the most recent year for which end year data is available, £17.38 million was provided to South West College and £23.64 million to North West College. During 2014/15 South West College had total enrolments of 25,920 while North West College had enrolments of 22,603.

In relation to capital investment, a major new South West College campus was constructed in Omagh in 2005, consisting of state of the art facilities and equipment, and North West Regional College is currently reviewing a number of development options in respect of its Strabane campus through the development of a business case. Any proposals received will be fully considered by my Department and any decision to proceed with investment at the campus will be subject to the availability of capital funding.

Further Education is being further supported, by my Department, through the on-going implementation of the Further Education Strategy, 'Further Education Means Success'. The Strategy has a vision to develop a world class professional and technical education and training system in order to provide the most effective support for the growth of our economy, and to provide learning pathways that enable our citizens to reach their full potential.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy whether his Department has plans for a new build for the North West Regional College campus in Strabane.

(AQW 2973/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: North West Regional College has advised my Department that it is currently reviewing a number of development options in relation to the Strabane campus and that a business case is at an advanced stage, but has not yet been finalised. Any proposals received will be fully considered and any decision to proceed with capital investment at the campus will be subject to the availability of capital funding.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy whether his Department plans to provide the City of Derry airport with a financial support package.

(AQW 2974/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: On 19 September 2016, the Executive announced a £7 million package for the North-West to assist development and growth around City of Derry Airport, including up to £4.5 million investment in capital works and up to £2.5 million in relation to route development.

My Department will be involved in discussions with other stakeholders, including Derry and Strabane District Council and the City of Derry Airport, on how the support package will be utilised.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the business case for the Ulster University Magee expansion.

(AQW 2987/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department is presently preparing a Strategic Outline Case which will look at the principal policy implications for the expansion of higher education provision, and set the Magee proposal in that context.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for the Economy what support or funding is available through his Department for entrepreneurs and small and medium sized enterprises.

(AQW 2995/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI provides a range of financial and practical assistance on starting a business, business growth, maximising efficiencies, product development and international trade and investment.

The agency also currently manages the Regional Start Initiative, on behalf of Northern Ireland's councils, providing the first stage of support for entrepreneurs. Participants, wishing to start a business, gain invaluable advice and guidance to help develop the capability to produce a viable business plan. The local Councils will have responsibility for the provision of this function from November 2016.

Additionally, Invest NI offer a wide range of support specifically tailored for entrepreneurs starting an export or globally focused business or for an established business seeking to accelerate its growth and development by entering export markets for the first time. For example, Invest NI's Propel Programme is aimed at entrepreneurs with the potential to start, and rapidly grow, an export-focused business to become a significant exporter and employer. Propel includes focused workshops, 1:1 mentoring and targeted financial support for entrepreneurs with the greatest potential to succeed.

Further information, advice and tools for entrepreneurs and businesses can be accessed via the nibusinessinfo.co.uk website, the official online channel for business advice provided by Invest NI in partnership with NI Direct.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the timeline and the personnel involved in initiating, overseeing and terminating the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme.

(AQW 3001/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Renewable Heat Incentive scheme was introduced in November 2012 and closed in February 2016. The initiation, oversight and termination of the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme was carried out by Energy Division officials within the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy to quantify and explain the surge in applications for the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme from in and around April 2015.

(AQW 3002/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: After a very slow start and low uptake in the early years there was a sustained increase in applications from spring 2015 and officials began working on proposals for cost controls.

Following the announcement in September 2015 of forthcoming tariff changes there was an unprecedented spike in applications resulting in some 900 applications being received in the 6-7 week period prior to the introduction of scheme changes on 18 November 2015.

In real terms this doubled the number of applications received and was the equivalent of the uptake in the three previous years.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for the Economy how many organisations and arm's-length bodies in his departmental remit offer recruitment agencies the opportunity to become the preferred providers of staff; and how an established recruitment agency is considered for inclusion on this list.

(AQW 3007/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: None of the Department's organisations or arm's-length bodies offer this opportunity.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for the Economy what provisions are in place within the Southern Education Authority to assist young people, over 19, and with learning disabilities, attending a Further Education course.

(AQW 3041/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department provides financial assistance to students over 19, including those with disabilities through the Further Education Awards and Hardship Fund. Both funds are means tested to ensure that support is directed at those students most in need and are designed, first and foremost, for any Further Education student who is experiencing exceptional financial difficulty with any costs associated with learning. However, this assistance is not directed specifically at students with disabilities.

The maximum amount payable through a combination of both Further Education Awards and Hardship Fund is £3,500 per annum in total. Further Education Awards provide bursaries for eligible students to assist with general living, but does not

have a specific transport element. Hardship Funds provide assistance with fees, books and equipment, travel costs and associated living costs. Assistance with transport is based on actual transport rates.

My Department also provides financial support through the Additional Support Fund, paid to Further Education colleges, for the provision of technical and personal support to assist students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities with their learning.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the grants available to a private developer wishing to convert derelict outbuildings into holiday lets.

(AQW 3105/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI offers a Tourism Development Scheme for the development of tourism accommodation. Grant of up to 25% of eligible costs can be obtained for projects that can satisfy the current qualifying criteria of the Scheme.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for the Economy whether a financial support package will be made available to assist the City of Derry Airport to help attract new routes and airlines; and how much funding will be made available.

(AQW 3152/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: On 19 September 2016, the Executive announced a £7 million package for the North-West to assist development and growth around City of Derry Airport, including up to £4.5 million investment in capital works and up to £2.5 million in relation to route development.

My Department will be involved in discussions with other stakeholders, including Derry and Strabane District Council and the City of Derry Airport, on how the support package will be utilised.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for the Economy what was the spend on the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme in the 2015-2016 financial year, broken down by scheme.

(AQW 3290/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) is delivered by a Programme Administrator, Energy Saving Trust, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation.

Details of spend, as provided by the Utility Regulator, can be found below.

NISEP 2015-16 Funding Spent by Scheme*

Scheme Ref.	Scheme Title	Funding Spent	Main Measures Included
Priority Domestic			
AIRT 1501 M P	Positive Energy Plus	£1,077,919.48	Heating & Insulation
AIRT 1502 M P	Positive Energy	£105,213.23	Heating & Insulation
AIRT 1503 I P	Positive Insulation Plus	£336,518.07	Insulation
ESL 1501 I P	Thermal Comfort	£2,005,681.95	Insulation
FIR 1501 M P	Home Comfort £1,800	£896,641.39	Heating & Insulation
FIR 1502 M P	Home Comfort £1,300	£242,732.12	Heating & Insulation
FIR 1503 M P	Home Comfort Plus	£387,279.00	Heating & Insulation
PNI 1501 M P	Energy Saver Homes	£568,600.46	Heating & Insulation
PNI 1502 M P	Snug Plus	£31,030.94	Heating & Insulation
PNI 1504 M P	Cosy Homes	£537,375.00	Heating & Insulation
PNI 1506 I P	Free Cavity Wall Insulation	£533,714.11	Cavity Wall Insulation
PNI 1508 I P	Cosy Homes Insulation	£58,078.00	Insulation
WFL 1502 I P	Warmer Homes for Golden Age	£504,460.08	Insulation
Total		£7,285,243.83	
Non Priority Domestic			
AIRT 1505 I NP	Positive Insulation	£3,545.13	Insulation
ESL 1503 I NP	150 Insulation Grant	£130,941.76	Insulation
WFL 1501 NP	Keeping You Warmer	£21,969.52	Insulation

Scheme Ref.	Scheme Title	Funding Spent	Main Measures Included
Total		£156,456.41	
Non Priority Commercial			
ENA 1501 L NP	High Bay/LED Lighting	£382,608.96	Lighting
ENA 1502 L NP	Fluorescent/LED Lighting	£48,556.86	Lighting
ENA 1503 O NP	Variable Speed Drives	£6,172.60	Energy Efficient Technology
ENA 1504 O NP	Variable Speed Compressors	£54,744.20	Energy Efficient Technology
ENA 1505 O NP	Heat Recovery on CAS	£10,044.00	Energy Efficient Technology
ENA 1508 O NP	Alu Compressed Air Piping	£9,740.00	Energy Efficient Technology
ENA 1509 O NP	Intelligent Heating Controls	£2,254.35	Heating Controls
ESB 1501 L NP	Energy Efficient Lighting	£9,157.00	Lighting
PNI 1510 O NP	Variable Speed Drives	£105,690.34	Energy Efficient Technology
Total		£628,968.31	
NISEP Total		£8,070,668.55	

*Funding spent is still subject to confirmation through analysis of post-implementation reports and scheme audits.

Primary Bidders:

- AIRT SSE Airtricity
- ENA Energia
- ESB Electric Ireland
- ESL Energystore
- FIR firmus energy
- PNI Power NI
- WFL Warmfill

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for the Economy which projects his Department is reviewing, or plans to review, as a result of changes in funding from European sources.

(AQW 3334/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Projects in the pipeline will be progressed in the normal course of business in line with UK Treasury instructions and in liaison with colleagues in the Department of Finance and the Special EU Programmes Body as necessary.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister for the Economy what mechanism his Department has to ensure the Personal Training Plan payment follows the student and not the training provider.

(AQW 3366/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Contracted training suppliers are required to develop an individualised Personal Training Plan for each participant on my Department's ApprenticeshipsNI and Training for Success programmes.

To allow time for individual assessment, training suppliers must complete a Personal Training Plan within 12 weeks of the participant's training start date. Payment is then made directly to the training supplier.

In the case of Training for Success, if a participant moves to a new training supplier then the new training supplier may be paid for the completion of a new Personal Training Plan. This payment recognises the need for a thorough individual re-assessment to be completed - with the potential for the young person to change their area of vocational training.

In the case of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, only one Personal Training Plan payment is made. In the event of a participant changing training supplier the original Personal Training Plan and all related records, outlining progress and achievement to date, are transferred to the new supplier. In contrast to Training for Success, as the apprentice is employed, there should be no change to the vocational area of study.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy, in relation to the deal to offer a £9m subsidy to United Airlines, whether there is any constraint on the Executive or Belfast international Airport seeking to attract competitors onto the Belfast to North America route.

(AQW 3440/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: There are no constraints in relation to attracting competitors onto the route.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for the Economy whether his Department will work towards maximising the clawback of excess subsidy monies from British Telecom for local reinvestment aimed at improving internet connectivity, including taking fibre into rural areas.

(AQW 3465/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department's contract with BT to deliver the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project contains specific conditions which determine how gain-share is calculated.

My officials are fully engaged with BT to establish the level of re-investment in fibre broadband services across rural areas of Northern Ireland.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy to what extent does the exceptional funding offered to Belfast International Airport and City of Derry Airport provide assistance for operating costs.

(AQW 3476/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: No funding has been offered to Belfast International Airport.

The Executive package announced for the North-West to assist development and growth around City of Derry Airport included up to £4.5 million investment in capital works and up to £2.5 million in relation to route development.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for the Economy, pursuant to AQW 789/16-21, how many staff were employed at each Ulster University campus in 2010; and how many staff are currently employed at each campus.

(AQW 3495/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department does not hold this information.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the total amount of grants, loans, funding or subsidies drawn for energy efficiency and/or renewable energy programmes by each local council, broken down by year from 2007 to 2014.

(AQW 3520/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The total amount of grants and loans, for the period requested, are detailed below.

Interreg IIIA programme Measure 2.3 – Energy efficiency/renewable energy -payments made to Project Lead Organisations within District Council areas.

Council Area	2007	2008
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Council	£27,105.54	£0
Belfast City Council	£386,128.60	£477,651.55
Ards & North Down	£51,618.54	£0
Causeway Coasts and Glens	£32,281.25	£224,263.60
Fermanagh & Omagh	£1,920.32	£4,720.69

Invest NI Assistance offered through The Carbon Trust Loan Fund (2008-09 TO 2014-15)

District Council Area	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
DCA	Loans	Loans	Loans	Loans	Loans	Loans	Loans
Antrim and Newtownabbey	18,143	205,742	603,768	185,838	346,000	234,207	409,161
Ards and North Down	7,200	117,669	22,568	4,700	130,737	37,933	373,325
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	64,347	380,331	214,157	421,108	733,517	863,386	1,366,940
Belfast	113,485	838,596	114,309	169,555	516,131	989,953	506,492
Causeway Coast and Glens	3,023	180,548	621,161	155,508	75,543	176,343	231,083
Derry City and Strabane		598,099	25,775	179,961	186,723	650,059	133,833
Fermanagh and Omagh		46,994	16,312	85,288	270,924	419,138	431,107
Lisburn and Castlereagh	12,001	1,409,058	53,376	97,823	223,535	580,709	697,469
Mid and East Antrim		53,509	58,660	38,144	366,581	278,484	377,422
Mid Ulster	47,197	724,451	422,304	219,379	873,527	791,583	1,285,351
Newry, Mourne and Down		612,912	89,786	265,491	81,550	229,063	282,275

District Council Area	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Unknown		12,760					
Total	265,396	5,180,669	2,242,176	1,822,795	3,804,768	5,250,858	6,094,458

Notes

- 1 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.
- 2 Figures relate to the Carbon Trust Loan Fund only.
- 3 No loans were made in 2007/08

My Department does not have information on the value of subvention under the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligations or Renewable Heat Incentive by Council area.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy to detail (i) the number of students attending the Coleraine Campus of the Northern Regional College in each of the last three years; and (ii) to provide a breakdown of the numbers attending apprenticeship courses.

(AQW 3522/16-21)

Mr Hamilton:

- (i) The number of students enrolled at the Coleraine campus of the Northern Regional College from 2012/13 to 2014/15 is provided in the table below:

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Number of students	1,407	1,281	1,264

- (ii) The number of students enrolled in apprenticeships at the Coleraine campus of the Northern Regional College from 2012/13 to 2014/15 is provided in the table below:

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Number of students	30	32	28

Source: Further Education Statistical Return 2012/13 and Consolidated Data Return from 2013/14.

Notes:

- 1 The latest available official statistics are for the 2014/15 academic year. Full-year data pertaining to the 2015/16 academic year will be available in December 2016.
- 2 The 'students enrolled' data relate to a headcount of individual students and not overall enrolments.
- 3 Apprenticeship enrolments include those either funded by Training for Success or ApprenticeshipsNI.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy to detail (i) the number of students attending the Limavady Campus of the North West Regional College in each of the last three years; and (ii) a breakdown of the numbers attending apprenticeship courses.

(AQW 3525/16-21)

Mr Hamilton:

- (i) The number of students enrolled at the Limavady campus of the North West Regional College from 2012/13 to 2014/15 is provided in the table below:

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Number of students	2,912	2,739	2,715

- (ii) The number of students enrolled in apprenticeships at the Limavady campus of the North West Regional College from 2012/13 to 2014/15 is provided in the table below:

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Number of students	164	140	135

Source: Further Education Statistical Return 2012/13 and Consolidated Data Return from 2013/14

Notes:

- 4 The latest available data are for the 2014/15 academic year. Full-year data pertaining to the 2015/16 academic year will be available in December 2016.
- 5 The 'students enrolled' data relate to a headcount of individual students and not overall enrolments.
- 6 Apprenticeship enrolments include those either funded by Training for Success or ApprenticeshipsNI.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy (i) how much his Department will receive from BT through the clawback mechanism in the NI Broadband Improvement Project contract; (ii) when it will receive these funds; and (iii) what his Department's priorities for its use.

(AQW 3532/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department's contract with BT to deliver the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project contains specific conditions which determine how gain-share is calculated. The amount and timing will not be known until officials have concluded their analysis. It is anticipated that this work will be completed in the coming weeks and my Department will confirm the level of re-investment in fibre broadband services across rural areas of Northern Ireland.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the number of jobs (i) promoted; and (ii) created in 2015/16 with the support of Invest NI funding, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 3535/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The information can be found on Invest NI's website on the page entitled 'Our Performance'.

<http://secure.investni.com/static/library/invest-ni/documents/performance-page-data-parliamentary-constituency-areas.xlsx>

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the number of jobs with salaries above the Northern Ireland private sector median wage that were (i) promoted; and (ii) created in 2015/16 with the support of Invest NI funding, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 3536/16-21)

Mr Hamilton:

- (i) Detail of the jobs promoted is set out in the table below.

Parliamentary Constituency Area	New Jobs Promoted Above NI Private Sector Median wage
Belfast East	66
Belfast North	68
Belfast South	507
Belfast West	40
East Antrim	27
East Londonderry	123
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	90
Foyle	332
Lagan Valley	302
Mid Ulster	265
Newry And Armagh	75
North Antrim	133
North Down	34
South Antrim	65
South Down	58
Strangford	42
Upper Bann	59
West Tyrone	42

Parliamentary Constituency Area	New Jobs Promoted Above NI Private Sector Median wage
Note: Projects containing an additional 401 jobs have not yet determined a location.	

- (ii) In the majority of cases businesses will take 3 to 5 years to create all of the jobs associated with a project. It is therefore not meaningful to measure and report job creation figures until businesses have had adequate time to fully implement projects.

Mr Butler asked the Minister for the Economy to outline what plans, if any, he has to set up an EU taskforce within his Department as the United Kingdom prepares to leave the European Union.

(AQW 3564/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: A central team has been established within my Department to coordinate preparations across all business areas across the Department for the UK leaving the European Union.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the funding provided to businesses in each constituency by Invest NI in 2015/16.

(AQW 3579/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The information can be found on Invest NI's website on the page entitled 'Our Performance'.

<http://www.investni.com/about-us/what-we-do/our-performance.html>

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for the Economy, given that 40 per cent of the passengers that use City of Derry Airport are from Donegal, whether he has discussed with the Irish government if it could contribute to the airport.

(AQW 3587/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I have not had any discussions with the Irish government regarding contributions to the City of Derry airport.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy, pursuant to AQW 52211/11-16, for an update on licence compliance.

(AQW 3600/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Licence compliance monitoring is a matter for the Utility Regulator, which is accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly, not my Department. As the Regulator is required to act independently of Government, my Department does not interfere in this matter and I neither ask for, nor receive, updates on compliance monitoring as a matter of routine.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy what plans he has for the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework.

(AQW 3605/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) was designed to assess the quality of teaching in English institutions in the context of UK government reforms to the operation of the Higher Education (HE) system in England. HE institutions in Northern Ireland, and the other devolved administrations, have also expressed a desire to participate in the TEF, primarily in order to protect their reputation as high quality providers of HE. I have therefore recently given permission to the UK Department for Education for our eligible local HE institutions to apply to year two of the TEF process, if they so wish.

Over the last number of months, my officials have been working with their counterparts in the UK Department for Education and the other devolved administrations so that the TEF is implemented in such a way as to ensure that local institutions are not disadvantaged in the assessment process. My Department and I will continue to work with colleagues in the rest of the UK to ensure that the Northern Ireland HE sector's interests continue to be promoted as the TEF develops over the coming years.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy what quality assurance measures are in place to assess and monitor the quality of courses offered by Higher Education institutions; and whether he plans to change or develop these measures.

(AQW 3606/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: A revised operating model for higher education quality assessment in England and Northern Ireland was published in March 2016, following an extensive review and consultation process over the preceding 18 months. Transition and pilot arrangements are being taken forward during the current year, with full implementation due to take place from Academic Year 2017/18.

Details of the operating model can be found at:

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Pubs/2016/201603/HEFCE2016_03.pdf

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy what quality assurance measures are in place to assess and monitor the quality of courses offered by Further Education institutions; and whether he plans to change or develop these measures.

(AQW 3607/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department works with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) to assess and monitor the quality of further education and work-based learning courses offered by Further Education (FE) institutions. These robust quality assurance arrangements include a systematic schedule of inspection visits to all FE colleges and a further requirement that each college submit an annual self evaluation report and quality improvement plan.

Results of inspections are published on the ETI website. Where an inspection identifies that a college has important areas for improvement, that provision is then subject to a follow up inspection process, the outcome of which is also published.

The Department and the ETI regularly review these arrangements, which will continue to develop in response to the implementation of the quality aspects of the strategies: 'Generating our Success', the strategy for youth training, 'Securing our Success', the strategy for apprenticeships and 'FE Means Success', the strategy for further education. As part of the implementation of 'FE Means Success', the Department has committed to reviewing the college inspection model, including its appropriateness and frequency, by March 2017.

Higher Education (HE) programmes delivered within FE institutions are subject to the same quality assurance procedures as those delivered in HE institutions and a revised operating model for higher education quality assessment in England and Northern Ireland was published in March 2016. Transition and pilot arrangements are being taken forward during the current year, with full implementation due to take place from Academic Year 2017/18. The new Higher Level Apprenticeship pilot programmes are quality assured by my Department's Quality Improvement team.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy to list the apprenticeship training suppliers.
(AQW 3608/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Thirty five training suppliers, located across Northern Ireland, are contracted to deliver my department's ApprenticeshipsNI training programme.

Contracted Training Suppliers

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| ■ Babcock Training Ltd | ■ Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) |
| ■ BCW Training Ltd | ■ North Down Training Ltd |
| ■ Belfast Central Training Ltd | ■ Northern Regional College |
| ■ Belfast College of Training & Education Ltd | ■ North West Regional College |
| ■ Belfast Metropolitan College | ■ People Plus NI |
| ■ Bombardier Aerospace – Shorts | ■ Riverpark Training |
| ■ Bryson FutureSkills | ■ Rutledge Recruitment and Training |
| ■ CAFRE – Rural Enterprise Team | ■ Seven Towers Training |
| ■ Craft Training | ■ South Eastern Regional College |
| ■ Customized Training Services | ■ South West College |
| ■ Dairy Farm & People 1st Ltd | ■ Southern Regional College |
| ■ Derry Youth & Community Workshop Ltd | ■ Springvale Learning |
| ■ ETT (Electrical Training Trust) | ■ Swann Training Services Ltd |
| ■ Global Horizon Skills Ltd | ■ The Link Works |
| ■ Hair Academy/Jennymount Training Services | ■ Transport Training Services Ltd |
| ■ Impact Training (NI) Ltd | ■ Workforce Training Services Limited |
| ■ Larne Skills Development Ltd | ■ Youth Action NI |
| ■ Loughview Training Services | |

Full details of all suppliers (including area of work covered, type of apprenticeship training offered, and location) can be found by clicking on the link below and using the search facility:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/apprenticeship-training-suppliers>

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy what quality assurance measures are in place to assess and monitor the quality of apprenticeship courses and training providers; and whether he plans to change or develop these measures.
(AQW 3609/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department works with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) to assess and monitor the quality of apprenticeship and training provision. These robust quality assurance arrangements include a systematic schedule of inspection visits to all training providers and a requirement that each provider submit an annual self evaluation report and quality improvement plan.

Results of inspections are published on the ETI website. Where an inspection identifies that an organisation has important areas for improvement, that organisation is then subject to a follow up inspection process, the outcome of which is also published.

The Department and the ETI regularly review these arrangements, which will continue to develop in response to the implementation of the quality aspects of 'Generating our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships' - including a review of the ETI quality improvement framework.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy how his Department is supporting law graduates entering the legal profession.
(AQW 3681/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department, through Invest NI, is engaged in a number of initiatives to create employment opportunities for NI legal graduates, including attracting foreign direct investment in legal services, increasing the exports of local firms and barristers and responding to the advance of technology in the legal industry.

For example, Invest NI recently organised a legal mission to the US, to participate in the International Bar Association annual conference in Washington, and to New York. Eight firms represented by 13 solicitors, three barristers, the Ulster University, two legal technology companies and senior representatives from the Law Society and Bar of Northern Ireland participated in this mission, which was actively supported by the First Minister.

Invest NI is also working with the Law Society and Bar of Northern Ireland, to profile the region's strengths for commercial dispute resolution.

Invest NI has also provided sponsorship to the Ulster University Legal Innovation Centre. This centre is the first of its kind in the UK, combining the strengths of the university's schools of law and computing. The centre will deliver training and development opportunities for both legal graduates and professionals.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for the Economy to detail what consumer legislation is applicable to Further Education providers.
(AQW 3738/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Further Education Providers should take into account the following consumer protection legislation when providing and marketing their education courses: - The Consumer Rights Act 2015; The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008; and The Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations 2013.

The Competition and Markets Authority has published a guide on students' rights relating to Higher Education entitled "Undergraduate students: your rights under consumer law" available through https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/415732/Undergraduate_students_-_your_rights_under_consumer_law.pdf

Although this guidance has not yet been updated to reflect the recent changes in

consumer rights introduced by the Consumer Rights Act 2015, it still provides very useful information on the obligations of higher education authorities to students and may also, depending on the precise circumstances, be helpful to those in Further Education.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for the Economy to detail what consumer legislation is applicable to Higher Education institutions.
(AQW 3739/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Higher Education Providers should take into account the following consumer protection legislation when providing and marketing their education courses: - The Consumer Rights Act 2015; The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008; and The Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations 2013.

The Competition and Markets Authority has published a guide on students' rights relating to Higher Education entitled "Undergraduate students: your rights under consumer law" available through https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/415732/Undergraduate_students_-_your_rights_under_consumer_law.pdf

Although this guidance has not yet been updated to reflect the recent changes in consumer rights introduced by the Consumer Rights Act 2015, it still provides very useful information on the obligations of higher education institutions to students.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the relationship between the Competition and Markets Authority and Higher Education institutions.
(AQW 3740/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) is a non-ministerial department which works to promote competition for the benefit of consumers, both within and outside the UK. The CMA has provided guidance to the higher education sector in relation to consumer protection legislation and has powers to enforce a range of consumer protection laws. Higher Education Institutions, as autonomous bodies, are responsible for ensuring appropriate compliance with relevant legislation, including consumer legislation.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the level of compliance amongst Higher Education institutions regarding consumer legislation.

(AQW 3741/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Higher Education Institutions are autonomous bodies therefore they are responsible for ensuring appropriate compliance with relevant legislation, including consumer legislation.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the steps taken to ensure Higher Education institutions are compliant with consumer legislation.

(AQW 3742/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department has been working with Northern Ireland's Higher Education Institutions to raise awareness of the Competition and Markets Authority guidance in relation to their legal obligations under consumer legislation. However, as autonomous bodies, these institutions are responsible for ensuring that they are complying with the relevant requirements.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the number of complaints to the Public Services Ombudsman, relating to a Higher Education institution, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3743/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Complaints relating to Higher Education Institutions have not previously been within the remit of the Public Services Ombudsman. However, under the Public Service Ombudsman (Northern Ireland) Act (2016), the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman will be able to consider complaints of this nature from 1 October 2016.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for the Economy to detail any student finance awards sponsored by philanthropists, including their qualifying criteria.

(AQW 3755/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The development of new and additional philanthropic bursary programmes is a key action within Access to Success, my Department's strategy for widening participation in Higher Education. Such programmes have the capacity to help to break down community barriers to participation and help to improve community liaison with higher education institutions.

Thirty five student bursary programmes have been developed between Higher Education Institutions, local employers and other philanthropists over the last few years.

My Department also publicises the bursary programmes that have a key objective of widening participation in Higher Education through our Reach Higher awareness programme.

The details of each of these can be found at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/university-and-college-bursaries>

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for the Economy (i) to detail the number of annual places for medical students in local universities; (ii) for a breakdown of those places taken by students from (a) Northern Ireland; (b) Great Britain; and (c) outside the United Kingdom.

(AQW 3793/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The table below¹ sets out first year medical enrolments at Northern Ireland's Higher Education institutions by domicile and principal subject area in academic years 2012/13 to 2014/15.

Domicile	Joint Academic Coding System subject area	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
NI	Pre-clinical medicine	70	75	75
	Clinical medicine	195	225	215
	Total	265	295	290
GB	Pre-clinical medicine	20	15	20
	Clinical medicine	35	35	35
	Total	55	50	55
Non-UK	Pre-clinical medicine	15	15	15
	Clinical medicine	40	40	45

¹ To prevent the identification of individuals, figures have been rounded to the nearest 5, in line with Higher Education Strategic Authority rounding strategy, with 0, 1 and 2 rounded to 0. Due to rounding, the sum of columns may not match the totals shown.

Domicile	Joint Academic Coding System subject area	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
	Total	55	55	60
Total	Pre-clinical medicine	105	110	110
	Clinical medicine	265	300	295
	Total	370	410	405

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for the Economy what efforts were made by Invest NI in the last 12 months to mitigate Caterpillar job losses.

(AQW 3842/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Caterpillar Inc. announced in September 2015 that it was seeking to reduce its annual operating costs by approximately \$1.5 billion through workforce reduction of approximately 10,000 and the consolidation and closure of a number of plants throughout the world.

Following this announcement, Invest NI's Chief Executive met with the company's local and US teams in Belfast in May 2016, and with US senior management at the company's US headquarters in August 2016.

This is in addition to the regular engagement between Invest NI staff and the company on both operational and strategic matters.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for the Economy to detail his Department's plans to promote the Sperrins as a tourist destination.

(AQW 3854/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Sperrins regularly feature in the marketing activity of both Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland.

The area is featured on Tourism Ireland's suite of international websites across 29 markets and has a series of dedicated pages on Tourism NI's Discover Northern Ireland website.

The Sperrins feature in Tourism Ireland's new film – Ten Amazing Places in Northern Ireland – which is currently being promoted via Tourism Ireland's social media platforms to over 3.6 million people worldwide and also across Tourism NI's digital channels including social media and top performing blogs.

Tourism NI also ensures the Sperrins are promoted by facilitating visits to the area by the international press, for example journalists from Great Britain and Canada attended the Bluegrass Music Festival held at the Ulster American Folk Park.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for the Economy whether his Department will provide funding for broadband provision as part of the Programme for Government 2016-21; and whether this funding will be used to provide full fibre future proofed solutions in rural areas.

(AQW 3857/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The NI Executive's draft Programme for Government (PfG) includes an Indicator to improve internet connectivity. The outcome of the PfG and related budget discussions, will dictate the nature and scale of my Department's future telecommunications interventions.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the business case that he used in deciding to provide a £9m subsidy to United Airlines, specifically with regard to the evidence surrounding the benefits to foreign direct investment of maintaining the flight.

(AQW 3874/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The United States is the largest source of Foreign Direct Investment into Northern Ireland. A direct transatlantic route from Belfast to North America has been important for Northern Ireland's economy over the past decade in terms of increasing our tourism, enhancing our prospects in attracting US based investors and helping our local companies to export their products and services. On this basis, I am pleased that we have approved an agreement with United Airlines which ensures the continuance of the Belfast-Newark route.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for the Economy whether he plans to increase student fees.

(AQW 3929/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The current tuition fee policy for Northern Ireland domiciled students studying in Northern Ireland is that any increase in fees is subject only to an annual inflationary increase. For the current academic year, the rate is £3,925 and for academic year 2017/18 this will rise to £4,030.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy what guidelines or protocols exist in his Department governing Ministers holding meetings with third parties in the absence of officials; and whether any record is kept of such meetings having been held.
(AQW 3941/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: There are no guidelines or protocols in my Department governing my holding of meetings with third parties in the absence of officials.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the skills barometer; and the progress on addressing the policy implications and research areas highlighted in the Skills Barometer Findings Report.
(AQW 3960/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Northern Ireland Skills Barometer, first published in November 2015, is a key tool in assessing the demand and supply of skills across the economy both now and into the future. It is currently being updated to ensure it continues to be based on the latest, most comprehensive information available.

The findings from the Barometer are shaping the work of my Department, influencing delivery in areas such as apprenticeships, youth training, higher education, further education and careers education, information, advice and guidance.

More broadly it constitutes a valuable part of the evidence base upon which my Department is developing the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy and the delivery plans underpinning the Programme for Government.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for the Economy what level of financial support his Department, or its arm's-length bodies, will provide to Banbridge Hockey Club as they host Round 1 of the European Hockey League at Havelock Park in October 2016.
(AQW 3965/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Financial support for tourism events in Northern Ireland is provided through the Tourism Events Funding Programme administered by Tourism NI.

In October 2015, Tourism NI launched an open call to applicants for events taking place between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017, under the 2016/17 Programme. Events were evaluated on a competitive basis and those that reached the successful pass mark were awarded support through the Tourism Events Sponsorship Scheme and the International Tourism Events Fund.

Tourism NI did not receive an application for support for the European Hockey League and therefore no financial support can be given.

Under The Review of Public Administration the responsibility for supporting local community events was transferred to Local Authorities. In relation to this enquiry, Tourism NI officials have been in touch with officials in the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and I understand that support has subsequently been made by the council to the event.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the impact of transferring responsibility for investigating maladministration complaints by students at Further and Higher Education Colleges and Universities to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.
(AQW 3966/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman assumed responsibility for investigating the public's complaints of alleged maladministration relating to Further and Higher Education provision from 1st October 2016.

The six Northern Ireland further education colleges operate a uniform complaints policy which incorporates appropriate references to the Ombudsman's new role. The Higher Education Institutions are also aware of their responsibilities and are fully committed to working with the new Ombudsman to ensure a smooth transition.

The new arrangements will bring Northern Ireland broadly into line with the approach to complaints handling in further and higher education in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the Gas to the West project.
(AQW 3981/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Construction work on the first phase of the Gas to the West project, involving a new gas pipeline from Maydown to Strabane, is well advanced with first gas connections expected in late 2016.

The developers have lodged a planning application with the Department for Infrastructure Strategic Planning Division for new gas infrastructure to connect the remaining towns in the project (Dungannon, Coalisland, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Omagh, Enniskillen and Derrylin) to natural gas. Subject to planning and other approvals, these works are anticipated to commence in 2017.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for the Economy under what circumstances can an energy provider access a customer's home to install a meter.
(AQW 4044/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I am informed by the Utility Regulator that the vast majority of electricity meters in NI are the property of Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (as opposed to energy providers) and they have legal rights to access their equipment.

This can be to facilitate supply or manage arrears (through installation of a pre-payment meter facility), for safety reasons, maintenance, meter replacement or disconnection. Similar arrangements apply for natural gas meters.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for the Economy what consideration he has given to future support mechanisms for (i) renewable heat; and (ii) renewable electricity.

(AQW 4111/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I will consider all options on the future direction of renewable energy policy within the context of wider energy strategy development over the coming months.

Mr Logan asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the impact of InvestNI's support for businesses in North Antrim over the last five years.

(AQW 4119/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The information is available from the Invest NI website on the page entitled 'Our Performance'.

<http://www.investni.com/about-us/what-we-do/our-performance.html>

The impact of Invest NI's support in North Antrim includes the £1.7million investment by Ballymena-based window manufacturer Apeer in January 2016 which will create 25 new jobs. Invest NI offered £399,000 to support the investment.

In May 2014, the Wrights Group, one of our most successful indigenous manufacturing companies, announced the investment of over £14 million in five research and development projects. Invest NI offered support of £1.8 million towards the projects.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the amount in grants paid each month in 2016 to Intertrade Ireland.

(AQW 4127/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The grants paid to InterTradeIreland so far in 2016 are as follows:

Payment Date	Amount
27/06/2016	£1,495,720
01/08/2016	£324,366
09/09/2016	£272,472

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister for the Economy to advise when he was first made aware of the May 2015 report Preliminary Analysis On the Impact of a UK Referendum on its Membership of the European Union, compiled by the European Policy and Coordination Unit within the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister.

(AQW 4128/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: This analysis paper was commissioned by the Head of the Civil Service but was not sent to Ministers for consideration following its completion. Following a Freedom of Information request to the Executive Office, Ministers became aware of this work and the document was released on two occasions following Freedom of Information requests.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for the Economy to outline what discussions have there been between his Department and the Department of Education in relation to careers advice in schools, particularly in relation to skills and training.

(AQW 4251/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The joint careers education and guidance strategy, Preparing for Success, agreed between my Department and the Department of Education outlines how my Department's Careers Service and schools will work closely to ensure young people are aware of career options, including training, and the skills most valued by employers.

The implementation of the strategy is monitored through quarterly meetings of a joint steering group chaired by senior officials from both Departments.

The Careers Service and schools agree a careers guidance programme each year and partnership agreements outlining the delivery arrangements are in place with 98% of post primary schools. Careers advisers provide impartial guidance to young people covering the full range of options available to them at key transition points including skills, education, training and employment opportunities.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the support given by Invest NI to Concentrix.

(AQW 4303/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Since the formation of Concentrix Europe Limited in 2011, Invest NI has given the company £2,908,700 of financial support and has given Concentrix Technologies Limited £200,000 of financial support.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of (i) the success of Omagh being awarded Purple Flag status for its excellence in entertainment and evening hospitality; and (ii) the contribution made by Omagh Street Safe volunteers to community safety during weekend nights in Omagh.

(AQW 4348/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I am pleased that Omagh is the latest town to achieve coveted Purple Flag Status, joining Enniskillen, Londonderry, Armagh and Newry as places offering quality experiences and a better range of things to do in the evenings and at weekends.

The Purple Flag Award scheme that recognises our town and city centres as welcoming places for residents and visitors alike. It aims to drive up quality standards and is a benchmark for destinations wishing to invest in developing the night time economy.

Tourism in Northern Ireland generates more than £760 million to the economy and we welcome 4.5 million visitors annually. Visitor surveys consistently show that across all interest and age groups, visitors are seeking out authentic places to visit, shop, eat and be entertained. Lively vibrant towns and cities that meet their needs against a backdrop of a welcoming environment will be good places to visit and to recommend. Additionally, more opportunities are provided to increase visitor spend.

While The Omagh Street Safe Volunteer Scheme is supported by the Policing and Community Safety Partnership, the PSNI, Fermanagh & Omagh District Council and the Department for Communities, I welcome any initiatives that make our towns and cities safer for all.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the departmental budget allocated to the EnergyWise programme.
(AQW 4376/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I am currently considering future energy efficiency policy. No decision has, therefore, been made with regards to budget allocation.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for the Economy whether he is considering implementing the teacher training model at Dublin City University as an approach to integrating teacher training whilst providing for a demoninational ethos.

(AQW 4437/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I am not considering implementing such an approach.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for the Economy what assurances he can give that current European support arrangements on the portability of student qualifications, accommodation costs and university fees on a North / South basis in Ireland will be maintained in the event of a withdrawal of EU membership.

(AQW 4525/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Professional and Technical Qualifications and General Qualifications are referenced to the European Qualifications Framework. This provides assurance for the learner, employers, and other users and underpins their portability and credibility.

While no decisions have been made yet, I can provide assurance that the full implications for student mobility and student support are being analysed within the context of our consideration of the implications of UK exiting the EU.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for the Economy why County Tyrone was not included in the Discover NI Say Hello to More marketing video.

(AQW 4570/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The locations in the 'Say hello to more' wider Tourism NI television advert, were featured as a result of extensive research in to the Republic of Ireland market, which established the experiences that would most appeal to that market. The call to action on the advert encouraged the audience to go to 'discovernorthernireland.com' where details on experiences, accommodation, events and things to see and do throughout every county in Northern Ireland are featured.

The TV advertisement is only one part of a much larger overarching campaign which is designed to drive visitor numbers and spend to Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland market. As well as TV, the campaign includes press, radio, digital advertising, web promotion and PR.

County Tyrone is featured throughout the Tourism Northern Ireland 'Say Hello to More' advertising campaign. There are Tyrone specific classified press adverts featuring Tyrone accommodation providers, as well as specific Tyrone press advertisements and advertorials which feature things to see and do on a short break in the Tyrone area. These will all appear in key Republic of Ireland newspapers. County Tyrone is also included on a number of digital assets associated with the Say Hello to More campaign. A website - www.sayhellotomore.ie - was developed to serve as the call-to-action for the campaign.

In broader terms, County Tyrone is regularly promoted across Tourism NI's social and digital channels. This includes dedicated blogs on the Discover NI website, social media posts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and inclusion in email newsletters.

There are a series of pages on discovernorthernireland.com dedicated to County Tyrone as well as a dedicated Tyrone and Sperrins destination section. In addition, products featuring County Tyrone are reflected in editorial across the website.

I am content that Tourism Northern Ireland's approach to the promotion of County Tyrone is inclusive, positive and robust.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for the Economy whether he will instruct Discover NI to edit their new marketing video to include County Tyrone.

(AQW 4571/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The locations in the 'Say hello to more' wider Tourism NI television advert, were featured as a result of extensive research in to the Republic of Ireland market, which established the experiences that would most appeal to that market. The call to action on the advert encouraged the audience to go to 'discovernorthernireland.com' where details on experiences, accommodation, events and things to see and do throughout every county in Northern Ireland are featured.

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Mr McElduff asked the Minister for the Economy to detail how his Department is marketing County Tyrone as a visitor destination in the east coast of the United States of America.

(AQW 4635/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Tourism Ireland promotes the attractions of Co Tyrone in the United States as part of its global marketing activity to attract visitors to Northern Ireland.

For example, The Sperrins feature in Tourism Ireland's film – Ten Amazing Places in Northern Ireland – which has been promoted in the US this year through Tourism Ireland's social media platforms.

This autumn, Tourism Ireland has invited journalists from publications such as the Boston Globe, Northern New England Journey and HungryTravelers.com to visit Northern Ireland to take part in the Halloween celebrations. Their itinerary includes a tour of the Ulster American Folk Park. Tyrone also features in information releases sent to Tourism Ireland's database of US journalists – with a recent release featuring the Ulster American Folk Park.

Representatives of National Museums Northern Ireland (Ulster American Folk Park) will join Tourism Ireland at this year's Stone Mountain Highland Games. Attracting almost 80,000 visitors of Scots-Irish and Scots descent during the two-day festival, the games are an ideal opportunity to highlight Tyrone to this market.

Throughout 2016 Northern Ireland's Year of Food and Drink has been highlighted in the US, featuring, among others, Tyrone Farmer's Market, Baronscourt Estate and The Brewer's House in Dungannon.

In late 2014, Tourism Ireland launched an online film to highlight a new section of the International Appalachian Trail (IAT). The IAT is a 2,200-mile long route, which begins in the United States and spans the terrain of the once-shared mountain ranges of North America and Europe. The film features images of the Sperrin Mountains and the Ulster American Folk Park.

I would recommend that tourism enterprises in Co Tyrone, who have not already done so, register on Tourism Ireland's industry opportunities website, for a range of opportunities to promote their businesses in the US. Details can be found at <http://www.tourismirelandindustryopportunities.com/>

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for the Economy whether he has any plans to develop a new onshore wind energy subsidy scheme.

(AQW 4645/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation provides support to a wide range of renewable electricity technologies, including onshore wind, and will continue to do so until 2037.

I will consider the future direction of renewable energy policy within the context of wider energy strategy development over the coming months.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for the Economy what measures are in place to address gender disparity in the uptake of apprenticeships.

(AQW 4652/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department's Careers Service is aware of the need to encourage more females to consider the apprenticeship route and provides careers guidance on an all age basis but with particular emphasis given to young people making key career decisions.

Careers advisers provide impartial advice on the full range of options available, including apprenticeships, to help individuals fulfil their potential.

The ApprenticeshipsNI Statistical Bulletin indicates that from 2007 to October 2015 the percentage of females starting ApprenticeshipsNI funded training has increased from 35% to 48%.

Factors impacting on this increase include the introduction of an all-age training provision coupled with accessibility for those working a minimum of 21 hours per week.

Additionally, research was commissioned to inform the development of a Widening Access Strategy within the reformed apprenticeship system as set out in 'Securing our Success: The Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships'. The Department is currently considering the out workings of the findings of this research.

The full Statistical Bulletin, referenced above, can be accessed by following the link.

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/apprenticeshipsni-statistics-september-2007-october-2015>

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for the Economy (i) to outline what the review on broadband contracts will cover; and (ii) whether this includes all funding associated with all three Northern Ireland broadband contracts with British Telecom.

(AQW 4686/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department is currently implementing two contracts with BT, the NI Broadband Improvement Project (which includes the Better Broadband Scheme) and the Superfast Roll-out Programme. These contracts are monitored on an ongoing basis by my officials and their counterparts in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. In addition, each project has a Project Board which oversees all aspects of the relevant contracts.

These are routine project management arrangements. There are no plans for a wider formal review of broadband contracts.

Mr McKee asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on opening the Agri-Food Competence Centre.

(AQW 4698/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Agri-Food Quest Competence Centre has been operating since October 2015 and to date has approved 6 research projects costing £952k. The Centre has 16 industry members including large and small companies.

Mr Butler asked the Minister for the Economy to outline why his Department could not give the Electrical Training Trust a five year plan for electrical training.

(AQW 4707/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department does not provide five year training plans for any training provider as our systems are determined by employer demand for apprentices including electrical training. The Electrical Training Trust holds a contract, which commenced in August 2013, to deliver my Department's ApprenticeshipsNI training programme.

Mr McKee asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the implementation of the Food and Drink Future Skills Action Group Action Plan.

(AQW 4785/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Action Plan focused on the three key themes of skills provision, sector attractiveness and co-ordination and communication.

Progress was made in addressing all three issues, for example through the "Tasty Careers" initiative which promoted the industry to young people through a range of measures including visits by school children to employers premises in order to allow them to experience the potential working environment for themselves.

Deficits in leadership and management skills were addressed through "Leaders in Industry" which provided an opportunity for 25 industry leaders to enhance their skills through participation in a Level 5 programme through the William J Clinton Institute at Queen's University.

Other skills shortages were addressed through apprenticeships and other training provided through the Further Education Colleges.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for the Economy why NIE, when replacing electric meters at domestic properties, do not use smart meters; and whether there are plans to use smart meters.

(AQW 4798/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Department has undertaken a reassessment of the cost/benefit analysis for electricity smart meters. The findings are currently being considered and will be used to inform a policy decision in relation to smart meters in due course. It is important that any smart meter solution is cost-effective and offers customers best value for money.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the businesses in West Tyrone that have received funding from Invest NI in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4803/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The table below contains the names of those businesses located in the West Tyrone constituency that have been offered financial support by Invest NI between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2016.

Name	Year Offer Approved
Active Packaging Ltd	2013-14
Adventure Tours NI	2013-14
All Beverage Services Ltd	2013-14
Apcon (N.I.) Ltd	2013-14
Baronscourt Estate	2013-14
B-Bold (EU) Ltd	2013-14
Boyd Bedding	2013-14
Butyl Systems Ireland Ltd	2013-14
Cannon Specialist Vehicles	2013-14
Classic Marble (Showers) Ltd	2013-14
Colton Contracts Ltd	2013-14
CPL Supplies Ltd	2013-14
Creative Stone and Tile Ltd	2013-14
CRS (NI) Ltd	2013-14
Dalradian Resources Inc	2013-14
Display It	2013-14
Donegal Rapeseed Oil	2013-14
Dragon Brand Foods Ltd	2013-14
Eco Technologies International (NI) Ltd	2013-14
Fabplus Ltd	2013-14
Fascin8	2013-14
Fir Trees Strabane	2013-14
Frylite Ltd	2013-14
Global Horizon Skills Ltd	2013-14
Grosvenor Shirts Ltd	2013-14
Heavenly Tasty Organics Ltd	2013-14
Hegarty's (Fitted Furniture) Ltd	2013-14
Hydro NI	2013-14
Interactive Trading Group Ltd	2013-14
J.M.G. Systems Ltd	2013-14
Kelly's Inn	2013-14
KOKO Rose Boutique	2013-14
Lacomo Beauty Ltd	2013-14
LD2 Ltd	2013-14

Name	Year Offer Approved
Loughtec Ltd	2013-14
Maxwell Concrete	2013-14
McColgans Quality Foods Ltd	2013-14
MCE Services	2013-14
Naturelle Consumer Products Ltd	2013-14
Northern Crusher Spares Ltd	2013-14
Nutts About Pets	2013-14
Oaktree Wood Moulding Ltd	2013-14
O'Neill Electrics Ltd	2013-14
O'Neills Irish International Sports Company Ltd	2013-14
Origin Fresh	2013-14
P. McDermott and Sons (Omagh) Ltd	2013-14
Patrick McCaul Environmental Consulting Engineers	2013-14
Provita Eurotech Ltd	2013-14
R&S Biomass Equipment Ltd	2013-14
ROCO Magazine	2013-14
RTC Direct Ltd	2013-14
S & M Products	2013-14
TAS Controls	2013-14
Telestack Ltd	2013-14
Terex GB Ltd	2013-14
Tesab Engineering Ltd	2013-14
The Creative Media Company (NI) Ltd	2013-14
Tirquin Distribution Ltd	2013-14
Tyford Surveying Ltd	2013-14
Tyrone Advertiser	2013-14
Ultra Building Products Ltd	2013-14
Vision Lift	2013-14
Wallline Ltd	2013-14
Waste Systems Ltd	2013-14
Weld-Tech Engineering Services Ltd	2013-14
Winters Renewables	2013-14
Woodbank Kitchens	2013-14
Abertay Nationwide Training Ltd	2014-15
Adman Civil Projects Ltd	2014-15
Adventure Tours (Int) Ltd	2014-15
Arolco Ireland Ltd	2014-15
Blackthorn Design	2014-15
C & G Nugent Plant Hire Ltd	2014-15
Castle Paving Ireland Ltd	2014-15
Charles O'Doherty & Sons Ltd	2014-15

Name	Year Offer Approved
Claddagh Art	2014-15
Cleantec Equipment Ltd	2014-15
CRS (NI) Ltd	2014-15
Daiak Ltd	2014-15
Dalradian Resources Inc.	2014-15
Display It	2014-15
Donegal Rapeseed Oil	2014-15
Glen Fresh Foods Ltd	2014-15
Global Horizon Skills Ltd	2014-15
Gormleys Auctions Ltd	2014-15
Hi Tec Solutions	2014-15
Interactive Trading Group Ltd	2014-15
J.M.G. Systems Ltd	2014-15
Kenwell Engineering	2014-15
KOKO Rose Boutique	2014-15
Lacomo Beauty Ltd	2014-15
LD2 Ltd	2014-15
Lift-Eze Ltd	2014-15
Loughtec Ltd	2014-15
Mamamigo Ltd	2014-15
Maxwell Concrete	2014-15
MCC Building Systems Ltd	2014-15
McColgans Quality Foods Ltd	2014-15
MCE Services	2014-15
McGirr Engineering Ltd	2014-15
McKenna Precision Engineering Ltd	2014-15
MDE Controls Ltd	2014-15
Metberg Ltd	2014-15
MG Networks Ltd	2014-15
Mount Fabrication	2014-15
Mullan Engineering	2014-15
Naturelle Consumer Products Ltd	2014-15
North West Of Ireland Printing and Publishing Company Ltd	2014-15
O'Neill Electrics Ltd	2014-15
O'Neills Irish International Sports Company Ltd	2014-15
Oran Oak Engineering	2014-15
P. McDermott and Sons (Omagh) Ltd	2014-15
Pokertree Brewing Company Ltd	2014-15
RecyCo Ltd	2014-15
Riddell ATVs Ltd	2014-15
Roadmixer International Ltd	2014-15

Name	Year Offer Approved
ROCO Magazine	2014-15
S & M Products	2014-15
Spherius	2014-15
Terex GB Ltd	2014-15
Tesab Engineering Ltd	2014-15
Tirquin Distribution Ltd	2014-15
Town & Country Guttering	2014-15
Trillick Landrover Centre	2014-15
Wallline Ltd	2014-15
Waste Systems Ltd	2014-15
Active Packaging Ltd	2015-16
Arolco Ireland Ltd	2015-16
Ballymore Civils Ltd	2015-16
Boran-Mopack Ltd	2015-16
Crosh Valley Farm	2015-16
CRS (NI) Ltd	2015-16
Devine Memorials	2015-16
Dickson & Co Insurance Brokers	2015-16
Display It	2015-16
Dragon Brand Foods Ltd	2015-16
Ecohog Ltd	2015-16
Fir Trees Strabane	2015-16
Glen Fresh Foods Ltd	2015-16
Herbst Machinery Ltd	2015-16
J.M.G. Systems Ltd	2015-16
Linton & Robinson Environmental Ltd	2015-16
Loughtec Ltd	2015-16
Maxwell Concrete	2015-16
McAleer & Teague Ltd	2015-16
McColgans Quality Foods Ltd	2015-16
MCE Services	2015-16
McGirr Engineering Ltd	2015-16
Metberg Ltd	2015-16
Naturelle Consumer Products Ltd	2015-16
North West Of Ireland Printing and Publishing Company Ltd	2015-16
Northern Crusher Spares Ltd	2015-16
Nutts About Pets	2015-16
O'Neills Irish International Sports Company Ltd	2015-16
Pedro Pet Foods Ltd	2015-16
Provita Eurotech Ltd	2015-16
SafeCert Awards Ltd	2015-16

Name	Year Offer Approved
Taylors (Fyfin) Ltd	2015-16
Tesab Engineering Ltd	2015-16
Visual Edge Ltd	2015-16
Whistler's Premium Dog Food	2015-16

The names of sole traders have not been included in the response, as this is considered to be third party personal data and would breach the first and second principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 in that it could be used to identify those individuals.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy which Regional Colleges are offering courses for young people seeking to pursue an apprenticeship in (i) plastering; and (ii) bricklaying.
(AQW 4822/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: ApprenticeshipsNI funded courses in plastering are currently offered by South Eastern, Southern and South West Regional Colleges at their campuses in Lisburn, Newry, Omagh and Enniskillen.

All six Regional Colleges offer ApprenticeshipsNI funded courses in bricklaying, within campuses located at Millfield Belfast, Farm Lodge Ballymena, Newtownabbey, Springtown, Limavady, Newtownards, Newry, Dungannon, Enniskillen and Omagh.

In addition, there are ten other training providers - based throughout Northern Ireland - also contracted to deliver apprenticeship training in the area of construction.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy to list the careers fairs held outside Northern Ireland which were attended by representatives from (i) Queen's University, Belfast; and (ii) Ulster University, in each year since 2012.
(AQW 5081/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department does not hold this information.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the Strabane Business Park.
(AQW 5090/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: In recent months, Invest NI has had discussions with a number of companies regarding their interest in locating to Strabane Business Park. Discussions between Invest NI and businesses in relation to investment plans are commercially sensitive and as such it would be inappropriate for me to provide any comment at this time. Invest NI will continue to pursue these and any future suitable property interests.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister for the Economy when he was first provided with access to the document compiled by the European Policy and Co-ordination Unit of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, entitled Preliminary Analysis on the impact of a UK Referendum on its membership of the European Union.
(AQO 441/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: This analysis paper was commissioned by the Head of the Civil Service but was not sent to Ministers for consideration following its completion.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the Invest NI business park in Strabane.
(AQW 5228/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: In recent months, Invest NI has had discussions with a number of companies regarding their interest in locating to Strabane Business Park. Discussions between Invest NI and businesses in relation to investment plans are commercially sensitive and as such it would be inappropriate for me to provide any comment at this time. Invest NI will continue to pursue these and any future suitable property interests.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for the Economy, further to his statement in the Assembly on 11 October, and in the absence of an air transport strategy, to outline how decisions are made regarding support for new routes, such as a direct link to the Middle East.
(AQO 557/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Air connectivity is a key driver in terms of growing the Northern Ireland economy and we have already witnessed considerable success on the part of our airports in securing new routes in recent years, including the establishment of a Ryanair base at Belfast International Airport and the launch of a Brussels Airlines service from George Best Belfast City Airport.

Government cannot dictate to commercially run airports which air routes they should pursue. However, as I have stated on several occasions, my approach is to be more interventionist in relation to securing new air routes to help develop Northern

Ireland's economy. Where airports bring forward potential new routes, I will consider them on a case by case basis and within the confines of the European Commission's rules on permissible support for airlines and airports.

Decisions to support new routes will be dependent on a number of factors, for example the strategic importance of the route in terms of business and inbound tourism potential and scope for onward connectivity, the long term sustainability of the proposed route, and whether it is considered to be a priority destination for Northern Ireland.

Dr Farry asked the Minister for the Economy, in relation to the co-ordination between schools and Further Education colleges, how he plans to work with the Minister of Education on the development of a strategy for 14 to 19 year olds.

(AQO 559/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: As I have previously advised the member this is a matter we will address comprehensively in the context of the new Programme for Government.

There is much we can do to ensure that our education system delivers the best possible outcomes for young people. That said, I am also clear that where we can make early progress there is no reason to delay.

An area where I and the Minister of Education are agreed that early action would be useful is that of careers guidance. I believe we have a comprehensive curriculum offer in both schools and colleges, but it is complex and too often choices based on incomplete information or on conflicting advice.

There are a number of key decision points but those most important are at 14 when GCSE choices are made and at 16, the end of compulsory education. It is vital that good choices are made at these key decision points to ensure young people follow the path that best meets their ambitions.

For these reasons the Minister of Education and I have endorsed the joint policy commitments outlined in the Careers Strategy - Preparing for Success, which provides the strategic direction for the delivery of careers education and guidance until 2020.

Together we recently attended the third meeting of the Careers Advisory Forum established to provide independent advice to both of us on key areas including employer and education engagement, at both a strategic and local level.

The Minister of Education and I will work together to ensure a coherent and sufficiently broad range of subject choices and pathways are available to meet the needs of every young person, as well as the needs of the economy.

We will want to see as much complementarity as possible in the interface between colleges and schools.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the importance of Northern Ireland continuing to participate in the European Single Market.

(AQO 560/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Maintaining close trading ties with our European neighbours is undoubtedly important for us and I want to make it clear that I will be working with my colleagues in the Executive to get the best deal for Northern Ireland in the negotiations for the UK exit from the EU.

Whichever means of accessing the EU emerges in due course I remain committed to ensuring that Northern Ireland will remain a great place to live, work and invest, with close business and trading ties with our European neighbours.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the efforts being made to boost the number of visitors from the Republic of Ireland.

(AQO 562/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: From January to June 2016, year on year, trips by visitors from the Republic of Ireland rose by 27% to 179,000, with those here on holidays rising by 6%.

The Republic of Ireland market has huge untapped potential and Tourism Northern Ireland has initiated a new advertising campaign in the Republic of Ireland which will run until the end of Autumn 2016.

This campaign went live in September 2016 with a 60 second TV advertisement positioning Northern Ireland as an Autumn short break destination. It is being delivered through TV, Outdoor and Press with Social Media, Digital Advertising and email marketing.

Tourism NI has developed this campaign in partnership with the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation whose members are, for the first time able, to access a marketing fund to promote themselves in the Republic of Ireland market.

Enabling our industry to market itself in this way is an important step towards ensuring we can compete with the more mature Republic of Ireland tourism industry.

A bespoke campaign website has been developed to showcase unique Northern Ireland experiences and industry offers. The website has also been supported by a significant investment in digital marketing.

Tourism NI has also set up an independent Taskforce to address the longer term challenges of increasing visitor numbers from the Republic of Ireland.

The primary objective of the group is to identify the key strategic imperatives for creating sustainable growth in the number of holiday makers from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland over the next 5 years.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for the Economy how he is improving trade links with the United States of America.
(AQO 563/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The United States of America is the second most significant trading partner for Northern Ireland, second only to the Republic of Ireland. Figures for the 12 months to June 2016 indicated that Northern Ireland exported nearly £1.5 billion in manufactured goods to the USA, an increase of just under 74% on the previous year.

The US market is an important focus for me, my Department and Invest NI. During my trip to Chicago last week, I met with the local representatives of the British-American Business Council, which provides its members with valuable business development, networking and marketing opportunities, as well as engaging with government on a broad range of policy issues.

Invest NI has a team of US-based Trade staff located in Boston, Miami and San Francisco. Additionally, Invest NI has US-based Trade Advisors covering a broad range of sectors across the East and West Coasts. All are engaged to help Northern Ireland companies with research and planning for in-market visits to develop trade opportunities.

Invest NI also has an extensive programme of trade missions to the US and participation at key trade exhibitions.

My Department, through Invest NI, works closely with the Department for International Trade in the USA on trade and investment opportunities. For example, organising joint trade missions, and partnering at key exhibitions, such as Con Expo in Las Vegas in March 2017.

Invest NI also offers a broad range of support to help companies export. I recently launched an enhanced range of support as part of a Trade Accelerator Plan and Invest NI is currently scheduling increased activity in sectors such as Materials Handling, Aerospace, Life Sciences, Creative, Digital and Marine.

During 2016 the First Minister and deputy First Minister announced two US Advisory Councils, on the East and West Coasts, to provide valuable insight on macroeconomic issues and trends in the USA likely to impact on trade growth and investment opportunities for local businesses.

My Department also works with the Northern Ireland Bureau to develop mutually beneficial partnerships in USA and support our trade and investment efforts.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for the Economy how many young people are regarded as not in education, employment or training.
(AQO 565/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: According to the Labour Force Survey, there were 21,000 persons in Northern Ireland aged 16-24 years who were not in education, employment or training in April – June 2016.

Department of Finance

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance to detail how much of the Executive's sugar tax fund will be allocated to the Department of Education to increase schools' physical activity and breakfast clubs.
(AQW 4101/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): The Executive will receive a Barnett share of any additional spending in England, financed by the sugar tax announced by the British Chancellor in the 2016 March Budget.

Allocations flowing through the Barnett Formula are unhypothecated for allocation by the Executive in line with local needs and priorities. It will therefore be for the Executive to decide how to allocate this funding as part of future budget processes.

I am disappointed that this Tax/levy is being imposed over our heads by Westminster thus preventing us from shaping the initiative in the best way to suit our local needs and wishes. This is a breach of the final settlement with the devolved administration.

However it is my hope that additional resources will enable us to look afresh at key issues around Health, Education, Sport, Recreation and Travel issues which span many Government Departments.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance how many staff are employed in his Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.
(AQW 4323/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: There are 5 Executive Information Service (EIS) Press Officers within the Dept of Finance.

The DoF Press Officers are involved in a wide range of press and public engagement activities. As well as dealing with the media, they work across a wide range of platforms including social media to ensure the public is kept informed of the work of the Department and how it impacts on the lives of our citizens and businesses.

The total salary cost for EIS Press Officers in the Department of Finance Press Office for 2015/16 was £196,148.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance to outline the impact of the Voluntary Exit Scheme on the composition of the Civil Service, in terms of community background.

(AQW 4744/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The attached tables show (A) the community background profile of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) workforce as at 1 July 2016 and (B) what it would have been if all the staff who left under the Voluntary Exit Scheme had remained in post.

In relation to Table B it is not possible to state with any degree of certainty that this would have been the profile had the Voluntary Exit Scheme not been launched as it is likely that some of those who left under the scheme would have left the service through other means, i.e. via retirement or resignation.

Table A – NICS Staff by Community Background as at 1 July 2016

Community Background	Number of staff	Percentage of Staff
Protestant	11,905	49.5
Roman Catholic	11,459	47.7
Not Determined	680	2.8
Total	24,044	100.0

Table B – NICS Staff by Community Background as at 1 July 2016 including Voluntary Exit Scheme leavers

Community Background	Number of staff	Percentage of Staff
Protestant	13,481	49.9
Roman Catholic	12,752	47.2
Not Determined	801	3.0
Total	27,034	100.0

* table may not add up due to roundings

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Finance, in relation to the pre-consultation phase with key stakeholders highlighted in the timetable for the 2016 budget, (i) who his Department considers key stakeholders; (ii) how Departments identify and determine their key stakeholders; and (iii) how long the consultation period will last.

(AQW 4932/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir:

- (i) In the past this set of stakeholders has included:
- NIC/ICTU- Umbrella organisation for NI unions
 - UNISON- Public sector union
 - NIPSA- Civil Service union
 - NICVA- Community and Voluntary Groups
 - CBI- Business Federation of Small Businesses
 - Equality Commission
 - Women's Policy Group
 - Institute of Directors
 - Construction Employer's Federation

However, the offer is available to any organisation that wishes to avail of it.

- (ii) It is for individual departments to determine their own stakeholders and how they engage with them.
- (iii) The pre-consultation period is dependent on the availability of stakeholders however we anticipate that these meetings will have concluded before the British Chancellor's Statement on 23 November.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance, pursuant to AQW 3801/16-21, to outline any modelling work that has been carried out by his Department to estimate the revenue impact of altering the non-domestic regional rate.

(AQW 4988/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: While no specific modelling has been done, the Executive will consider the approach to the Regional Rate as part of the wider Budget process.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Finance to list the banks and financial institutions that have taken ownership of private and public building sites, housing estates and housing property as a result of the financial crisis.

(AQW 5014/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: My Department has not disposed of any property assets as a result of the financial crisis. Property assets are only disposed of where the Department no longer has a need for that asset.

More broadly, my Department does not hold the information requested on assets obtained by the banks and other financial institutions.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Finance (i) to detail the number of departmental and arm's-length body staff that exited under the Voluntary Exit Scheme, broken down by grade; (ii) how many of these posts were then suppressed; and (iii) (a) what proportion; and (b) how many posts were later (1) advertised; and (2) filled by internal promotion.

(AQW 5042/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir:

- (i) to detail the number of departmental and arm's-length body staff that exited under the Voluntary Exit Scheme, broken down by grade;

The number of staff falling within the administrative responsibility of the Department of Finance for exit under the 2015/16 VES was 511 – the table below shows the breakdown by grade.

Grade	No of Staff
Industrial	1
Grade C	2
Accountant (DP)	2
Administrative Assistant	29
Administrative Officer	133
Assistant Director	1
Assistant Economist	1
Assistant Information Officer	1
Assistant Librarian	1
Assistant Statistician	11
Assistant Valuer	6
Auditor DP	1
Chief Clerk of Works (SPTO)	1
Chief Law Clerk	1
Clerk of Works 1 (HPTO)	4
Clerk of Works 2 (PTO)	3
Deputy Economist	1
Deputy Principal Statistician	8
Deputy Principal	37
District Valuer (G6)	1
Executive Officer i	25
Executive Officer ii	45
Fire Officer 2 (PTO)	1
Higher Map and Charting Officer	1
HPTO (Architect Assistant)	1
HPTO (Civil Engineer Assistant)	1

Grade	No of Staff
HPTO (Structural Engineer Assistant)	2
HPTO Graphic Designer	1
HPTO Safety Advisory Officer	1
ICT Level 3	10
ICT Level 4	8
ICT Level 5	4
ICT Level 6	4
ICT Level 7	1
ICT Level 8	1
Law Clerk 1	1
Mapper	1
Mapping and Charting Officer	11
Medical Officer	1
Nurse Grade G	1
Personal Secretary	10
PPTO (Architect) (G7)	3
PPTO Civil Engineer	1
PPTO Quantity Surveyor (G7)	1
PR Mapping and Charting Officer (G7)	1
Principal Economist (G7)	1
Principal Legal Officer	5
Principal Statistician (G7)	2
Principal	19
PTO (Architectural Assistant)	1
Senior Map and Charting Officer	2
Senior Mapper	1
Senior Personal Secretary	2
Senior Principal (G6)	1
Senior Principal Legal Officer	4
Senior Principal statistician (G6)	1
Senior Valuer (G7)	3
SGB2 Security Guard	4
SPTO (Architectural Assistant)	3
SPTO (M and E Engineer)	2
SPTO (M and E Engineering Assistant)	1
SPTO (Quantity Surveying Assistant)	1
SPTO Health and Safety Adviser	1
Staff Officer	32
Support grade 1 Security Guard	4
Support Grade Band 1	6
Support Grade Band 2	2

Grade	No of Staff
Support Manager 2	1
Support Manager 3	1
Typing Manager	1
Typist	12
Valuer i	6
Valuer ii	5
Assistant Secretary	3
Assistant Solicitor (G5)	1
Senior Medical Officer	1
Total	511

- (ii) how many of these posts were then suppressed;
- Of the 511 staff who exited, 70 of these posts were not under DoF control.
 - Of the 441 DoF posts, 385 (87%) were either suppressed directly or alternative suppressions were secured.
- (iii) (a) what proportion; and (b) how many posts were later (1) advertised; and (2) filled by internal promotion;

The DoF Permanent Secretary gave approval to fill 35 (8%) of VES posts. A variety of methods under the Vacancy Management system have been used to fill vacancies, however none of the posts have been filled by internal promotion.
Back in Business Rate Support Scheme

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Finance how many new business ventures have been established as a result of the Back in Business Rate Support Scheme since 2012, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 5103/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The information requested is not available as Land & Property Services (LPS) does not hold information on whether or not a business is a new venture.

We can however say that ratepayers have benefitted from the Back in Business Rate Support Scheme for 638 new occupancies in non-domestic properties since April 2012.

The number of properties that benefitted in each constituency since April 2012 is given in the table below.

Constituency	Number of Non-Domestic Properties Benefitting from Back in Business Relief
Belfast East	33
Belfast North	24
Belfast South	70
Belfast West	20
East Antrim	22
East Londonderry	37
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	39
Foyle	45
Lagan Valley	40
Mid Ulster	16
Newry and Mourne	55
North Antrim	40
North Down	22
South Antrim	32
South Down	34
Strangford	27

Constituency	Number of Non-Domestic Properties Benefitting from Back in Business Relief
Upper Bann	50
West Tyrone	32
Total	638

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance what financial arrangements and outlay attended the termination of Special Adviser contracts at the end of the last mandate.

(AQW 5193/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: This response is in respect of Department of Finance only.

The Department followed the Code Governing the Appointment of Special Advisers with severance payment limited to the total number of days between employment.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance (i) how many candidates were considered for the post of Ministerial Special Adviser; (ii) what account was taken of any potential imbalance in religious background or gender in the pool from which he selected his Special Adviser; (iii) how wide was the trawl for candidates; (iv) how did he ensure that it was broadly based as required by the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers; and (v) to publish the job description and person specification drawn up before the Special Adviser was appointed.

(AQW 5435/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Department of Finance Special Adviser was appointed in accordance with the Code Governing the Appointment of Special Advisers.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Finance to detail any pay rises given to staff within the Rivers Agency during (i) 2011-12; (ii) 2012-13; (iii) 2013-14; (iv) 2014-15; and (v) 2015-16.

(AQW 5446/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Pay is negotiated centrally through the Department of Finance. The pay remit for each year is set out below for both non-industrial and industrial staff across the entire Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Year	Non-industrial	Industrial
2011-12	2.7%	Increase of 15.5p per hour
2012-13	3.7%	1%
2013-14	2.8%	1%
2014-15	1.5%	1%
2015-16	1.1%*	**

* In 2015-16, the consolidated increase was 1.1% for staff within pay-bands, but in addition 0.41% of non-consolidated payments were made to staff on the maximum of their pay-scales.

** The industrial trade unions are currently balloting their members on a 2 year pay deal for industrial staff worth 4% in total for 15/16 and 16/17.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance what arrangements have been made in his Department to promote co-operation as required by Section 2(2) of the Children's Services Co-operation Act.

(AQW 5547/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: My Department will, in the context of the new Children and Young People's Strategy and the Review of Civil and Family Justice, seek to identify new collaborative opportunities that will help to promote the best interests of children and young people.

DoF is also developing guidance on the pooling of budgets which will help to facilitate co-operation between children's authorities. This will be incorporated in the "In year monitoring guidance" in due course.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Finance to outline a timeline for his Departmental Solicitor's Office decision on Northern Ireland Water's statutory powers to carry out work on an asset which was on private property at Sicily Park, Finaghy.

(AQW 5551/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: In order to maintain cross-Executive confidence in its impartiality, the Departmental Solicitor's Office is operationally independent of the Department of Finance and legal work like this will be privileged to the client department. You would therefore be best raising any queries on this issue with the Minister for Infrastructure.

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance to outline the circumstances when he or his Special Adviser must give clearance before a Freedom of Information response can be issued.
(AQW 5717/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Under two exemptions of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000 (s.24 – national security and s.36 – conduct of public affairs), the Minister must act as the qualified person of the Department and give his “reasonable opinion” that disclosure would or would be likely to prejudice the safeguarding of national security or the conduct of public affairs.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance what assurances have been sought from the EU on the security of funding under the INTERREG Programme.
(AQW 5730/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The INTERREG VA programme has a total value of €283 million.

Following the outcome of the Referendum on EU membership, I wrote to the European Commission, along with my counterpart Paschal Donohue, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, outlining our continued commitment to the successful implementation of the programme and requesting a meeting to clarify the basis on which we could proceed. The Commission responded stating its officials would not engage in any discussions until notification of Article 50 has taken place.

It should be noted that the British Chancellor's announcement on 3rd October, guaranteeing its share to projects approved prior to a change of relations with the EU is a positive development for INTERREG VA, in that it should facilitate the commitment of expenditure to the full value of the programme.

I can assure you that I and my officials are working to ensure full commitment of not only INTERREG VA but also PEACE IV funding.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance whether he has written to the EU Regional Policy Commissioner regarding the potential implications of Brexit on the PEACE and INTERREG Programmes; and will he place on public record any response received.
(AQW 5731/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Following the Referendum result on EU membership, I wrote to Corina Cretu, the European Commissioner for Regional Policy, with my counterpart in the South, outlining our continued commitment to the successful implementation of the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes and requesting a meeting to clarify the basis on which we could proceed.

I received a response stating Commission officials would not engage in any discussions until a notification of Article 50 has taken place.

I have now placed this response in the Assembly library.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Finance to detail the (i) total number; and (ii) proportion of (a) Assembly Written Questions; (b) Assembly Priority Written Questions; and (c) Freedom of Information requests directed at his Department that have been answered within the maximum permitted timescales since May 2016.
(AQW 5745/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The detail sought, for the period 1 May to 30 September 2016, is provided in the table below.

Type	Number asked	Proportion (%) within timescales
(a) Assembly Written Questions	205	70%
(b) Assembly Priority Questions	19	21%
(c) Freedom of Information requests	104	72%

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance, following assurances from the UK Treasury that all structural and investment fund projects signed before the Autumn Statement will be fully funded, even when these projects continue beyond the UK's departure from the EU, (i) at what stage in the development process should a project be in order to be signed; and (ii) who is responsible for signing such projects.
(AQW 5795/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The responsibility for signing off projects in European Structural and Investment Fund Programmes lies with the designated programme managing authorities in accordance with the arrangements agreed with their independent monitoring committees, and should follow appropriate appraisal of proposals.

Department for Infrastructure

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of his Department's implementation of the recommendation of the A6 Toome-Castledawson Inquiry with regards to establishing procedures to resolve the communications gap between his Department, and landowners and the community, in particular in relation to the A5 Western Transport Corridor.

(AQW 3439/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): The inspector's comments on communications within the A6 Toome-Castledawson Public Inquiry report are noted and it is acknowledged and recognised that comprehensive communications are necessary in progressing major road projects such as the A5 Western Transport Corridor (A5WTC) project.

Throughout the development of the A5 project there has been ongoing consultation with affected landowners, residents and Statutory Authorities.

In the period 2007-2010, the study area, preliminary options, preferred route and proposed scheme were presented on four separate occasions in events at four locations local to the Western Transport Corridor. The first event in 2008 associated with the study area, was attended by 388 people and in February 2009, the preliminary options consultation event attracted 2546 people. In July 2009, a public exhibition held to consult on the preferred route was attended by 2550 people and a further event associated with the proposed scheme was held in October 2010 and was attended by 1219 people. Over the same time period approximately 3000 meetings were undertaken with individual landowners to review the scheme detail and land take requirements and a total of 2577 letters were received and responded to during the formal consultation period.

As a consequence of the court's decision in April 2013 to quash the Minister's decision on the making of the Orders, the Department undertook reinstatement works on land where preliminary works had been previously undertaken. This involved meeting with 113 affected landowners to agree reinstatement works and compensation.

During the Spring and Autumn of 2014 and in advance of the re-publication of the draft statutory Orders and new Environmental Statement, there was an extensive consultation exercise which involved a total of 534 meetings with affected landowners.

Publication of the draft statutory orders and Environmental Statement on 16 February 2016, initiated a consultation period extending to 2 June 2016, and this included Public Information events, held over four days in March 2016. These events, which included a computer generated 'fly through' of the scheme and a detailed display of information boards, were attended by 1045 people over the four days. 3000 brochures for each section were produced, 16,600 leaflets were distributed and posters advertising the events placed at 66 locations.

During the consultation period 991 letters of representation were made to the Department, which were responded to in detail. These letters and responses were forwarded to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) who have been appointed by my Department as the independent Inspector to administer a Public Inquiry (PI) for the A5WTC scheme, which opened 4 October 2016 and is currently scheduled to finish 11 November 2016.

PAC issued questionnaires to all affected landowners and Statutory Authorities who made representations to ascertain if they wished to participate in the PI process. 120 number responded that they wished to attend and be involved in the round table discussions set up to discuss and get opinions in the strategic and individual issues categorised by the PAC.

All communications during this process will be processed in the Inspector's Report, which is expected around May 2017. My Department will consider the recommendations of the Report in detail before I make a decision on whether to proceed with the scheme and make the necessary statutory Orders (Direction Order, Vesting Order and Stopping-Up Order).

Overall, I believe the A5WTC project team have carried out thorough and extensive communication with all interested parties along the A5 route corridor, and this will continue during and after the Public Inquiry process.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to outline the business case and risk assessment that took place prior to the Board of Northern Ireland Water permitting oil exploratory drilling to occur within the water catchment area of Woodburn dams; and; (ii) whether he would provide a copy of any such assessment.

(AQW 4016/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Infrastrata employed RPS consultants to produce a document to inform NI Water's decision-making. A copy of this document, redacted to protect the personal details of junior members of staff and third parties, will be placed in the Assembly Library. NI Water considered this report and carried out an informed and detailed analysis of the risks to the public water supply in relation to the exploratory oil drill at Woodburn.

NI Water's assessment of risk is contained within its Drinking Water Safety Plan, which considered ground disturbance – sediment and turbidity in raw water, vehicle access and operation of machinery on the site with potential for oil spill, and the storage of chemicals on site. This assessment concluded that, following the application of appropriate mitigating actions, there were no significant residual risks to drinking water quality as a result of exploratory drilling at Woodburn.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the arrangements for traffic wardens to enforce parking penalties in loading bays during working days but outside working hours.

(AQW 4022/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's contract with NSL enables parking enforcement of loading bays to be carried out at different times with Traffic Attendants being deployed from Monday to Saturday between 7.45am and 6.30pm. A reduced level of service is provided on Sundays between 1.00pm and 6.30pm. A reduced level of service is also provided in Belfast from Tuesday to Saturday between 6.30pm and 10.30pm.

Parking restrictions, including loading bays that are continuously operational (i.e. 24 hours per day, 7 days per week), are not enforced by my Department's parking enforcement service outside the above working hours.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the new ticketing system for use on railways, with regard to an assurance that post-primary school pupils will not be disadvantaged by it.

(AQW 4024/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The new ticketing system will apply across both Bus and Rail and will ensure greater flexibility and convenience to all Translink customers. It is being implemented to bring more advantages to the travelling public, including post-primary school pupils.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department's contract with Parking Enforcement Officers allows for enforcement to take place at different times on different working days.

(AQW 4025/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's contract with NSL enables parking enforcement to be carried out at different times with Traffic Attendants being deployed from Monday to Saturday between 7.45am and 6.30pm. A reduced level of service is provided on Sundays between 1.00pm and 6.30pm. A reduced level of service is also provided in Belfast from Tuesday to Saturday between 6.30pm and 10.30pm.

Mr Ford asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has any plans to increase car park capacity at Mossley West railway station, including using unused Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs owned land to the north of the station.

(AQW 4037/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink has appointed a Design Team to assess options to provide additional Park & Ride spaces at Mossley West Train Halt. The land being reviewed is owned by Invest NI, situated to the west of the Halt and would essentially be an extension to the existing Park & Ride facility. The land is currently on a long term lease to Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council. Translink is not at this time considering the use of any other land to facilitate the extension of the Park & Ride at Mossley West.

Mr Ford asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the land owned by her Department to the north of Mossley West railway station could be used by Translink to provide additional car parking spaces.

(AQW 4038/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink has appointed a Design Team to assess options to provide additional Park & Ride spaces at Mossley West Train Halt. The land being reviewed is owned by Invest NI, situated to the west of the Halt and would essentially be an extension to the existing Park & Ride facility. The land is currently on a long term lease to Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council. Translink is not at this time considering the use of any other land to facilitate the extension of the Park & Ride at Mossley West.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) his Department's remit in regard to upgrading or installing new sewerage treatment plants in rural settlements; (ii) any plans for investment in necessary sewerage infrastructure in Tattyreagh and Eskra, County Tyrone; and (iii) whether his Department will work with other relevant Departments and agencies to ensure that planning approvals or future applications for housing in both locations can be developed and actualised as soon as possible.

(AQW 4040/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) NI Water has developed a prioritised list for the upgrading of Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTW) with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency for the PC15 (2015-2021) investment period.
- (ii) At present, NI Water has no plans to install infrastructure in Tattyreagh or to upgrade the WwTW at Eskra.
- (iii) NI Water, TransportNI and Rivers Agency work closely with all parties involved in development proposals by providing input into planning applications at an early stage. My officials, as part of consultations, will continue to engage and provide input into any current or future development applications in Tattyreagh and Eskra settlements.

With the transfer of the majority of planning powers to local councils on 1 April 2015, the responsibility for the processing and decision making for local and major planning applications passed to the councils.

Given that the settlements of Tattreagh and Eskra are located within Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, council officials are best placed to consider the implementation of development proposals in both locations. The member may therefore wish to raise this matter directly with the Council Chief Executive, Mr. Brendan Hegarty who can be contacted at the address below:

The Grange, Mountjoy Road, Omagh, County Tyrone BT79 7BL.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on road improvement works carried out as part of the Rural Roads Initiative in Upper Bann.

(AQW 4064/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department does not hold the requested information on a constituency basis, but rather by local Council area. However, I can advise that initial programme of work in the Banbridge and Craigavon area was increased from 42 to 46 sites due to the availability of funding.

30 of these sites have now been treated, with the remaining sites programmed for completion by the end of November 2016.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the total spent on road resurfacing works within the (i) Portadown; (ii) Banbridge; and (iii) Lurgan areas, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4067/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department does not maintain a record of expenditure in the format requested, however, I can provide the member with information on road resurfacing expenditure by Division.

The towns Portadown, Banbridge and Lurgan are within the Divisional boundaries of TransportNI's Southern Division.

Table 1 below details expenditure on road resurfacing in the whole of Southern Division.

Table 1

Division	2011-12 £k	2012-13 £k	2013-14 £k	2014-15 £k	2015-16 £k
Southern Division	19,328	18,315	22,943	16,328	7,176

Table 2 below details the District Council areas within TransportNI's Southern Division.

Table 2

Pre Local Government Reform	Post Local Government Reform
Ards	Ards & North Down Borough Council
Armagh City	Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
Banbridge	
Craigavon	
Down	Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
Newry and Mourne	

Officials from my Department meet with District Councils bi-annually to deliver an update on schemes in their area. Reports presented to the District Councils, noted in Table 2 above, are available at:

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/corporatereports/topic/5244>

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail Transport NI's 2016-17 maintenance budget for each section office.
(AQW 4080/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's 2016-17 forecast outturn for maintenance activities by TransportNI's section offices is detailed in the table below.

Client Section Offices	Forecast Outturn for 2016-17 £k
Antrim and Newtownabbey	3,422
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon (East)	4,087
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon (West)	3,516

Client Section Offices	Forecast Outturn for 2016-17 £k
Belfast North	2,622
Belfast South	1,034
Causeway Coast and Glens (West)	3,395
Causeway Coast and Glens (East)	2,119
Fermanagh and Omagh (East)	2,855
Fermanagh and Omagh (West)	3,209
Lisburn & Castlereagh	3,734
Derry and Strabane	3,738
Mid and East Antrim	3,703
Mid Ulster (North)	3,554
Mid Ulster (South)	2,641
Newry , Mourne and Down (East)	2,505
Newry , Mourne and Down (West)	3,546
North Down and Ards	3,487
Total	53,167

The Member should note that some of the maintenance budget is managed centrally within the Divisions and not allocated to a specific section office. Therefore the figures in the table above exclude Street Lighting Maintenance, Traffic Signs & Signals Maintenance, Bridge Maintenance, and TransportNI's Internal Contractor.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure what alternative options are being explored by his Department to ensure that the York Street Interchange project is fully funded even in the event of a withdrawal of some or all European Union funding. **(AQW 4105/16-21)**

Mr Hazzard: There is no doubt that the outcome of the EU Referendum has presented considerable challenges for the Executive.

The York Street Interchange is one of a number of projects where European Union funding has been identified to potentially complement conventional funding. I will be considering this project along with other capital schemes as part of the Budget 2016 process, and within the context of rebalancing investment across the Region, particularly in the West.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure what steps have been taken by his Department to prevent a repeat of the breach of European Union procurement law that led to the Department being taken to court over the A8 procurement process. **(AQW 4109/16-21)**

Mr Hazzard: TransportNI is the Centre of Procurement Expertise for road construction projects within my Department. It has amended its procedures to take into consideration the judgement in this court case and the revised processes for dealing with abnormally low tenders, as detailed within the new Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of public transport provision in Upper Bann. **(AQW 4139/16-21)**

Mr Hazzard: I am aware that Translink currently provides a wide range of services in Upper Bann which includes:

- A mixture of scheduled and school services through Ulsterbus;
- Goldline Express network that provides longer journeys in the area including connections to Belfast International Airport and Belfast City Airport;
- Local town services within Armagh, Portadown, Lurgan and Banbridge;
- Rural routes service a number of villages and small towns; and
- Rail services that serve Poyntzpass, Scarva, Portadown and Lurgan.

I believe that the level of public transport provision within Upper Bann is appropriate when taking account of demand in the area and available funding. In conjunction with my Department, Translink continually monitors those services to ensure that demand is met and that an appropriate level of service is in place.

Further to this, my Department is to commence work on refreshing the full suite of transport plans. It is anticipated that work will begin in the very near future on the Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan (RSTNTP). This will be followed

by a series of Local Transport Plans which will be developed by my Department in conjunction with Council officials including those in the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon District Council.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department will raise the kerb levels of a number of footpaths in Brook Street, Omagh to further enhance the safety of pedestrians.

(AQW 4152/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following consultation with elected representatives and members of the public, TransportNI recently introduced a one way traffic system on Brook Street Omagh.

This new One Way System has eased traffic congestion and reduced vehicle/pedestrian conflict on this narrow urban route, improving road safety for all road users and in particular school children walking between the Holy Family Primary School sites on Brookmount Road and Brook Street.

It is acknowledged that raising the kerbs would provide some further benefit but this work would not be considered a priority at this time.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) how many taxi operator licences exist; and (ii) of these, how many are failing to fully comply with all required regulations.

(AQW 4161/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The figures requested are National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. The latest published statistics reflect the position as at 31 March 2016 and are detailed below.

Small Operator	1,467
Large Operator	237
Total Number of Taxi Operator Licences	1,704

Source DfI National Statistics

The Department does not publish similar statistics for part (ii) of this question. However, during the period 2015/16, 45 licensed operators have been issued with a £200 Fixed Penalty Notice relating to the offence of 'operator operating a taxi service with an unlicensed driver or vehicle'. In addition, 40 Improvement Notices¹ were issued following compliance audits conducted at licensed taxi operator premises.

1 These are not Official Published Statistics.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Infrastructure when were the temporary staff processing Blue Badges dismissed by his Department, as referred to at the Committee for Infrastructure on 28 September 2016.

(AQW 4166/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The decision to end temporary staff contracts for the Blue Badge Unit was taken in December 2014 at a time when the then Department for Regional Development was facing an overspend. Plaque on New Bellarena Railway Halt

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the cost of the commemorative plaque at the new Bellarena railway halt which was removed by Translink.

(AQW 4168/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink has advised that the commemorative plaque was supplied to it at zero cost.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how much has still to be paid to landowners that had their land vested as part of the A8 road project; and (ii) how many claims have been finalised.

(AQW 4177/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The total amount still to be paid to landowners, who have had their land vested on A8 Belfast to Larne Dualling scheme will not be known until all claims have been submitted and finally agreed.

To date, approximately 46% of landowners out of 147 impacted by the scheme have agreed their formal claim for compensation and have been paid.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the number of motorists in East Derry that have had their licences suspended for motoring offences relating to driving under the influence of drink/drugs and; (ii) the number of motor cyclists suspended for the same reasons, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4188/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Driver & Vehicle Agency's (DVA) un-validated management information, which is set out below, shows the number of drivers, including motor cyclists, from the East Derry area who have been disqualified from driving for offences relating to driving under the influence of drink/drugs in each of the last five years.

The statistics also provide information on the total number of drivers who were disqualified from driving for alcohol or drug-related offences and, separately, the number of drivers who, at the time of conviction, held full entitlement to drive motorcycles. The DVA does not hold information on the category of vehicle being driven at the point of detection.

The Driver Licensing database does not hold records by Parliamentary Constituency area, therefore the following postcodes were used to identify drivers within the East Derry constituency - BT47, BT49, BT51, BT52, BT53, BT55, BT56, and BT57

Total Drivers Disqualified from Driving by Year

Period	Number Disqualified
1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011	127
1 January 2012 to 31 December 2012	123
1 January 2013 to 31 December 2013	116
1 January 2014 to 31 December 2014	106
1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015	119

Motorcycle Licence Holders Disqualified from Driving by Year

Period	Number Disqualified
1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011	*
1 January 2012 to 31 December 2012	6
1 January 2013 to 31 December 2013	*
1 January 2014 to 31 December 2014	5
1 January 2015 to 31 December 2015	7

* where results return a figure of less than five, figures are suppressed to protect the identity of individuals.

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether rural dwellers and the rural economy will be affected by recent changes in taxi legislation.

(AQW 4196/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The former Department of the Environment (DOE) made a number of sets of Regulations to implement the provisions of the Taxis Act, introducing new taxi accessibility requirements, new vehicle licensing requirements, taximeters and a maximum fare.

These measures are intended to have a positive impact throughout the North, both in rural and urban communities, by improving public safety, consumer protection and increasing the quality of accessible taxis.

Following discussions with the former Environment Committee, the DOE took action to adjust the taximeter Regulations to ensure that the taxi industry in rural areas is not disadvantaged by the new maximum fare requirement.

I have instructed officials to commence work immediately on a review of taxi policy and legislation to ensure there is a taxi industry that fully meets the needs of all consumers. Given the importance of efficient taxi services in outlying and rural locations it will be vital to assess the current situation and establish where improvements could or should be made as part of this process.

Mr M Bradley asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many additional roads in East Londonderry have been added to the gritting schedule for 2016-17.

(AQW 4197/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The gritting schedule for winter 2016/17 within East Derry does not include any additional roads and is consistent with the length of roads gritted last winter season 2015/16. Whilst TransportNI has completed a route optimisation project this year, this merely focussed on achieving efficiencies through better use of gritting plant and route planning; it did not seek to remove roads from the existing schedules.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the weed spraying programme for 2016 in the Fermanagh and Dungannon areas; (ii) the completion dates; and (iii) any reasons for delay.

(AQW 4205/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The weed control programme for this year aims to have all weeds on our urban roads and footways treated. As you will appreciate this equates to hundreds of locations; if more detailed information is required in relation to any area then this can be obtained from the local Section Office.

Weed spraying requires some weed growth and dry weather for the chemical to be effective. This year progress in relation to weed spraying was hampered by the unsettled weather during the summer and the fact that no weed spraying was completed last year exacerbated the problem.

The weed control programme was substantially completed on 27 August in the Fermanagh area and on 10 June in the Dungannon area.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the proportion of the £10 million additional funding from the June monitoring round for resurfacing rural roads allocated to each of the Fermanagh and Dungannon areas; and (ii) the roads and proposed completion dates in each area.

(AQW 4206/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Of the £10m Rural Roads Initiative budget, £4m has been allocated to TransportNI's Western Division. £758k has been allocated to the Mid Ulster South (Dungannon) Section Office and £790k has been allocated to the Fermanagh & Omagh West (Fermanagh) Section Office area.

The roads which have been identified to date in the Fermanagh area for treatment under the Rural Roads Initiative are listed below:

Road Number	Road Name
B514	Gola Road, Lisbellaw
U9378	D'Brughas North, Lisnaskea
U9100	Derryany Road, Newtownbutler
U9147	Kilmabrack Road, Lisnaskea
U9104	Mulnahorn Road, Newtownbutler
B533	Wattlebridge Road, Newtownbutler
U9129	Drumgramph Road , Newtownbutler
U9129	Drumully Road, Newtownbutler
U9143	Knockballymore Road, Newtownbutler
U9155	Golan Road, Newtownbutler
B143	Magheraveely Road, Lisnaskea
U9447	Bunnisnagapple Road, Brookeborough
C425	Teiges Hill Road, Brookeborough
C426	Nutfield Road, Brookeborough
U9388	Colebrooke Park Road, Brookeborough
U9388	Colebrooke Church Road, Brookeborough
U9049	Drumnameel Road, Clabby, Fivemiletown
U9541	Derryhillagh Road, Enniskillen
U9008	Lissan Lane, Coa
U9593	Drumconnis Road, BallinamallaRoad
U9691	Deadmans Lane, Trory, Enniskillen
U9628	Lettermoney Road, BallinamallaRoad
B123	Old Junction Road, Irvinestown
C681	Feglish Road, Irvinestown
U9327	Duross Road, Killadeas
C409	Crevenish Road, Kesh
U9331	Mantlin Road, Kesh
U6335	ARoadess Villas, Kesh

Road Number	Road Name
C407	Lack Road, Irvinestown
C403	Tirwinny Road, Lack
U8491	Cashel Road, Garrison
U8071	Ballintempo Road, Belcoo
C444	Lisdead Road, Boho
U8455	Shankill Road, Monea
B81	Monea Road, Derrygonnelly
U8649	Devenish Road, Monea
C443	Dairies Road, Enniskillen
U8501	Ballygonnell Road, Springfield
U8461	Faugher Road, Derrygonnelly
U8494	Drumbroory Road, Enniskillen
C442	Rossorry Ch Road, Enniskillen
B81	Ashwoods Road, Enniskillen
U8511	Drumkeen Road, Enniskillen
U8053	Sligo Line, Belcoo
B52	Latone Road, Belcoo
C438	Arney Road, Bellanaleck
U8196	Skea Road, Arney
U8022	Killywillen Road, Bellanaleck
U8299	Ross Road, Bellanaleck
U8229	Drumane Road, Florencecourt
U8220	Clontymullan Road, Florencecourt
U8214	Killybracken Road, Derrylin
U8054	Clonliff Road, Kinawley
C431	Teemore Road, Derrylin
U8265	Mullinaherb Road, Derrylin

The roads which have been identified in the Dungannon area for treatment under the Rural Roads Initiative are listed below:

Road Number	Road Name
U1008	Kettle lane Coalisland
U1025	Cloghog Road Coalisland
U1023	Drummurrer Lane Coalisland
U1022	Drummurrer Lane Coalisland
C642	Annaghmore Road Coalisland
U1028	Creenagh Lane Coalisland
U1035	Spademill Road Dungannon
U1029	Coash Road Coalisland
U1003	Agharan Road Newmills
U1016	Ballybeg Road Coalisland
C643	Grange Road Moy

Road Number	Road Name
U1135	DrumaRoadcross Road Killyman
U1120	Derryoghill Road Moy
U944	Corlea Road Galbally
U906	Cappagh Road Galbally
U920	Crossdernot Road Donaghmore
U923	Feroy Lane Donaghmore
U907	Chapel Lane Galbally
U918	Tullyleek Road Donaghmore
U920	Coolmaghry Road Donaghmore
U909	Cornamaddy Road Galbally
U916	Kilnaslee Road Donaghmore
U915	KilmakaRoadle Road Donaghmore
U907	Toomog Road Galbally
U929	Caulfield Road Castlecaulfield
U925	Garvagh Road Donaghmore
U901	Upper Cranlome Road Ballygawley
U1405	Dromore Middle Road Fivemiletown
U1405	Skelgagh Road Fivemiletown
U0409	Cormore Road Clogher
U0413	Clarmore Lane Clogher
U0429	Knockmany Road Clogher
U0414	Glenhoy Road Spur Augher
U0415	Glenhoy Road Spur Augher
U0339	Tullylinton Road Ballygawley
U0339	Lettery Road Ballygawley
U0341	Richmond Lane Ballygawley
U0501	Lurganmore Road Ballygawley
U0501	Tulnavern Road Ballygawley
U0315	Lisbeg Road Ballygawley
U0316	Cravenny Road Ballygawley
U0321	Aghaloo Road Aughnacloy
U0505	Leany Road Aughnacloy
U0508	Leany Road Aughnacloy
U0518	Carricklongfield Road Aughnacloy
U0519	Mullycar Road Eglis
U0533	Curlagh Road Spur Aughnacloy
U0527	Creevelough Road Aughnacloy
U420	Altadaven Road Spur Augher
U 337	Lisnaweary Road Augher
U1402	Legamaghery Road Fivemiletown

Please note that in many cases there are a number of locations on the road identified that have been/will be treated under this initiative. It isn't possible to provide estimated completion dates for each road although it is expected that all work will be substantially complete before the end of the year.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to flooding incidents in 2015 in the areas around Lough Neagh, to detail the remedial measures that have been taken to prevent a repeat of these incidents in 2016.
(AQW 4242/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Prolonged and heavy rainfall, throughout much of November, December 2015 and January of this year resulted in saturated ground conditions and generally higher than normal water levels in lakes and watercourses. Rainfall totals were well above average with this being the wettest winter in over 100 years.

My Department is undertaking a review of this flooding event. This review is examining the causes of the flooding and the multi-agency emergency response to these events. The management and operating regime to control water levels in Lough Neagh is also being considered. However, in the meantime, DfI Rivers will continue to monitor and regulate the levels of Lough Neagh within the prescribed limits as far as weather permits.

In addition to our normal watercourse and flood defence maintenance operations, my Department is implementing the 'Homeowner Flood Protection Grant Scheme' which is an innovative approach to managing flood risk. This scheme provides assistance to property owners who wish to install individual property protection measures to help reduce the impact of flooding on their property.

My Department is also leading on a programme of community engagement, to help improve household and community resilience to flooding. This practical approach has already proved to be beneficial in reducing the impacts of flooding in known flood risk areas.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the funding for grass cutting for 2015-16, broken down by local council area.
(AQW 4243/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department does not maintain a record of expenditure in the format requested, however, I can provide the Member with information on Routine Maintenance expenditure by District Council area (see table below). Grass Cutting is one of the sub functions that make up the Routine Maintenance of the road network.

Other functions within Routine Maintenance are Embankments & Cuttings and Verges, Weed Spraying, Fences and Sweeping, Cleaning and Gully Emptying.

District Council Area	2015-16 £k
Belfast City Council	1,662
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	1,076
Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council	751
Mid & East Antrim Borough Council	1,566
Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council	1,693
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council	1,675
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	1,223
Ards & North Down Borough Council	637
Derry City & Strabane District Council	1,159
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	1,642
Mid Ulster District Council	1,232
Total Routine Maintenance Spend	14,316

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the funding for new street lighting in 2015-16, broken down by local council area.
(AQW 4244/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The total amount spent by my Department's TransportNI's on Capital Street Lighting in 2015-16 by council area is detailed in the table below.

District Council Area	Outturn 2015-16 £k
Belfast City Council	1,165
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	535
Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council	482
Mid & East Antrim Borough Council	638
Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council	804
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council	3,530
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	602
Ards & North Down Borough Council	453
Derry City & Strabane District Council	1,221
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	451
Mid Ulster District Council	465
Total	10,346

During 2015-16 a project to replace standard sodium lanterns with LED lanterns in the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon area took place.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he would consider the adoption of the footbridge and associated footways adjacent to Kesh River bridge, Co. Fermanagh.
(AQW 4248/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Around the time of construction in 1999 of the footbridge adjacent to Kesh River Bridge, TransportNI (then Roads Service) agreed in principle to adopt the footbridge, excluding the adjacent steps, providing a number of conditions were met. These conditions related to obtaining Planning and Technical Approval for the structure as well as provision of link footways and approval from landowners. Regrettably the promoters of the footbridge did not meet these conditions and therefore adoption of the structure and associated footways did not take place at that time.

As you will be aware the private car park adjacent to the south abutment of the footbridge is clearly showing signs of distress and it is unclear if this has affected the stability of the footbridge. In any event the requirement to provide Technical Approval and meet the other outstanding conditions remains a key issue which must be addressed before adoption could be considered.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) the criteria used to decide what amount of the overall available budget is allocated to each local council area for both structural and routine maintenance of the road network; and (ii) the reasons that the Ards and North Down Borough Council area is allocated the smallest amount of budget of all the local council areas for both functions.

(AQW 4257/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) My Department allocates funding to its four TransportNI Divisions on the basis of need, using a range of weighted indicators, tailored to each maintenance activity i.e. resurfacing, patching, gully emptying, grass cutting etc. Divisions also use a range of indicators when apportioning across council areas to ensure, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of funds. These take into consideration criteria such as road mileage, structural condition and population.
- (ii) Ards and North Down Borough Council area is allocated funding for structural and routine maintenance on the same basis as other District Councils, using indicators such as road mileage, structural condition and population. Allocations across council areas do therefore vary year on year.

With reference to the out-turn expenditure figures for the financial year 2015-16, I can advise that contractual difficulties resulted in the non-availability of both a resurfacing contractor to carry out resurfacing and patching works, as well as a gully cleaning contractor, both of which had a considerable impact on the ability of the Section to

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to outline the process for renewing or applying for a new Blue Badge with the Department for Transport's Blue Badge Improvement Service; and (ii) whether a paper application option still be available for those who are unable to engage with the online process.

(AQW 4266/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) Currently, existing badge holders are issued with reminders four to six weeks before their badges are due to expire. People can renew or apply for a Blue Badge by:
- Connecting to the NI Direct website and apply using the newly launched online facility.
 - Connecting to the NI Direct website to download and print out an application form.
 - Phoning NI Direct to request an application form which will be sent to the requestor.
 - Writing or emailing the Blue Badge Unit in Enniskillen to request an application form which will be forwarded to them.
- The application process will not change when the system transfers to the Department for Transport's Blue Badge Improvement Service.
- (ii) The paper application option will remain available for those who are unable to engage with the online process. Department for Transport's Blue Badge Improvement Service

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister for Infrastructure what measures he is putting in place to make sure people will not face additional barriers when renewing or applying for a Blue Badge when the system transfers to the Department for Transport's Blue Badge Improvement Service.

(AQW 4267/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Currently, existing badge holders are issued with reminders four – six weeks before their badges are due to expire. People can renew or apply for a Blue Badge by:

- Connecting to the NI Direct website and apply using the newly launched online facility.
- Connecting to the NI Direct website to download and print out an application form.
- Phoning NI Direct to request an application form which will be sent to the requestor.
- Writing or emailing the Blue Badge Unit in Enniskillen to request an application form which will be forwarded to them.

The application process will not change when the system transfers to the Department for Transport's Blue Badge Improvement Service.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) the policy for the cutting of dangerous hedges and trees in Fermanagh; and (ii) what steps are taken to identify and implement same.

(AQW 4288/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The vast majority of roadside trees and hedges are on lands adjacent to public roads and as such it is the responsibility of property owners or occupiers of those lands to ensure that such trees and hedges do not endanger or obstruct road users. From time to time TransportNI places notices in the local press and in farming journals reminding owners/occupiers of this responsibility.

Generally, overgrown trees and hedges that endanger or obstruct road users are identified by TransportNI staff during routine maintenance inspections. As a first step, owners/occupiers are identified and are requested to co-operate in removing or cutting the offending tree or hedge. If this fails, TransportNI has powers under the Roads (NI) Order 1993 to serve a notice on the owner/occupier requiring removal or cutting back of the tree or hedge so as to remove the danger or obstruction. Where an owner/occupier does not comply with the requirements of the notice, in extreme circumstances, TransportNI may carry out the necessary works and seek to recover the costs.

With regard to the relatively small number of trees which are the responsibility of TransportNI, specialist external contractors are generally employed to undertake this type of work as the in house contractor does not have the necessary specialist skills or equipment. This work is prioritised and undertaken subject to budget availability

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to detail the residential developments with completed houses that are not adopted in (a) Belleek; (b) Ballinamallard; (c) Irvinestown; and (d) Kesh; and (ii) to outline the method to progress the adoptions and proposed completion dates.

(AQW 4290/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Please see below a list of housing developments in Belleek, Ballinamallard, Irvinestown and Kesh where the construction of housing is underway and the road infrastructure is not yet adopted by my Department. Officials have also provided an update on each development in terms of its progress towards adoption.

Please note that the development addresses provided are those used in the bond and agreement documentation and that these are based on the address submitted at the time as part of the planning process. In some cases these now differ from the development name adopted by the developer.

Belleek: There are five developments ongoing in Belleek.

- 1 Phoenix Manor (PS810/05) – The Department has taken enforcement action on this development and works are nearing completion. It is anticipated that all works will be complete in the next three months.

- 2 Whiteisland Court (PS814/07) – A new developer has recently purchased this development and officials are in discussion with him in relation to the outstanding road infrastructure works. The Department will continue to afford him the opportunity to complete this development and it is not considered appropriate for enforcement action to be taken at this time.
- 3 Breesy View (PS820/07) – The developer is continuing to complete this development and the Department is in regular contact with him. It is considered appropriate at this stage to allow the developer to complete the development.
- 4 Ashdale Drive, The Commons (PS803/04) – Visibility splays are not in place for the access on to the public road as per the planning permission and their provision requires use of third party lands. Unfortunately this issue is outside of the Department's control and is the responsibility of the land owners to remedy.
- 5 Rathfort Crescent (PS904/99) – The Department has served an enforcement notice on the developer and intends to commence the remedial works within this development within the next six months.

Ballinamallard: There are currently no housing developments in Ballinamallard which have houses constructed and are not adopted.

Irvinestown: There are currently three sites ongoing in Irvinestown.

- 1 Carnhill (PS819/07) – The Department is currently carrying out enforcement work on the first two phases to bring the roads and sewerage infrastructure up to an adoptable standard. A new developer is on site for the remainder of development. It is anticipated that the enforcement works will be completed within the next six months.
- 2 Briarshill/Sprucehill (PS805/97) – The Department has taken enforcement action on this development and the remedial works are nearly complete. Completion is anticipated within the next two months.
- 3 Hazelwood (PS802/84) – The Department has taken enforcement action on this development and the remedial works are nearly complete. Completion is anticipated within the next two months.

Kesh: There are currently five sites ongoing in Kesh.

- 1 Ardess (PS806/06) – The Department is continuing to liaise with the developer regarding completion of this development and considers this to be the appropriate action at this time.
- 2 Crevenish Road (808/06) – The Department has been working closely with the developer and has advised officials that he intends to finish the outstanding defects to allow the development to be adopted.
- 3 Castle Manor (PS813/04) – This development has been completed by the developer and is currently serving its defects liability period of one year and will be adopted thereafter.
- 4 Station Road (PS828/05) – The developer responsible for this development is no longer trading. The Department intends to serve enforcement proceedings during the 2017/18 financial year.
- 5 Rosscah View (PS906/00) – The developer is continuing to complete this development and the Department is in regular contact with him. It is considered appropriate at this stage to allow the developer to complete the development.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline if he plans to expand the existing passenger shelter at the Bellarena rail halt.

(AQW 4310/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink advise that, in the short term, it has not considered any further plans to extend the new passenger shelters at Bellarena railway halt. However, this situation may be reviewed when it looks at future passenger numbers.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to provide a definitive completion timetable for Bellarena rail halt.

(AQW 4311/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The new railway halt at Bellarena will be completed by the end of December 2016 as part of the current line upgrade project which includes a passing loop at Bellarena.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail any additional street light schemes are due for completion in Mid Ulster by 2019.

(AQW 4313/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Programmes for 2017/2018 and beyond are not confirmed at this stage but if capital funding levels for street lighting for the current year are maintained over the next two years then it would be hoped to take forward the following schemes:

- Dyan Road, Dyan - Lighting Upgrade
- Victoria Way, Dungannon - Lighting Upgrade
- Old Rectory Park, Cookstown - Lighting Upgrade
- Churchview, Drummullan - Lighting Upgrade
- Moneyhaw Road, Drummullan - Lighting Upgrade

- Maghera Town Centre - Lighting Upgrade
- Tullyleak Cottages, Donaghmore – Replacement of concrete columns
- Kilnacart Road, Kilnakart - Replacement of concrete columns

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the 2015-16 and 2016-17 budgets allocated for the repair of street lights in Mid Ulster.

(AQW 4314/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's expenditure on street lighting repairs in the Mid Ulster District Council area for the financial year 2015-2016 is detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1

District Council	2015-2016
Mid Ulster District Council	£287k

Budgets are not allocated on either a district council or parliamentary constituency basis; rather they are allocated on an assessment of need. District Council analysis is performed on the actual expenditure after the end of the financial year.

I can, however, advise the Member that Mid Ulster District Council falls into my Department's TransportNI Western Division and that forecast expenditure in Western Division for street lighting repairs in 2016-2017 is some £671k.

District Councils within Western Divisions boundaries are Derry City & Strabane District Council, Fermanagh & Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he would consider undertaking a review into the current speed limit on the Cavan Road, Dungannon.

(AQW 4342/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: TransportNI officials, in partnership with the PSNI, have recently undertaken a review of the speed limit on Cavan Road, Dungannon.

This assessment indicated that the national speed limit of 60 mph remains appropriate and consequently there are no plans to change the speed limit at this time.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what procedures are in place to ensure that consultation with local elected representatives and emergency services takes place prior to decisions being made to close a road for necessary works.

(AQW 4346/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department manages the temporary closure of public roads when it is necessary for road maintenance/improvement purposes or for works by utilities (BT, NIE, Phoenix Gas etc) The main reason is generally to avoid danger to the public or to those working on or adjacent to roads. Such road closures can be relatively short (a day or so) or last for several months. Where such a road closure is to last more than two weeks the Department is required under legislation to advertise in the local press.

When preparing road closures, my officials will assess the impact on all road users, local services and those living alongside the works. The Department will endeavour to ensure that the general public and in particular those (frontagers) most affected are given advance notification of the necessary works and or road closures before the works commence. Initial consultation may involve organising local meetings, letter drops, leaflets, advance warning or information signs and advertisements in the local press. Responsibility for this normally lies with whoever is carrying out the work.

It is also normal practice that the PSNI, emergency services, schools, churches, bus services, etc are consulted and their views taken into account. Generally, local representatives are not directly consulted about specific road closures, however, local councils are made aware of the various planned resurfacing schemes etc through the presentation of the biannual council reports.

It is important to stress that roads do not remain closed for any longer than is absolutely necessary.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the streets in North Down listed for future road resurfacing.

(AQW 4362/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that the following roads in North Down are programmed for resurfacing this financial year:

- Ballymiscaw Road
- Ballyrobert Road
- Rathgael Road Roundabout (Trunk Road scheme completed)
- Morston Park, Bangor

Any additional resurfacing schemes will be carried out subject to the availability of in-year funding.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the streets in North Down listed for future footpath resurfacing.
(AQW 4363/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that footway resurfacing is currently ongoing in Morston Park, Bangor within the North Down area. This is a sizeable scheme and there are no other schemes programmed this financial year. Any additional footway resurfacing schemes will be carried out subject to the availability of in-year funding.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the streets in North Down listed for future road calming measures.
(AQW 4364/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Due to a reduced network development budget, no traffic calming schemes have been programmed for delivery in the North Down area this financial year. However, should additional funds become available it would be the intention to progress a traffic calming scheme in Park Drive, Bangor.

TransportNI's annual report is presented to local councils normally in the spring. The report is specific to each council area and outlines the works programme for the new financial year as well as detailing works undertaken in the previous year.

The annual report is also published online and can be viewed at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/corporatereports>

Subsequent works programmes will be dependent on the subsequent budget.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his Department's policy in addressing road parking safety issues effecting parents, children and residents, when dropping off and picking up pupils at Crawfordsburn Primary School, Ballymage Primary School, Kilmaine Primary School and Towerview Primary School, Bangor.
(AQW 4365/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I recognise that many schools generate short term parking related issues during their peak periods at the start and end of the school day. My Department takes the safety of children on their journeys to and from school very seriously and has implemented a significant number of safety schemes, many through the Safer Routes to Schools programme which was first introduced in 2005. These schemes use engineering measures to warn drivers of the presence of pupils and reduce vehicle speeds.

Different features provided by the Safer Routes to School measures have included; enhanced electronic signing, road markings and coloured road surfacing to draw drivers' attention to the presence of school children. As each school is unique, additional measures such as central islands, footpaths, lay-bys, drop off and collection areas and enforceable 'Keep Clear' zigzags can also be considered.

I am aware that Crawfordsburn Primary School on Cootehall Road, Crawfordsburn and Ballymagee Primary School, on Ashbury Avenue, Bangor already have enhanced electronic flashing school signs on both approaches to the schools. Kilmaine Primary School on Lyndale Drive and Towerview Primary School on Towerview Crescent in Bangor have school patrol signs provided. In addition to the signs all these schools have yellow 'school keep clear' road markings to warn drivers of the presence of the schools.

My Department's officials work closely with the Education Board to address issues which arise around schools and I can assure you that these areas will continue to be monitored in the interests of road safety.

I can also advise that whilst my traffic engineers work with others to install these various engineering measures, that parents, residents and all road users have a role to play in following the relevant traffic signs and road markings to ensure the wellbeing of our young people making their way to and from school.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 2330/16-21 and AQW 2328/16-21, to outline why the Ards and North Down Borough Council receives the least amount of funding of all councils across Northern Ireland for weed spraying, resurfacing of footpaths and roads by Transport NI.
(AQW 4366/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Members query relates to the TransportNI out-turn expenditure by District Council area for the financial year 2015-16, against Routine Maintenance and Capital Structural Maintenance as provided in the previously mentioned AQWs.

My Department allocates funding to its four TransportNI Divisions on the basis of need, using a range of weighted indicators, tailored to each maintenance activity i.e. resurfacing, patching, gully emptying, grass cutting etc. Divisions also use a range of indicators when apportioning across council areas to ensure, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of funds.

Ards and North Down Borough Council area is allocated funding for structural and routine maintenance on the same basis as other District Councils, using indicators such as road mileage, structural condition and population.

During the financial year 2015-16 contractual difficulties resulted in the non-availability of a resurfacing contractor to carry out resurfacing and patching works, as well as a gully cleaning contractor, both of which had a considerable impact on out-turn expenditure for the Borough.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to detail how frequently litter is picked up on the Comber Greenway; (ii) whether he will take forward plans to provide public seating and bins along the Comber Greenway; and (iii) to outline what discussions his Department has had to date with local councils on this issue.

(AQW 4382/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Belfast City Council sweep the Comber Greenway once per week and TransportNI do a litter pick of the grass areas prior to each grass cut which is currently twice each season.

My Department is planning to consult shortly on a draft Belfast Bicycle Network Plan with the purpose of guiding the development and operation of the bicycle infrastructure in the city for the next ten years. The proposed plan will include the Comber Greenway. The consultation will provide the opportunity for people to set out their ideas for improvements including the issue of public seating and bins.

Specifically in relation to bins my Department encourages the principle of "Leave No Trace". This is a worldwide initiative that, among other things, encourages people to take anything they have brought into a park back home with them. This includes any waste from food consumed or dog waste. However, bins are provided at access points to the Greenway.

My Department's Cycling Unit has not had any conversations with any Councils on this specific issue.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there is any required level of maintenance and reliability which Electricity Supply Board have to meet as part of the conditions of the transfer of ownership of the electric car charging infrastructure.

(AQW 4385/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) and the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) have, from the outset of the ecar programme, been responsible for setting maintenance and reliability standards for charge point infrastructure. Since the assets formally transferred to ESB in July 2015, there has been no change in the standard of this service provision.

Should you require any further information about the maintenance or reliability of the infrastructure you should contact Conor O'Brien, ESB ecars, 27 Lower Fitzwilliam Street, Dublin 2, D02 KT92.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many staff are employed in his Department's Information Service; and (ii) the annual cost of this service.

(AQW 4396/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The government departments in the North were restructured on 8 May 2016.

The breakdown of Executive Information Service (EIS) staff is as follows:

- Principal Press Officer 1
- Senior Press Officer 3 (FTE)
- Assistant Press Officer 1

The total salary cost for EIS Press Officers in DFI from 9 May until 30 September 2016 was £110,519.17

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many detections of illegal movements of plant and machinery have been made by the Driver and Vehicle Agency in each year since 2011.

(AQW 4397/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Driver & Vehicle Agency captures information relating to a range of enforcement activities, in respect of operator, driver and vehicle encounters.

However, the Agency does not specifically record details of illegal movement of plant and machinery, therefore the information requested cannot be provided.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to detail the capacity of the water treatment works at Edenderry; and (ii) whether it has sufficient capacity for further development in Edenderry village.

(AQW 4399/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: It has been assumed that the Member is referring to Edenderry Wastewater Treatment Works which is situated in this area.

- (i) The design capacity of the Wastewater Treatment Works (WWTW) at Edenderry, County Antrim is 481 population equivalent (PE). PE is related to, but not the same as population, and is based on the types of businesses, public buildings etc discharging into the WWTW. The actual PE has been assessed as 458.
- (ii) At present, there is available capacity within the WWTW before the full design PE is reached. However, the extent of further development which can be facilitated will depend upon its type and size.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has any plans to provide a standard landline number for the payment of parking fines.

(AQW 4400/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: When the parking enforcement IT contract was originally set up in 2006, it included an Automated Telephone Payment solution, provided by the then Department's contracted IT service provider.

My Department is in the process of having the telephone numbers changed to a number prefixed with 03 for both the Automated Telephone Payment line and the general enquiry number. The 03 number ranges are specifically designed for charities and public bodies.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline why his Department continues to use an 0845 prefix for the telephone number used for parking enforcement payments.

(AQW 4401/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: When the parking enforcement IT contract was originally set up in 2006, it included an Automated Telephone Payment solution, provided by the then Department's contracted IT service provider.

My Department is in the process of having the telephone numbers changed to a number prefixed with 03 for both the Automated Telephone Payment line and the general enquiry number. The 03 number ranges are specifically designed for charities and public bodies.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many taxi meters were rejected during testing on 30 September 2016 at Newtownards Test Centre; and (ii) the reason for each failure.

(AQW 4406/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: All taximeters presented for testing at the Newtownards Test Centre on 30 September 2016 passed.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the assets that NI Water is considering disposing of in the next five years.

(AQW 4408/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have been advised by NI Water (NIW) that it does not maintain a five year disposal plan. In accordance with Condition K, paragraph 5.1 of the instrument of appointment (the Licence) granted to NIW, NIW must furnish to the NI Authority for Utility Regulation (The Utility Regulator) an Estate Management Plan (EMP) identifying land which NIW considers likely to be surplus to its requirements within a ten year period. The current EMP covers financial periods from 2014/15 to 2023/24.

NIW will be setting a capital receipts disposal target, as agreed with the Department and Strategic Investment Board, for the next budget period. This is anticipated to run for the next 4 years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much funding does NI Water receive through his Department.

(AQW 4409/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: In 2015/16, £283.3 million of subsidy was provided to NI Water. This figure reduces to £212.1 million when payments made by NI Water to the Department in the same year for dividend and interest on loans are netted off (£24.7 million and £46.5 million respectively).

The amount of loans issued to NI Water in the 2015/16 financial year was £36 million. In addition, NI Water invoiced the then Department for Regional Development, £20.0 million for Roads Drainage costs.

It is anticipated that similar amounts will apply for the 2016/17 financial year.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many complaints has Transport NI received over the failure to fix street lights in North Down in the last 12 months.

(AQW 4410/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Department has received no formal complaints about the failure to fix street lights in North Down over the past 12 months.

However, 2195 reports of defective street lights have been received during the period. Staff have endeavoured to address these as quickly as possible.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many complaints Transport NI received over the failure to spray weeds in North Down in the last 12 months.

(AQW 4411/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Department has received three formal complaints about the failure to spray weeds in North Down over the past 12 months.

However, 115 reports relating to weeds have been received during the period. Staff have endeavoured to address these as quickly as possible.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many complaints Transport NI received over the failure to fix pot holes in North Down in the last 12 months.

(AQW 4412/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Department has received one formal complaint about the failure to fix potholes in North Down over the past 12 months.

However, 55 reports of potholes have been received during the period. Staff have endeavoured to address these as quickly as possible.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of parking tickets issued in South Antrim in each of the last two years.

(AQW 4426/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Parking Tickets, known as Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) can only be issued where parking restrictions exist in sufficient quantity to merit providing the parking enforcement service. Please see the table below for the numbers of PCNs issued in the towns and villages in the South Antrim constituency in the last two financial years.

	01/04/2014 – 31/03/2015	01/04/2015 – 31/03/2016
Aldergrove	5	5
Antrim	827	888
Ballyclare	391	280
Crumlin	50	50
Doagh	3	0
Newtownabbey	330	264
Randalstown	95	81
Toome	4	1

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the streets in South Antrim that are earmarked for future road-calming measures.

(AQW 4432/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: TransportNI is currently progressing legislation to implement Traffic Calming at Avondale Drive, Ballyclare, in the South Antrim constituency area.

Jordanstown Heights and Carrall Road, Newtownabbey, will be considered for inclusion in a future programme subject to availability of finance and consultations with residents.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline how Ministerial time used for party business is accounted for on departmental-funded trips.

(AQW 4436/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Since taking office I have undertaken three departmental funded trips, one to Rotterdam, one to Oxford, and one to China. I did not conduct any party business on any of these trips.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has any plans to introduce or explore the introduction of free bus and rail transport for the hearing impaired as is the case in the Southern part of the island.

(AQW 4456/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Free bus and rail travel is available to all those over 60 including those who have a hearing impairment. I am sympathetic to the introduction of free bus and rail travel for the hearing impaired who are under 60. However, the position is that the concessionary fares budget remains under pressure and there is currently no provision within the budget to support any further extension of the scheme.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether (i) he has received notification of a potential legal challenge against the A6 Randalstown-Toome-Castledawson dual carriageway; and (ii) he intends to commence construction work pending the outcome of any such challenge.

(AQW 4475/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise that on 27 September 2016 my Department received papers seeking Leave to apply for a Judicial Review for the A6 Toome to Castledawson section of the scheme. The Leave application requested the courts to order a cessation of works on this section until the outcome of the challenge is known. As such the decision on whether work on this section can proceed will be a matter for the courts to decide. In the meantime, the Department is completing preliminary advance works which had commenced prior to the receipt of the Application for Leave papers. The main construction works are not being progressed.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the total number of Blue Badge applications that are currently to be processed.

(AQW 4479/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Blue Badge applications are normally processed within eight weeks of the date of receipt of completed application forms. However, if information to support an application has to be requested from a doctor, applicants will be notified and it may take longer to issue a decision.

The number of Blue Badge applications that are currently waiting to be processed is 9,174.

6,348 are within the normal eight week processing period and the remaining 2,826 form the backlog.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the total spend on street lighting in Upper Bann in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4480/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department does not maintain an analysis of its expenditure in the format requested. Upper Bann constituency is largely coterminous with the legacy councils of Armagh City & District Council, Banbridge District Council and Craigavon District Council.

The table below provides you with total spend on street lighting in those council areas.

Total Street Lighting Expenditure

District Council	2011-12 £k	2012-13 £k	2013-14 £k	2014-15 £k	2015-16 £k
Armagh	1,203	764	932	880	5,688
Banbridge	770	615	576	719	
Craigavon	2,126	1,148	1,349	1,686	
Total	4,099	2,527	2,856	3,285	5,688

Following local government reform, the three legacy councils were merged into one super Council, Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon District Council. As such from 2015-16 onwards information is only available for the merged Council.

In 2015-16 a pilot project to replace some 15,000 standard sodium lanterns with LED lanterns in the Craigavon and Banbridge areas was completed, which largely accounts for the increased expenditure in that financial year.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) when the new Strangford ferry will be brought to Strangford Lough; (ii) from what date it will be operational; and (iii) why it was delayed.

(AQW 4670/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am pleased to report that, following successful sea trials, the new ferry arrived in Strangford Lough on Saturday 8 October 2016. There will now be a period of training for the ferry crews. It is anticipated that the new ferry will be operational by late November 2016.

Delivery of the vessel was originally scheduled for 31 August 2016. However, during the commissioning phase, the builder, Cammell Laird shipyard, Birkenhead, encountered some issues regarding the integration of the engines and thrusters. These issues were resolved prior to delivery of the vessel.

Mr Bell asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) for his assessment of coastal erosion on Portaferry Road, Newtownards; and (ii) to detail a timescale for repair and maintenance.

(AQW 4721/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) I can advise the Member that my Department's Transport NI has recently carried out a survey of the entire coastline of the Ards Peninsula where it adjoins the public road to assess the impact of coastal erosion on sea walls, etc.

A number of locations have been identified for repair including along the Portaferry Road, Newtownards.

- (ii) I can confirm that arrangements are in hand to have repairs carried out at several of these locations including the Portaferry Road during this financial year.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many work vehicles does NI Water have; and (ii) their purpose. (AQW 4817/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Water has advised that it has 577 vehicles in service. Details of these are provided in the table below:

Type of Vehicle	Number of Vehicles in Service	Purpose
Four Wheel Drive Vehicles	49	These are primarily used for towing major incident equipment such as bowsers, pumps, etc but also for access to remote sites in poor weather.
Loaders	6	These are used on treatment sites and depots for the handling of goods, chemicals etc.
Lorries	47	These are used for transporting tools, equipment, stores items, spoil, etc whilst carrying out water main and sewer repairs. It also includes for tractor lorry units used in sludge tanker haulage and a double deck education/training bus used in schools and shows
Tractors	21	These are used on treatment sites for site maintenance and handling of goods.
Panel Vans	454	Primarily, these are customer facing vehicles for frontline operatives to carry out the full range of water and sewerage related services.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail any new road resurfacing plans there are for Groomsport over the next four years.

(AQW 4894/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI does not have any plans to carry out road resurfacing in Groomsport over the next four years.

Mr McKee asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on all planned capital expenditure in South Down, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4950/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware Budgets have not yet been allocated to Departments beyond the 2016-17 financial year. Therefore, the figures in the table below include planned spend in South Down in 2016-17 on projects greater than £500k with only committed expenditure included beyond that period.

Projects located in one constituency may benefit a number of other constituencies, e.g. major road schemes, water and waste water treatment works, Translink infrastructure and vehicles.

As expenditure across the Department is not maintained on a constituency basis, projects have been largely identified using District Councils as a proxy; for South Down these are Newry, Mourne & Down; Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon.

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
South Down	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network	2016-17	12.2
	Department	Planned programme of Network Development, Local Transportations and Safety Measures	2016-17	1.9
	Department	Replacement vessel for the Strangford Ferry service	2016-17	1.1
	NIW	Drummaroad WTW Clear Water Tank	2016-17 to 2019-20	10.2
	NIW	Kilkeel DAP Phase 1	2016-17 to 2020-21	2.6
	NIW	Newpoint WWPS Screen upgrade	2016-17 to 2017-18	1.8
	NIW	Silent Valley recreational facilities appraisal	2016-17 to 2020-21	1.2
	NIW	Kilkeel WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2018-19	1.0

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
	NIW	Cranfield WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2019-20	0.5
	NIW	Moneyslane WWTW Appraisal	2016-17 to 2018-19	1.0
All Constituencies	Translink	Replacement Ticketing System	2016-17 to 2020-21	44.3
All Constituencies	Department	Northern Ireland Planning Portal Hardware software refresh	2016-17	1.1
All Constituencies	DVA	MOT Test Centres	2016-17 to 2022-23	1.6
All Constituencies	DVA	Roadside Enforcement IT System	2016-17	0.6

In addition, my Department has four flagship projects which the Executive agreed as part of Budget 2016-17. These projects which will benefit the Region as a whole were provided with a funding commitment up to 2020-21 as set out in the table below:

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	2020-21 £m
A5 Road	13.2	40.0	53.0	55.0	68.0
A6 Road	21.0	57.0	60.0	60.0	60.0
Belfast Rapid Transit	17.0	9.0	20.0	12.9	-
Belfast Transport Hub	5.8	16.0	40.0	60.0	

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on all planned capital expenditure in Lagan Valley, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4952/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware Budgets have not yet been allocated to Departments beyond the 2016-17 financial year. Therefore, the figures in the table below include planned spend in Lagan Valley in 2016-17 on projects greater than £500k with only committed expenditure included beyond that period.

Projects located in one constituency may benefit a number of other constituencies, e.g. major road schemes, water and waste water treatment works, Translink infrastructure and vehicles.

As expenditure across the Department is not maintained on a constituency basis, projects have been largely identified using District Councils as a proxy; for Lagan Valley these are Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council; Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon.

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
Lagan Valley	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network	2016-17	10.3
	Department	Planned programme of Network Development, Local Transportations and Safety Measures	2016-17	0.7
	Department	Roundabout at Temple Crossroads	2016-17	0.6
	Translink	Moir Park & Ride	2016-17 to 2019-20	3.0
	NIW	Maghaberry WWTW	2016-17 to 2018-19	5.8
	NIW	Eastleigh Dale/Pasadena Gardens, Belfast, Sewer Upgrade for DG5 removals.	2016-17 to 2017-18	1.2
All Constituencies	Translink	Replacement Ticketing System	2016-17 to 2020-21	44.3
All Constituencies	Department	Northern Ireland Planning Portal Hardware software refresh	2016-17	1.1

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
All Constituencies	DVA	MOT Test Centres	2016-17 to 2022-23	1.6
All Constituencies	DVA	Roadside Enforcement IT System	2016-17	0.6

In addition, my Department has four flagship projects which the Executive agreed as part of Budget 2016-17. These projects which will benefit the Region as a whole were provided with a funding commitment up to 2020-21 as set out in the table below:

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	2020-21 £m
A5 Road	13.2	40.0	53.0	55.0	68.0
A6 Road	21.0	57.0	60.0	60.0	60.0
Belfast Rapid Transit	17.0	9.0	20.0	12.9	-
Belfast Transport Hub	5.8	16.0	40.0	60.0	

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on all planned capital expenditure in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4955/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware Budgets have not yet been allocated to Departments beyond the 2016-17 financial year. Therefore, the figures in the table below include planned spend in Fermanagh and South Tyrone in 2016-17 on projects greater than £500k with only committed expenditure included beyond that period.

Projects located in one constituency may benefit a number of other constituencies, e.g. major road schemes, water and waste water treatment works, Translink infrastructure and vehicles.

As expenditure across the Department is not maintained on a constituency basis, projects have been largely identified using District Councils as a proxy; for Fermanagh and South Tyrone these are Fermanagh & Omagh; Mid Ulster.

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Mid Ulster Council area	2016-17	5.8
	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Fermanagh & Omagh Council area	2016-17	6.3
	Department	Planned programme of Network Development, Local Transportations and Safety Measures in Mid Ulster	2016-17	0.6
	Department	Planned programme of Bridge Strengthening in Mid Ulster	2016-17	0.6
	Department	Planned programme of Network Development, Local Transportations and Safety Measures in Fermanagh & Omagh	2016-17	0.9
	Department	Planned programme of Bridge Strengthening in Fermanagh & Omagh	2016-17	0.5
	Waterways Ireland	Erne jetties	2016-17	0.8
	NIW	Dungannon WWTW Feasibility Study.	2016-17 to 2020-21	22.8
	NIW	Killyhevlin to Lough Bradan Link Watermain	2016-17 to 2020-21	9.6
	NIW	Killyhevlin Clear Water Tank	2016-17 to 2018-19	4.6

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
	NIW	Eglisish (Dungannon) WwTW upgrade	2016-17 to 2018-19	3.0
	NIW	Killyhevlin WTW Improvements to sludge settlement system	2016-17 to 2018-19	1.7
	NIW	Belleek Meenacloybane Strategic Main Replacement.	2016-17 to 2017-18	1.4
	NIW	Garrison WwTW	2016-17 to 2020-21	1.4
	NIW	Tamlaght WWTW Upgrade	2016-17 to 2020-21	1.0
	NIW	Belleek WWTW Feasibility	2016-17 to 2019-20	1.0
	NIW	Syonfin WPS to Dungoran SR 150mm DI Watermain Replacement	2016-17 to 2017-18	0.8
	NIW	Drumgallon WWPS Upgrade.	2016-17 to 2017-18	0.7
	NIW	Tullynagarn WWPS Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2017-18	0.6
	NIW	Drumquin WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2018-19	0.5
	NIW	Ballygawley WWTWs Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2020-21	2.4
	NIW	Fivemiletown WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2018-19	0.8
	NIW	Moy WWTW Appraisal Study	2016-17 to 2018-19	0.5
All Constituencies	Translink	Replacement Ticketing System	2016-17 to 2020-21	44.3
All Constituencies	Department	Northern Ireland Planning Portal Hardware software refresh	2016-17	1.1
All Constituencies	DVA	MOT Test Centres	2016-17 to 2022-23	1.6
All Constituencies	DVA	Roadside Enforcement IT System	2016-17	0.6

In addition, my Department has four flagship projects which the Executive agreed as part of Budget 2016-17. These projects which will benefit the Region as a whole were provided with a funding commitment up to 2020-21 as set out in the table below;

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	2020-21 £m
A5 Road	13.2	40.0	53.0	55.0	68.0
A6 Road	21.0	57.0	60.0	60.0	60.0
Belfast Rapid Transit	17.0	9.0	20.0	12.9	-
Belfast Transport Hub	5.8	16.0	40.0	60.0	

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on all planned capital expenditure in West Tyrone, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4956/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware Budgets have not yet been allocated to Departments beyond the 2016-17 financial year. Therefore, the figures in the table below include planned spend in West Tyrone in 2016-17 on projects greater than £500k with only committed expenditure included beyond that period.

Projects located in one constituency may benefit a number of other constituencies, e.g. major road schemes, water and waste water treatment works, Translink infrastructure and vehicles.

As expenditure across the Department is not maintained on a constituency basis, projects have been largely identified using District Councils as a proxy; for West Tyrone these are Fermanagh & Omagh; Derry & Strabane.

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
West Tyrone	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Derry & Strabane Council area	2016-17	3.3
	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Fermanagh & Omagh Council area	2016-17	6.3
	Department	Planned programme of Network Development, Local Transportations and Safety Measures in Fermanagh & Omagh	2016-17	0.9
	Department	Planned programme of Bridge Strengthening in Fermanagh & Omagh	2016-17	0.5
	NIW	WIIM Phase 2 Lough Braden Drumquin WP	2016-17 to 2017-18	2.8
	NIW	WIIM Phase 2 Loughmacrory WP	2016-17 to 2018-19	2.3
	NIW	Bridge Street WWPS, Strabane - Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2017-18	1.6
	NIW	Derg WTW MCPA PEO Undertakings	16/17-18/19	5.4
	NIW	Drumquin WWTW Feasibility Study	16/17-18/19	0.5
	NIW	Seskinore WWTW Feasibility Study	16/17-18/19	0.5
	NIW	WIIM Phase 2 Lough Braden Drumquin WP	16/17-17/18	2.8
	NIW	Mountfield WWTW's Appraisal Study	16/17-17/18	1.5
All Constituencies	Translink	Replacement Ticketing System	2016-17 to 2020-21	44.3
All Constituencies	Department	Northern Ireland Planning Portal Hardware software refresh	2016-17	1.1
All Constituencies	DVA	MOT Test Centres	2016-17 to 2022-23	1.6
All Constituencies	DVA	Roadside Enforcement IT System	2016-17	0.6

In addition, my Department has four flagship projects which the Executive agreed as part of Budget 2016-17. These projects which will benefit the Region as a whole were provided with a funding commitment up to 2020-21 as set out in the table below:

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	2020-21 £m
A5 Road	13.2	40.0	53.0	55.0	68.0
A6 Road	21.0	57.0	60.0	60.0	60.0
Belfast Rapid Transit	17.0	9.0	20.0	12.9	-
Belfast Transport Hub	5.8	16.0	40.0	60.0	

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on all planned capital expenditure in Newry and Armagh, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4957/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware Budgets have not yet been allocated to Departments beyond the 2016-17 financial year. Therefore, the figures in the table below include planned spend in Newry and Armagh in 2016-17 on projects greater than £500k with only committed expenditure included beyond that period.

Projects located in one constituency may benefit a number of other constituencies, e.g. major road schemes, water and waste water treatment works, Translink infrastructure and vehicles.

As expenditure across the Department is not maintained on a constituency basis, projects have been largely identified using District Councils as a proxy; for Newry and Armagh these are Newry, Mourne & Down; Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon.

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
Newry & Armagh	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Council area	2016-17	7.0
	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Newry, Mourne & Down Council area	2016-17	5.2
	Department	Planned programme of Network Development, Local Transportations and Safety Measures in Newry Mourne & Down	2016-17	1.2
	Department	Planned programme of Network Development, Local Transportations and Safety Measures in Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	2016-17	0.7
	NIW	WIIM Phase 2 Clay Lake Keady WP	2016-17 to 2017-18	2.8
	NIW	Killylea Road WWPS, Armagh, Upgrade.	2016-17 to 2018-19	0.6
	NIW	Darkley WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2018-19	0.5
	NIW	Annvale SPS Upgrade - Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2018-19	0.5
	NIW	Mountnorris WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2018-19	0.5
	NIW	Poyntzpass WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2018-19	0.5
	NIW	WIIM 1 Phase 2 Carran Hill Crossmaglen WP	2016-17 to 2018-19	3.8
	NIW	Meigh WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2018-19	0.7
	NIW	Markethill WWTW feasibility	2016-17 to 2018-19	0.7
	NIW	Newpoint WWPS Screen upgrade	16/17-17/18	1.8
All Constituencies	Translink	Replacement Ticketing System	2016-17 to 2020-21	44.3
All Constituencies	Department	Northern Ireland Planning Portal Hardware software refresh	2016-17	1.1
All Constituencies	DVA	MOT Test Centres	2016-17 to 2022-23	1.6
All Constituencies	DVA	Roadside Enforcement IT System	2016-17	0.6

In addition, my Department has four flagship projects which the Executive agreed as part of Budget 2016-17. These projects which will benefit the Region as a whole were provided with a funding commitment up to 2020-21 as set out in the table below:

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	2020-21 £m
A5 Road	13.2	40.0	53.0	55.0	68.0
A6 Road	21.0	57.0	60.0	60.0	60.0
Belfast Rapid Transit	17.0	9.0	20.0	12.9	-
Belfast Transport Hub	5.8	16.0	40.0	60.0	

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on all planned capital expenditure in Upper Bann, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4959/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware Budgets have not yet been allocated to Departments beyond the 2016-17 financial year. Therefore, the figures in the table below include planned spend in Upper Bann in 2016-17 on projects greater than £500k with only committed expenditure included beyond that period.

Projects located in one constituency may benefit a number of other constituencies, e.g. major road schemes, water and waste water treatment works, Translink infrastructure and vehicles.

As expenditure across the Department is not maintained on a constituency basis, projects have been largely identified using District Councils as a proxy; for Upper Bann these are Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon.

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
Upper Bann	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Council area	2016-17	7.0
	Department	Planned programme of Network Development, Local Transportations and Safety Measures in Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	2016-17	0.7
	Department	Millenium Way, Lurgan	2016-17	3.5
	Department	Laurelvale Flood Alleviation Scheme	2016-17 to 2017-18	1.0
	Translink	Portadown Station Park and Ride	2016-17 to 2017-18	3.2
	Translink	Wilson Street Park & Ride Portadown (Land purchase December 2016, Construction July 2017) awaiting LoO. EA outstanding	2016-17 to 2017-18	0.7
	Translink	Knockmore - Lurgan - Track Rehabilitation	2016-17 to 2017-18	21.8
	NIW	Portadown Drainage Area Network Improvements - Meadow Lane and Bann Street	2016-17 to 2019-20	2.7
	NIW	Robinsonstown WWTW Feasibility Study.	2016-17 to 2017-18	1.7
	NIW	Portadown DAP Stage 1	2016-17 to 2018-19	0.9
All Constituencies	Translink	Replacement Ticketing System	2016-17 to 2020-21	44.3
All Constituencies	Department	Northern Ireland Planning Portal Hardware software refresh	2016-17	1.1
All Constituencies	DVA	MOT Test Centres	2016-17 to 2022-23	1.6
All Constituencies	DVA	Roadside Enforcement IT System	2016-17	0.6

In addition, my Department has four flagship projects which the Executive agreed as part of Budget 2016-17. These projects which will benefit the Region as a whole were provided with a funding commitment up to 2020-21 as set out in the table below;

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	2020-21 £m
A5 Road	13.2	40.0	53.0	55.0	68.0
A6 Road	21.0	57.0	60.0	60.0	60.0
Belfast Rapid Transit	17.0	9.0	20.0	12.9	-
Belfast Transport Hub	5.8	16.0	40.0	60.0	

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on all planned capital expenditure for each Belfast constituency, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4961/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware Budgets have not yet been allocated to Departments beyond the 2016-17 financial year. Therefore, the figures in the table below include planned spend in Belfast Constituency in 2016-17 on projects greater than £500k with only committed expenditure included beyond that period.

Projects located in one constituency may benefit a number of other constituencies, e.g. major road schemes, water and waste water treatment works, Translink infrastructure and vehicles.

As expenditure across the Department is not maintained on a constituency basis, projects have been largely identified using District Councils as a proxy; for Belfast Constituency these are Belfast City Council; Lisburn, Castlereagh City Council, Antrim & Newtownabbey.

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
Belfast East	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in Belfast City Council	2016-17	2.5
	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Lisburn & Castlereagh Council area	2016-17	3.3
	Department	East Belfast Flood Alleviation Scheme Connswater Community Greenway, Phase 2	2016-17	0.6
	Department	East Belfast Flood Alleviation Scheme Knock and Loop Rivers	2016-17	2.5
	NIW	Queens Bridge Belfast Siphons	2016-17 to 2017-18	1.1
	NIW	Glenmachan Street WWPS refurbishment	2016-17 to 2018-19	3.7
Belfast North	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in Belfast City Council	2016-17	2.5
	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Antrim & Newtownabbey Council area	2016-17	3.8
	Department	Trunk Road Resurface - A8	2016-17	0.9
	NIW	Belfast WWTW PLC Upgrade	2016-17 to 2018-19	4.6
Belfast South	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in Belfast City Council	2016-17	2.5
	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Lisburn & Castlereagh Council area	2016-17	3.3
	NIW	Ormeau Avenue Sewer pollution resolution	2016-17 to 2018-19	3.9
	NIW	Olympia Leisure Centre Windsor Park Storm Sewer Requisition	2016-17 to 2017-18	0.9
	NIW	DG5 Feasibility Report- Minor Works	2016-17 to 2017-18	0.5
Belfast West	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in Belfast City Council	2016-17	2.5
	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Lisburn & Castlereagh Council area	2016-17	3.3
	NIW	Glenmachan Street WWPS refurbishment	2016-17 to 2018-19	3.7
Belfast	Translink	Duncrue Street Garage Redevelopment	2016-17 to 2018-19	28.9

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
	Translink	Metro Bus Fleet Replacement Programme 2016/17	2016-17	6.3
All Constituencies	Translink	Replacement Ticketing System	2016-17 to 2020-21	44.3
All Constituencies	Department	Northern Ireland Planning Portal Hardware software refresh	2016-17	1.1
All Constituencies	DVA	MOT Test Centres	2016-17 to 2022-23	1.6
All Constituencies	DVA	Roadside Enforcement IT System	2016-17	0.6

In addition, my Department has four flagship projects which the Executive agreed as part of Budget 2016-17. These projects which will benefit the Region as a whole were provided with a funding commitment up to 2020-21 as set out in the table below:

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	2020-21 £m
A5 Road	13.2	40.0	53.0	55.0	68.0
A6 Road	21.0	57.0	60.0	60.0	60.0
Belfast Rapid Transit	17.0	9.0	20.0	12.9	-
Belfast Transport Hub	5.8	16.0	40.0	60.0	

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on all planned capital expenditure for East Antrim, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4963/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware Budgets have not yet been allocated to Departments beyond the 2016-17 financial year. Therefore, the figures in the table below include planned spend in East Antrim in 2016-17 on projects greater than £500k with only committed expenditure included beyond that period.

Projects located in one constituency may benefit a number of other constituencies, e.g. major road schemes, water and waste water treatment works, Translink infrastructure and vehicles.

As expenditure across the Department is not maintained on a constituency basis, projects have been largely identified using District Councils as a proxy; for East Antrim these are Mid & East Antrim; Causeway Coast & Glens.

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
East Antrim	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Causeway Coast & Glens Council area	2016-17	10.8
	Department	Planned programme of Network Development, Local Transportations and Safety	2016-17	0.7
	Department	A2 Coast Road Slope stability & sea defence work	2016-17	0.8
	NIW	DG5 Feasibility Report- Minor Works	2016-17 to 2017-18	0.5
All Constituencies	Translink	Replacement Ticketing System	2016-17 to 2020-21	44.3
All Constituencies	Department	Northern Ireland Planning Portal Hardware software refresh	2016-17	1.1
All Constituencies	DVA	MOT Test Centres	2016-17 to 2022-23	1.6

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
All Constituencies	DVA	Roadside Enforcement IT System	2016-17	0.6

In addition, my Department has four flagship projects which the Executive agreed as part of Budget 2016-17. These projects which will benefit the Region as a whole were provided with a funding commitment up to 2020-21 as set out in the table below:

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	2020-21 £m
A5 Road	13.2	40.0	53.0	55.0	68.0
A6 Road	21.0	57.0	60.0	60.0	60.0
Belfast Rapid Transit	17.0	9.0	20.0	12.9	-
Belfast Transport Hub	5.8	16.0	40.0	60.0	

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on all planned capital expenditure for South Antrim, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4965/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware Budgets have not yet been allocated to Departments beyond the 2016-17 financial year. Therefore, the figures in the table below include planned spend in South Antrim in 2016-17 on projects greater than £500k with only committed expenditure included beyond that period.

Projects located in one constituency may benefit a number of other constituencies, e.g. major road schemes, water and waste water treatment works, Translink infrastructure and vehicles.

As expenditure across the Department is not maintained on a constituency basis, projects have been largely identified using District Councils as a proxy; for South Antrim these are Antrim & Newtownabbey; Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council.

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
South Antrim	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Antrim & Newtownabbey Council area	2016-17	3.8
	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Lisburn & Castlereagh Council area	2016-17	3.3
	Department	Trunk Road Resurface - A8	2016-17	0.9
	NIW	WIIM Phase 2 Dunore Point WP	2016-17 to 2017-18	3.0
	NIW	Killylane WTW to Crosshill SR Trunk Main Replacement	2016-17 to 2017-18	1.4
	NIW	Dunadry WWPS Upgrade	2016-17 to 2018-19	0.6
	NIW	Neillsbrook WwPS Upgrade Appraisal	2016-17 to 2017-18	0.9
All Constituencies	Translink	Replacement Ticketing System	2016-17 to 2020-21	44.3
All Constituencies	Department	Northern Ireland Planning Portal Hardware software refresh	2016-17	1.1
All Constituencies	DVA	MOT Test Centres	2016-17 to 2022-23	1.6
All Constituencies	DVA	Roadside Enforcement IT System	2016-17	0.6

In addition, my Department has four flagship projects which the Executive agreed as part of Budget 2016-17. These projects which will benefit the Region as a whole were provided with a funding commitment up to 2020-21 as set out in the table below;

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	2020-21 £m
A5 Road	13.2	40.0	53.0	55.0	68.0
A6 Road	21.0	57.0	60.0	60.0	60.0
Belfast Rapid Transit	17.0	9.0	20.0	12.9	-
Belfast Transport Hub	5.8	16.0	40.0	60.0	

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on all planned capital expenditure for Mid Ulster, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4967/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware Budgets have not yet been allocated to Departments beyond the 2016-17 financial year. Therefore, the figures in the table below include planned spend in Mid Ulster in 2016-17 on projects greater than £500k with only committed expenditure included beyond that period.

Projects located in one constituency may benefit a number of other constituencies, e.g. major road schemes, water and waste water treatment works, Translink infrastructure and vehicles.

As expenditure across the Department is not maintained on a constituency basis, projects have been largely identified using District Councils as a proxy; for Mid Ulster these are Mid Ulster Council; Fermanagh & Omagh.

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
Mid Ulster	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Mid Ulster Council area	2016-17	5.8
	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Fermanagh & Omagh Council area	2016-17	6.3
	Department	Planned programme of Network Development, Local Transportations and Safety Measures in Mid Ulster	2016-17	0.6
	Department	Planned programme of Bridge Strengthening in Mid Ulster	2016-17	0.6
	Department	A31 Magherafelt By-Pass	2016-17 to 2017-18	16.0
	Department	Planned programme of Network Development, Local Transportations and Safety Measures in Fermanagh & Omagh	2016-17	0.9
	Department	Planned programme of Bridge Strengthening in Fermanagh & Omagh	2016-17	0.5
	NIW	Lough Fea CWB Capacity Increase	2016-17 to 2019-20	4.2
	NIW	Ballyronan WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2018-19	2.5
	NIW	WIIM Phase 2 Lough Fea WP	2016-17 to 2018-19	2.2
	NIW	Derrycrin WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2017-18	1.5
	NIW	Desertmartin WwTW	2016-17 to 2019-20	1.3
	NIW	Killygonlan (Mullanahoe)WwTW Upgrade	2016-17 to 2017-18	1.0
	NIW	Knockloughrim WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2017-18	0.5
All Constituencies	Translink	Replacement Ticketing System	2016-17 to 2020-21	44.3
All Constituencies	Department	Northern Ireland Planning Portal Hardware software refresh	2016-17	1.1

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
All Constituencies	DVA	MOT Test Centres	2016-17 to 2022-23	1.6
All Constituencies	DVA	Roadside Enforcement IT System	2016-17	0.6

In addition, my Department has four flagship projects which the Executive agreed as part of Budget 2016-17. These projects which will benefit the Region as a whole were provided with a funding commitment up to 2020-21 as set out in the table below;

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	2020-21 £m
A5 Road	13.2	40.0	53.0	55.0	68.0
A6 Road	21.0	57.0	60.0	60.0	60.0
Belfast Rapid Transit	17.0	9.0	20.0	12.9	-
Belfast Transport Hub	5.8	16.0	40.0	60.0	

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on all planned capital expenditure for North Down, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4969/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware Budgets have not yet been allocated to Departments beyond the 2016-17 financial year. Therefore, the figures in the table below include planned spend in North Down in 2016-17 on projects greater than £500k with only committed expenditure included beyond that period.

Projects located in one constituency may benefit a number of other constituencies, e.g. major road schemes, water and waste water treatment works, Translink infrastructure and vehicles.

As expenditure across the Department is not maintained on a constituency basis, projects have been largely identified using District Councils as a proxy; for North Down these are Ards & North Down, Belfast City Council.

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
North Down	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Ards & North Down Council area	2016-17	3.0
	Translink	Bangor Station P&R (Dufferin Avenue)	2016-17	0.9
	NIW	Hollywood Sewer Network Improvements-Phase 2	2016-17 to 2017-18	1.1
	NIW	Bangor DAP Works Package 3 - Belfast Lough UIDs	2016-17 to 2018-19	2.0
	NIW	Hollywood Sewer Network Improvements	2016-17 to 2017/18	1.1
All Constituencies	Translink	Replacement Ticketing System	2016-17 to 2020-21	44.3
All Constituencies	Department	Northern Ireland Planning Portal Hardware software refresh	2016-17	1.1
All Constituencies	DVA	MOT Test Centres	2016-17 to 2022-23	1.6
All Constituencies	DVA	Roadside Enforcement IT System	2016-17	0.6

In addition, my Department has four flagship projects which the Executive agreed as part of Budget 2016-17. These projects which will benefit the Region as a whole were provided with a funding commitment up to 2020-21 as set out in the table below:

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	2020-21 £m
A5 Road	13.2	40.0	53.0	55.0	68.0
A6 Road	21.0	57.0	60.0	60.0	60.0
Belfast Rapid Transit	17.0	9.0	20.0	12.9	-
Belfast Transport Hub	5.8	16.0	40.0	60.0	

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on all planned capital expenditure for Strangford, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.

(AQW 4972/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware Budgets have not yet been allocated to Departments beyond the 2016-17 financial year. Therefore, the figures in the table below include planned spend in Strangford in 2016-17 on projects greater than £500k with only committed expenditure included beyond that period.

Projects located in one constituency may benefit a number of other constituencies, e.g. major road schemes, water and waste water treatment works, Translink infrastructure and vehicles.

As expenditure across the Department is not maintained on a constituency basis, projects have been largely identified using District Councils as a proxy; for Strangford these are Ards & North Down; Lisburn City & Castlereagh City Council; Newry, Mourne & Down.

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
Strangford	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Ards & North Down Council area	2016-17	3.0
	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Newry, Mourne & Down Council area	2016-17	5.2
	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Lisburn & Castlereagh Council area	2016-17	3.3
	Department	Planned programme of Network Development, Local Transportations and Safety Measures in Newry Mourne & Down	2016-17	1.2
	Department	Replacement vessel for the Strangford Ferry service	2016-17	1.1
	NIW	Killinchy WWTW - Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2019-20	2.0
	NIW	Loughries WWTWs Appraisal	2016-17 to 2018-19	0.7
	NIW	Ards North, Carrowdore, Ballywalter, Ballyhaskin	2016-17 to 2019-20	17.1
	NIW	Ards South, Portavogie, Ballyhalbert, Cloughey, Kirkistown	2016-17 to 2020-21	4.9
	NIW	Ballygowan WwTW	2016-17 to 2019/20	4.7
All Constituencies	Translink	Replacement Ticketing System	2016-17 to 2020-21	44.3
All Constituencies	Department	Northern Ireland Planning Portal Hardware software refresh	2016-17	1.1
All Constituencies	DVA	MOT Test Centres	2016-17 to 2022-23	1.6
All Constituencies	DVA	Roadside Enforcement IT System	2016-17	0.6

In addition, my Department has four flagship projects which the Executive agreed as part of Budget 2016-17. These projects which will benefit the Region as a whole were provided with a funding commitment up to 2020-21 as set out in the table below:

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	2020-21 £m
A5 Road	13.2	40.0	53.0	55.0	68.0
A6 Road	21.0	57.0	60.0	60.0	60.0
Belfast Rapid Transit	17.0	9.0	20.0	12.9	-
Belfast Transport Hub	5.8	16.0	40.0	60.0	

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the present value of each road surety bond in East Antrim; (ii) where the developer is no longer trading, who is currently receiving the developer's interest from each bond; and (iii) the cost to his Department to manage the road surety bonds.

(AQW 4980/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) The information held by my Department is recorded by Council area as opposed to Constituency area. The following is a list of the current road bonds with present value in the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Area.

Brooklands, Ahoghill	£14,250.00
Brooklands, Ahoghill	£8,325.00
Brooklands, Ahoghill	£1,650.00
Maine Grove, Cullybackey	£10,700.00
Millwater Lodge, Ahoghill	£8,300.00
Millwater Lodge, Ahoghill	£16,110.00
Rosburn Manor, Kells	£19,080.00
Craignamaddy Heights, Cargan	£20,700.00
Crebilly Road	£30,200.00
Crebilly Road	£25,300.00
Sandhurst Manor, Galgorm	£4,110.00
Sandhurst Manor, Galgorm	£41,900.00
Woodside Road	£34,000.00
Oldstone Manor, Clough	£29,250.00
Main Street, Portglenone	£38,700.00
Fisherstown, Cargan	£47,050.00
Ambleside, Cullybackey	£20,000.00
Meeting House Meadows, Ahoghill	£76,500.00
Phoenix Fields	£55,750.00
Phoenix Fields	£70,000.00
Phoenix Fields	£60,800.00
Caherty Road, Broughshane	£37,750.00
Caherty Road, Broughshane	£76,300.00
Caherty Road, Broughshane	£15,810.00
Killane Manor, Ahoghill	£138,600.00
Riverdale Park, Portglenone	£6,590.00
Old Manse Grove, Toomebridge	£36,900.00
Leighinmohr Avenue	£5,360.00

Leighinmohr Avenue	£17,450.00
Leighinmohr Avenue	£27,100.00
Leighinmohr Avenue	£35,500.00
Leighinmohr Avenue	£60,200.00
Leighinmohr Avenue	£29,400.00
Woodland Grove	£55,900.00
Woodland Grove	£4,540.00
Woodland Grove	£3,780.00
The Old Mart, Martinstown	£10,290.00
Cornmill, Kells	£54,840.00
Cornmill, Kells	£22,200.00
Rockfield Park, Cargan	£31,500.00
Cushendall Road	£9,700.00
Carndale Meadows	£10,860.00
Carndale Meadows	£27,000.00
St Patricks Barracks	£174,900.00
Carniny Road	£146,000.00
Carniny Road	£14,900.00
Eaton Fields, Broughshane Road	£20,950.00
Eaton Fields, Broughshane Road	£1,490.00
Eaton Fields, Broughshane Road	£13,200.00
Antrim Road	£28,000.00
Raceview Road, Broughshane	£26,200.00
Raceview Road, Broughshane	£6,500.00
Portglenone Road, Ahoghill	£25,000.00
Portglenone Road, Ahoghill	£7,000.00
Cushendall Road	£98,900.00
Cushendall Road	£8,600.00
Montague Avenue	£5,700.00
Bloomsdale, Broughshane	£53,300.00
Bloomsdale, Broughshane	£2,700.00
Pottinger Street, Cullybackey	£7,400.00
Oakdene	£3,950.00
Lindara	£105,000.00
Leafield, Ballycarry	£8,490.00
Leafield, Ballycarry	£31,900.00
Bayfields, Carnlough	£85,100.00
Lislainan, Ballycarry	£9,250.00
Lislainan, Ballycarry	£11,300.00
Lislainan, Ballycarry	£7,400.00
Porter Green	£30,660.00
Porter Green	£20,350.00

Porter Green	£18,500.00
Ballyhampton Road	£29,750.00
Ballyhampton Road	£25,900.00
Ballyhampton Road	£5,750.00
Ballyhampton Road	£17,050.00
Ballyhampton Road	£9,850.00
Ballyhampton Road	£50,300.00
Ballyhampton Road	£44,400.00
Ballyhampton Road	£59,500.00
Ballyhampton Road	£33,300.00
Rose Place, Islandmagee	£3,370.00
Rose Place, Islandmagee	£3,290.00
Riverside Mews	£10,800.00
Riverside Mews	£22,200.00
Redlands Road	£172,000.00
Drumalla Park, Carnlough	£18,500.00
Drumalla Park, Carnlough	£180,300.00
Gorse Meadow	£29,800.00
Woodlawn, Woodburn Road	£7,800.00
Woodlawn, Woodburn Road	£5,130.00
Brackenridge, Sloefield Road	£2,050.00
Craiglands	£9,150.00
Riverbrook, Whitehead	£37,200.00
Loughview Terrace, Greenisland	£500.00
Loughview Terrace, Greenisland	£17,200.00
Goldenview Park, Greenisland	£52,600.00
Goldenview Park, Greenisland	£58,900.00
Thralcot Lane, Thralcot Link	£66,600.00
Marlborough Manor	£49,100.00
Marlborough Manor	£5,000.00
Shorelands, Greenisland	£25,900.00
Cambridge Close, Larne Road	£69,700.00
Farm Lodge, Upper Road	£54,150.00
Riverford, Whitehead	£96,850.00
Riverford, Whitehead	£224,850.00
Old Shore Court	£45,325.00
The Old Boatyard, Larne Road	£69,050.00
Farm Lodge Park, Greenisland	£19,250.00
Farm Lodge Stables, Greenisland	£17,725.00
Hartley Hall, Greenisland	£70,320.00
Hartley Hall, Greenisland	£2,340.00
Hartley Hall, Greenisland	£7,150.00

Cable Road, Whitehead	£3,400.00
Trailcock Road	£21,200.00
Trailcock Road	£30,100.00
Trailcock Road	£42,300.00
Tudor Oaks, Tudor Road	£21,600.00
Tudor Oaks, Tudor Road	£28,550.00
Tudor Oaks, Tudor Road	£33,300.00
Tudor Oaks, Tudor Road	£40,700.00
The Cairn, Greenisland	£34,725.00
The Cairn, Greenisland	£24,400.00
Thralcot Link	£14,200.00
Thralcot Link	£32,450.00
Golden Gate, Greenisland	£29,900.00
Orland Meadows	£5,270.00
Sunnylands	£34,400.00
North Road	£2,090.00
North Road	£240.00
Hartley Hall, Greenisland	£9,980.00

- (ii) Interest that is received from cash bonds is added to the bond account and returned to the developer on completion of adoption or in the case where the developer is no longer trading it is returned to the administrator of the Company when the street is adopted.
- (iii) My Department does not hold information on the cost of the management of road bonds as this work is undertaken across a number of staff grades who also carry out other administrative functions.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on all planned capital expenditure in North Antrim, broken down by each project including (i) the timescale; and (ii) the total anticipated cost.
(AQW 4998/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As you will be aware Budgets have not yet been allocated to Departments beyond the 2016-17 financial year. Therefore, the figures in the table below include planned spend in North Antrim in 2016-17 on projects greater than £500k with only committed expenditure included beyond that period.

Projects located in one constituency may benefit a number of other constituencies, e.g. major road schemes, water and waste water treatment works, Translink infrastructure and vehicles.

As expenditure across the Department is not maintained on a constituency basis, projects have been largely identified using District Councils as a proxy; for North Antrim these are Causeway Coast & Glens; Mid & East Antrim.

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
North Antrim	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Causeway Coast & Glens Council area	2016-17	6.4
	Department	Planned expenditure on structural maintenance of the carriageway and footway network in the Mid & East Antrim Council area	2016-17	4.4
	Department	Planned programme of Network Development, Local Transportations and Safety Measures in Mid & East Antrim	2016-17	0.7
	Department	A26 Glarryford - A44 Dualling	2016-17 to 2017-18	27.3

Constituency	Organisation	Project title (Only projects £500k and over)	Timescale	£m
	Department	Replacement vessel for the Rathlin Ferry service and improvement to harbours	2016-17	1.4
	Translink	Cullybackey Park and Ride	2016-17 to 2019-20	0.6
	NIW	Moorfield WWTW Feasibility Study.	2016-17 to 2019-20	1.0
	NIW	Galgorm WWPS Upgrade - Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2018-19	2.9
	NIW	WIIM Phase 2 Altnahinch Bushmills WP	2016-17 to 2017-18	2.7
	NIW	Devenagh Burn WWPS - Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2018-19	2.6
	NIW	Dervock WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2019-20	1.5
	NIW	Mullans WWTW (Antrim) Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2017-18	1.4
	NIW	Moss-side WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2018-19	1.4
	NIW	Armoy WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2019-20	1.3
	NIW	Monaclogh SR Capacity Extension	2016-17 to 2017-18	1.2
	NIW	Ballyvoy WWTW Feasibility Study	2016-17 to 2018-19	1.1
	NIW	Glenlough Pumping Station & Pumping Main	2016-17 to 2017-18	0.7
All Constituencies	Translink	Replacement Ticketing System	2016-17 to 2020-21	44.3
All Constituencies	Department	Northern Ireland Planning Portal Hardware software refresh	2016-17	1.1
All Constituencies	DVA	MOT Test Centres	2016-17 to 2022-23	1.6
All Constituencies	DVA	Roadside Enforcement IT System	2016-17	0.6

In addition, my Department has four flagship projects which the Executive agreed as part of Budget 2016-17. These projects which will benefit the Region as a whole were provided with a funding commitment up to 2020-21 as set out in the table below:

	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	2020-21 £m
A5 Road	13.2	40.0	53.0	55.0	68.0
A6 Road	21.0	57.0	60.0	60.0	60.0
Belfast Rapid Transit	17.0	9.0	20.0	12.9	-
Belfast Transport Hub	5.8	16.0	40.0	60.0	

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his Department's role in relation to the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

(AQW 5004/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's role in relation to the Trust Ports in the north, which includes Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners and Warrenpoint Harbour Authority is set out below.

- The Department is responsible for ports policy and the legislative framework within which ports operate in the north.
- The Department exercises a stewardship role over the trust ports to ensure that in undertaking their fiduciary duties, they adhere to good practice and probity in accordance with statutory public accountability measures.
- The Department appoints Non-Executive members to the boards of the three Trust Ports situated in Belfast, Derry and Warrenpoint.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much funding has the Belfast Harbour Commissioners received from his Department over the last two year period.

(AQW 5007/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As Trust Ports, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners and Warrenpoint Harbour Authority, are autonomous, self-financing statutory bodies who operate on a commercial basis with the profit generated by their activities re-invested to improve their facilities and services. However, if Trust Ports do need to borrow to enable this, my Department can make loans to them, subject to a satisfactory business case being submitted and approved. Any borrowings by Trust Ports, irrespective of where the funds are sourced, count against my Department's Delegated Expenditure Limit.

During the last two audited financial years, 2014/15 and 2015/16, my Department has provided a loan facility of £3.5m to Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners. Neither Belfast Harbour Commissioners nor Warrenpoint Harbour Authority has received any government funding during this two year period.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure, apart from his Department, to detail the funding streams open to the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.
(AQW 5008/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As Trust Ports, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners and Warrenpoint Harbour Authority, are autonomous, self-financing statutory bodies who operate on a commercial basis with the profit generated by their activities re-invested to improve their facilities and services.

These Trust Ports generally fund their own capital investment, however if they need to borrow to enable this, my Department can make loans to them, subject to a satisfactory business case being submitted and approved. Any borrowings by Trust Ports, irrespective of where the funds are sourced, counts against my Department's Delegated Expenditure Limit.

Until recently, my Department was working closely with the Trust Ports to support possible bids for EU funding. Indeed on the eve of the referendum on EU membership I was in Rotterdam making the case for our Ports to the Commission during the annual TEN-T Days event. Unfortunately our Ports will not now be in a position to benefit from this significant funding opportunity.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the A28 Armagh East Link project.
(AQW 5068/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following feedback received at a Public Information event for the proposed Armagh East Link held in June 2014 the Preferred Option was reviewed.

The review identified viable alternative options which are now subject to detailed assessment before a Preferred Option can be confirmed. It is anticipated that this work will be complete in the coming months, however, it is important to note that the preferred option may, or may not, change as a result of this review.

Following identification of the Preferred Option, the next stage of development work, involves completing the detailed design which will be subject to further comprehensive environmental, economic and engineering assessments. The formal statutory procedures will then follow and it is likely a Public Inquiry will be required to determine if the proposal should go ahead as planned.

Progression to construction remains subject to clearing the statutory procedures, having satisfactory economic appraisals and the availability of funding in future budget settlements.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the A3 Armagh West Link project.
(AQW 5069/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Armagh North and West Link Road extends approximately 6.9 km around the Western and Northern outskirts of Armagh City, from the A3 Monaghan Road to the A3 Portadown Road crossing a number of radial roads.

The current stage of development would conclude with the confirmation of a Preferred Option and junction strategy for the link road, however it is not considered appropriate to make a decision on the Preferred Option at this time, pending development of proposals for the Mullinure Area highlighted in the Armagh City Centre Masterplan 2030.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline how his Department is enhancing road safety within the vicinity of schools.
(AQW 5100/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has a statutory duty to promote road safety and, within the context of the NI Road Safety Strategy, does this through a wide range of rolling road safety educational activities, including road safety public information campaigns and education programmes; and engineering initiatives.

My Department continues to take a range of actions to reduce deaths and serious injuries on our roads and focuses on the key causes of road casualties, and on groups which are over-represented in the casualty figures. Children and young people are amongst the most vulnerable groups using our roads and as such must be taught how to use our roads safely, both in the school vicinity and the wider community.

My Department provides educational resources and schemes which are used by teachers to teach road safety to school children. For example, the road safety Teaching Aid Calendar is on every primary school and nursery wall in the north of Ireland. The Junior Road Safety Officer (JRSO) scheme aims to empower children to raise awareness of road safety issues amongst pupils, teachers and the wider community and to date some 130 primary schools have joined the scheme.

A total of 190 schools have participated in the Active School Travel programme, funded by DfI and in partnership with the Public Health Agency. This programme aims to encourage children to walk or cycle to school and provides walking and cycling skills training so that children can travel to school more safely. Safety measures such as enhanced school traffic signs and road markings, has been provided in the vicinity of these schools under the programme. In the last five years road safety improvements have been provided at 132 schools as part of the School Travel and Safety Projects initiative. A further 60 schools have been selected to join the programme during this school year.

The Cycling Proficiency Scheme (CPS) is offered to all primary schools. CPS teaches children in years 6 and 7 how to ride their bicycles safely, to learn the basics of the Highway Code and help them be safer road users. It will also teach children basic manoeuvres to ensure their safety as they continue to cycle. In this academic year CPS will be delivered in approx 320 schools with 7,500 children being trained.

Practical Child Pedestrian Safety Training (PCPST) is offered to selected primary schools, chosen from targeted areas of social need. The scheme is a rolling three year programme and is an effective way for children in years 3, 4 and 5 to acquire and develop pedestrian skills, observe dangers and practise crossing roads safely via supervised training walks in the locale of their school.

As children progress into post primary, there are resources and schemes to support them as they mature. My Department has produced six education packs that address the persistent behaviours that cause the vast majority of collisions on our roads. The education packs are used to stimulate debate among students and assist in making better road safety behaviours. There are also seven short lessons and presentations which teachers can use to deliver to students.

The Department also supports a GCSE, 'Motor Vehicle Road User Studies', which gives students firsthand experience of road safety through both practical and theoretical study.

For the month of September, a series of road safety messages were delivered through social media, radio, television and outdoor advertising, addressing a range of road safety behaviours on the journey to and from school to enhance child passenger and child pedestrian safety.

As over 95% of road traffic collisions where someone is killed or seriously injured is due to human error, the risks to children's safety at schools that arise from road traffic and driver behaviour can be varied. In addition to road safety education my Department can call upon a number of measures to help improve safety by encouraging drivers to reduce their speed through engineering initiatives. These include provision of enhanced signing and lining, central islands, lay-bys, and traffic calming features such as road humps. A recent innovation has been the development of part-time 20 mph speed limits at schools, especially at schools on roads where the national speed limit applies. I have asked my officials to consider further refinements of this measure that would facilitate an increased provision, subject to available funding.

My Department's policy and procedure guide for engineering measures to improve safety at schools is available for download at <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/road-safety-schools-rsppg-e070> .

I am committed to continuing to work towards reducing deaths and serious injuries on our roads. I recognise the continuing challenges of preventing road deaths and serious injuries and as such my Department will continue to address the issues through various activities.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what role does his Department have in relation to the Warrenpoint Harbour Authority.

(AQW 5139/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's role in relation to the Trust Ports in the north, which includes Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners and Warrenpoint Harbour Authority is set out below.

- The Department is responsible for ports policy and the legislative framework within which ports operate in the north.
- The Department exercises a stewardship role over the trust ports to ensure that in undertaking their fiduciary duties, they adhere to good practice and probity in accordance with statutory public accountability measures.
- The Department appoints Non-Executive members to the boards of the three Trust Ports situated in Belfast, Derry and Warrenpoint.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what role his Department has in relation to the Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners.

(AQW 5140/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's role in relation to the Trust Ports in the north, which includes Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners and Warrenpoint Harbour Authority is set out below.

- The Department is responsible for ports policy and the legislative framework within which ports operate in the north.

- The Department exercises a stewardship role over the trust ports to ensure that in undertaking their fiduciary duties, they adhere to good practice and probity in accordance with statutory public accountability measures.
- The Department appoints Non-Executive members to the boards of the three Trust Ports situated in Belfast, Derry and Warrenpoint.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure , apart from his Department, to outline any other funding streams available to the Warrenpoint Harbour Authority.

(AQW 5141/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As Trust Ports, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners and Warrenpoint Harbour Authority, are autonomous, self-financing statutory bodies who operate on a commercial basis with the profit generated by their activities re-invested to improve their facilities and services.

These Trust Ports generally fund their own capital investment, however if they need to borrow to enable this, my Department can make loans to them, subject to a satisfactory business case being submitted and approved. Any borrowings by Trust Ports, irrespective of where the funds are sourced, counts against my Department's Delegated Expenditure Limit.

Until recently, my Department was working closely with the Trust Ports to support possible bids for EU funding. Indeed on the eve of the referendum on EU membership I was in Rotterdam making the case for our Ports to the Commission during the annual TEN-T Days event. Unfortunately our Ports will not now be in a position to benefit from this significant funding opportunity.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure , apart from his Department, to outline any other funding streams available to the Northern Ireland Drainage Council.

(AQW 5142/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are no funding streams required by the Drainage Council as it is a non-Departmental Public Body and has no budget, nor do the members of this body receive a salary. The running costs for the Drainage Council consists only of venue and travel expenses and these are paid by my Department.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much departmental funding has the Warrenpoint Harbour Authority received over the last two years.

(AQW 5143/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As Trust Ports, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners and Warrenpoint Harbour Authority, are autonomous, self-financing statutory bodies who operate on a commercial basis with the profit generated by their activities re-invested to improve their facilities and services. However, if Trust Ports do need to borrow to enable this, my Department can make loans to them, subject to a satisfactory business case being submitted and approved. Any borrowings by Trust Ports, irrespective of where the funds are sourced, count against my Department's Delegated Expenditure Limit.

During the last two audited financial years, 2014/15 and 2015/16, my Department has provided a loan facility of £3.5m to Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners. Neither Belfast Harbour Commissioners nor Warrenpoint Harbour Authority has received any government funding during this two year period.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the criteria used to decide what proportion of his overall available departmental budget is allocated to South Belfast for both structural and routine maintenance.

(AQW 5144/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's TransportNI allocates available maintenance funding on the basis of need for both structural and routine work within a particular council area. This is done using a range of weighted indicators, including length of roads, asset condition, volumes of traffic, number of identified defects and public complaints.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) for an update on the Millennium Way project in Lurgan; and (ii) to detail a date for opening.

(AQW 5181/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Despite good progress with the construction of the new section of Millennium Way, progress has been slower than expected at both the Flush Place/Gilford Road/Banbridge Road and Millennium Way/Malcolm Road junctions.

At Flush Place equipment from a significant number of utility providers including BT, NIE, NIW, Virgin Media, Eircom and Firmus Gas has been required to be altered. Considerable advance works were undertaken to facilitate the extension to Millennium Way scheme, however, a number of the utility providers have been unable to complete their works in accordance with the timeframes required. This has had subsequent implications for the progress of the main construction works.

At Malcolm Road there are a number of high and low voltage electricity cables in the existing carriageway. Working around these cables has proved more difficult than anticipated and this has limited progress at the junction. To facilitate construction of the junction NIE is progressing a programme of works during October and November.

It is also important to note that in order to minimise disruption to traffic and businesses in the area during the busy Christmas period works on the live carriageways will be limited during December.

My Department's TransportNI will continue to work with the construction contractor and utility providers to complete the works as soon as possible and will endeavour to minimise delays during the remainder of the works. Works are now expected to be completed in Spring 2017.

Mr Lynch asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has any plans for an interchange for Translink bus service numbers (i) 261; (ii) 273; (iii) 209; (iv) 250; and (v) 251 to Belfast International Airport.

(AQW 5204/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A bus interchange allows passengers to change service and wait on connecting services in a safe and comfortable environment. Services 261, 273, 209, 250 and 251 originate and terminate at the Europa Bus Centre and all travel along the M1. Service 300 is seen as the relevant service connecting to Belfast International Airport and operates for over 18 hours each day with services running at 20 minute intervals at peak times.

Services 261/273/209/250/251 are primarily aimed at passengers travelling regularly to and from Belfast and have been growing in use at least partly because of a reduced number of stops en route which provides journey time savings. Any diversion to a potential interchange off the M1 would add substantially to the journey time for those travelling to and from Belfast. It may also require Translink to consider changing existing service routes or putting on a new service with a very high frequency like Service 300 and identifying potential interchange locations which would be safe and convenient.

For these reasons there are no plans to alter the current timetable.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the Enniskillen bypass.

(AQW 5213/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The preferred alignment for the A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass was announced in June 2015. The next stage involves production of the Environmental Statement and the draft Statutory Orders (Direction Order and Vesting Order) for the scheme and consultants have recently been appointed to assist my Department in taking the project through this stage.

I hope to be in a position to announce the publication of the draft Orders and Environmental Statement in mid 2017 and this would commence the statutory consultation process which, depending on the representation made, may result in a public inquiry. Depending on the outcome of this process my Department may be in a position to make the Direction Order thereafter and this would define the line of the new road and provide planning protection.

Progression of the scheme thereafter to the construction stage would depend on the availability of funding and unfortunately current indicative funding levels are such that no commitments can be given at this time. My Department is however progressing the development of new Transport Plans in line with The New Approach to Regional Transportation, and this will set out a long-term programme of investment. This process will provide an opportunity for schemes, such as the A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass, to be considered for funding, along with other existing and proposed schemes elsewhere in the north of Ireland.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 3659/16-21 and AQW 3978/16-21, to detail when he will answer these questions.

(AQW 5219/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I answered AQW 3659/16-21 on 18 October and AQW 3978/16-21 on 19 October 2016 respectively.

Mr McGuigan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has any plans to reinstate facilities to allow for a train stop in Dunloy on the Derry to Belfast route.

(AQW 5261/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink considered improvements to its railways network under its 2015 Network Utilization Strategy. The outcome of this work did not include a need for a new halt at Dunloy. Therefore Translink's current capital plans do not include provision for such a proposal.

I will however ask Translink to keep such proposals and the business demand for them under review for consideration in the longer term.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much departmental funding has the Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners received over the last two years.

(AQW 5282/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As Trust Ports, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners and Warrenpoint Harbour Authority, are autonomous, self-financing statutory bodies who operate on a commercial basis with the profit generated by their activities re-invested to improve their facilities and services. However, if Trust Ports do need to borrow to enable this, my Department can make loans to them, subject to a satisfactory business case being submitted

and approved. Any borrowings by Trust Ports, irrespective of where the funds are sourced, count against my Department's Delegated Expenditure Limit.

During the last two audited financial years, 2014/15 and 2015/16, my Department has provided a loan facility of £3.5m to Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners. Neither Belfast Harbour Commissioners nor Warrenpoint Harbour Authority has received any government funding during this two year period.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure how much departmental funding has the Driver and Vehicle Agency received over the last two years.

(AQW 5283/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The departmental funding provided to the Driver & Vehicle Agency in the last two years (excluding funding for the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme) was £5.72 million in 2015/16 and £2.84 million in 2014/15. The increase in the funding in 2015/16 was due to departmental funding for a new driver licensing IT system.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure apart from his Department, to outline any other funding streams available to the Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners.

(AQW 5284/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As Trust Ports, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners and Warrenpoint Harbour Authority, are autonomous, self-financing statutory bodies who operate on a commercial basis with the profit generated by their activities re-invested to improve their facilities and services.

These Trust Ports generally fund their own capital investment, however if they need to borrow to enable this, my Department can make loans to them, subject to a satisfactory business case being submitted and approved. Any borrowings by Trust Ports, irrespective of where the funds are sourced, counts against my Department's Delegated Expenditure Limit.

Until recently, my Department was working closely with the Trust Ports to support possible bids for EU funding. Indeed on the eve of the referendum on EU membership I was in Rotterdam making the case for our Ports to the Commission during the annual TEN-T Days event. Unfortunately our Ports will not now be in a position to benefit from this significant funding opportunity.

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how much his Department and associated agencies have spent on cutting grass in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5293/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department does not maintain a record of expenditure in the format requested, however, I can provide the Member with information on Environmental Work which includes Grass Cutting, Weed Control, Tree Maintenance and Other/Emergency Environmental Works.

The total amount spent by my Department's TransportNI on these activities in each of the last three years, is detailed in the table below.

	2013-14 £k	2014-15 £k	2015-16 £k
Grass Cutting, Weed Control & Tree Maintenance	6,609	6,026	5,768

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether it is an offence to paint over locations on road signs; and if so how many prosecutions have been made in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5296/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can confirm that it is an offence under Article 33 of the Road Traffic Regulation (NI) Order 1997 for a person to unlawfully and intentionally interfere with or damage a traffic sign.

The Member will, however, appreciate the many difficulties in proving a case in this regard, as the courts will require substantial and clear evidence before an effective prosecution can be brought.

Over the past five years, no formal investigations into specific incidents have been carried out by my Department and no prosecutions taken.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed scheme to improve road safety at the Sand Road/Woodtown Road junction, Ballymena.

(AQW 5311/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A design for the junction improvement at Sand Road / Woodtown Road is now complete and some necessary service alterations have been completed in advance.

The scheme proposal to improve the junction will be considered for inclusion in a future works programme as resources permit.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 4204/16-21, whether he plans to adjust or alter the type of road edge marking on the A32, Clanabogan Road to permit slow moving and agricultural vehicles, and groups of cyclists to travel on existing hard shoulders.
(AQW 5312/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department carried out a trial in 2002, provided signage and road markings on sections of the A4 route between Dungannon and Enniskillen to permit slow moving vehicles to use the hard shoulders. During this trial, motorists in slow moving vehicles did not regularly utilise the hard shoulder, claiming they were experiencing difficulty at junctions and accesses and when rejoining the carriageway at the end of the hard shoulder lanes. The majority of these trial lanes have now been removed and any remaining lanes will be removed when the adjacent carriageway is being resurfaced.

My Department has therefore no further plans to permit slow moving vehicles and cyclists to travel along hard shoulders on any routes including the A32 Clanabogan Road.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to (i) outline the policy for maintenance of skid resistant resurfacing on existing accident prone sites; and (ii) list the overall spending on the same, over the last three financial years in the Fermanagh and Dungannon areas.
(AQW 5313/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Skid resistant surfacing or High Friction Surfacing (HFS) as it is properly known, is considerably more expensive than other forms of surface treatment such as asphalt resurfacing or surface dressing and its use can only be justified in exceptional circumstances.

Apart from the initial capital cost, HFS has a much shorter life span than other surfacing materials (3 to 5 years as opposed to 15 to 20 years for asphalt or 8 to 10 years for surface dressing). Furthermore HFS also tends to be very damaging to the underlying layers on which it is applied and also needs to be placed on a structurally sound layer to achieve anything like its optimum life span. Consequently it is difficult to replace on a like for like basis without considerable expensive repairs being necessary to the underlying surface before it is reapplied.

Where the required level of skid resistance can be achieved by using other methods or materials such as asphalt or surface dressing, this is by far the preferred maintenance option.

For these reasons there has been no expenditure on relaying HFS in Fermanagh and Dungannon in recent years. However at some locations alternative surfacing has been provided to improve the skid resistance e.g. a section of the A4 Sligo Road near Enniskillen was resurfaced in asphalt during 2015 rather than replacing the existing HFS and during the summer of 2016 a section of Gardner's Cross Road near Maguiresbridge was surfaced dressed thus removing the need for HFS.
Ballymagee and Kilmaine Primary Schools Parking

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what can his Department do to help alleviate the parking issue at Ballymagee and Kilmaine Primary Schools when dropping children to and from school.
(AQW 5367/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: School related parking issues occur during peak parental movement times and this is a common complaint at many educational facilities throughout the north. These short term problems are especially prevalent at educational establishments which deny vehicular access for drop off and pick up purposes thereby leaving no alternative therefore other than to park on the road itself.

My Department has already provided measures at Ballymagee Primary School in the form of electronic flashing amber school ahead warning signs and school keep clear road markings to warn drivers of the presence of the school in conjunction with red textured carriageway bands denoting 'School Ahead' text provided within.

Kilmaine Primary School is within a residential area and has school patrol signs and school keep clear road markings to warn drivers of the presence of the school.

My Department's officials work closely with the Education Board to address issues which arise around schools and I can assure you that these areas will continue to be monitored in the interests of road safety.

I can also advise that whilst my traffic engineers work with others to install these various engineering measures, that parents, residents and all road users have a role to play in following the relevant traffic signs and road markings to ensure the wellbeing of our young people making their way to and from school.

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 3895/16-21; to detail the projected expenditure for 2016-17.
(AQW 5421/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Departments roads structural maintenance forecast outturn by service activity for 2016-17 is detailed in the table below.

Roads Structural Maintenance by Activity Forecast

Activity	2016-17 £k
Resurfacing & Reconstruction	50,496
Patching	9,984
Structural Drainage	5,148
Total Structural Maintenance	65,628

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the current road structural maintenance budget deficit; and (ii) how this compares to each of the last ten years.

(AQW 5424/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The independently established Structural Maintenance Funding Plan (SMFP) recommends that some £141 million per annum, based on 2016 prices, is needed to maintain the structural integrity of the entire road network in the North at good practice resurfacing frequencies. The structural maintenance budget for the current financial year (2016/17) is £66 million, leaving a deficit of around £75 million.

The funding required is reviewed annually to reflect changes in unit costs of materials and inflationary pressures. The deficit over the last ten years, calculated as the difference between the level of funding recommended by the Structural Maintenance Funding Plan in the given year and the actual structural maintenance out-turn in that same year, is as follows:

■ 2006/07	£31m	■ 2011/12	£4m*
■ 2007/08	£22m	■ 2012/13	£16m
■ 2008/09	£41m	■ 2013/14	£2.5m*
■ 2009/10	£23m	■ 2014/15	£35m
■ 2010/11	£24m	■ 2015/16	£83m

*out-turn exceeded SMFP recommended level

The Member should be assured of my commitment to supporting the funding for structural maintenance and that it is certainly high on my priorities this year and looking to Budget 2016.

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Infrastructure, for each carpark where ownership transferred to a local council as part of the reform of local government, to detail (i) the council it transferred to; (ii) the number of spaces; (iii) the revenue generated in the year immediately before transfer; (iv) the enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer; and (v) the costs of any projected or required maintenance and upgrading at the time of transfer.

(AQW 5427/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Please see the table attached for details of each car park where ownership transferred to a local council as part of the reform of local government, which shows:

- (i) the council it transferred to;
- (ii) the number of spaces;
- (iii) the revenue generated in the year immediately before transfer (note this contains both car park receipts and Penalty Charge Notice receipts received from illegal parking within car parks); and
- (iv) the enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer.

In response to item (v), i.e. the costs of any projected or required maintenance and upgrading at the time of transfer; because all car parks were transferred as fit for purpose at the time of transfer no projected maintenance costs or upgrading were required.

AQW 5427/16-21 reference

Car Park Description	Town	(i) council area transferred to	(ii) Number of spaces	(iii) revenue generated in year immediately before transfer^ FYE 31/3/2015 £	(iv) enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer* FYE 31/3/2015 £
Castle Street	Antrim	Antrim & Newtownabbey	117	0	0
Central (Castleway)	Antrim	Antrim & Newtownabbey	452	-124,163	88,076
Dublin Road	Antrim	Antrim & Newtownabbey	195	0	0
Railway Street	Antrim	Antrim & Newtownabbey	186	-70,914	23,339
Harrier Way	Ballyclare	Antrim & Newtownabbey	133	-35,583	9,695
Market Square	Ballyclare	Antrim & Newtownabbey	55	-29,962	8,852
Farmley Road	Glengormley	Antrim & Newtownabbey	146	0	0
John Street	Randalstown	Antrim & Newtownabbey	102	0	0
Portglenone Road	Randalstown	Antrim & Newtownabbey	23	0	0
Shore Road (487-489)	Whiteabbey	Antrim & Newtownabbey	27	0	0
Shore Road (606-612)	Whiteabbey	Antrim & Newtownabbey	46	-20,491	6,086
Court House	Armagh	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	31	0	0
Dobbin Street Lane (excepting St Malachy's Church)	Armagh	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	106	0	3,589
Dobbin Street Lane (St Malachy's Church)	Armagh	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	96	-52,284	13,457
Friary Road East	Armagh	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	138	-30,405	12,211
Friary Road West (4 Dobbin Street)	Armagh	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	42	0	0
Linenhall Street	Armagh	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	63	-46,426	10,659
Lonsdale Street	Armagh	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	105	-23,587	11,221
Mall West (159 Mall View Terrace)	Armagh	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	412	-89,134	0
Bridge Street East	Banbridge	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	66	-12,439	5,069
Church Square	Banbridge	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	138	0	0

Car Park Description	Town	(i) council area transferred to	(ii) Number of spaces	(iii) revenue generated in year immediately before transfer^ FYE 31/3/2015 £	(iv) enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer* FYE 31/3/2015 £
Commercial Road	Banbridge	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	113	-100,501	17,626
Downshire Place	Banbridge	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	112	-46,239	9,700
Downshire Road	Banbridge	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	15	0	0
Kenlis Court	Banbridge	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	20	0	0
Kenlis Street	Banbridge	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	74	-40,230	6,364
Townsend Street	Banbridge	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	69	-8,457	3,816
Cross Lane 1 & 2	Dromore	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	71	0	0
Gallows Street	Dromore	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	36	0	0
Meeting Street	Dromore	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	31	0	0
Castle Hill	Gilford	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	21	0	0
Cow fair	Keady	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	25	0	0
Glen Road	Keady	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	24	0	0
Kinelowen Street	Keady	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	80	0	0
Alexander Square 1 & 2	Lurgan	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	29	0	0
Blacks Court	Lurgan	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	200	0	0
Castle Lane	Lurgan	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	174	-73,246	19,482
Foster Place	Lurgan	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	26	0	0
High Street	Lurgan	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	102	0	0
Moore's Lane	Lurgan	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	78	-5,310	5,537
Connolly Place	Lurgan	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	21	-5,577	350
Union Street	Lurgan	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	21	0	0
Robert Street	Lurgan	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	70	0	0

Car Park Description	Town	(i) council area transferred to	(ii) Number of spaces	(iii) revenue generated in year immediately before transfer^ FYE 31/3/2015 £	(iv) enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer* FYE 31/3/2015 £
Edward Street	Lurgan	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	5	0	0
Waring Street	Lurgan	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	9	-8,775	8,956
Millennium Way	Lurgan	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	38	-7,446	700
Fair Green (7 Duke Street)	Portadown	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	158	0	0
Foundry Street	Portadown	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	71	0	0
Magowan Buildings 1 & 2 (West Street)	Portadown	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	412	-226,514	60,726
Marley Street	Portadown	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	38	-24,245	14,466
Meadow Lane East	Portadown	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	108	0	6,196
Meadow Lane West	Portadown	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	118	-59,114	20,961
River Bank	Portadown	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	30	0	0
West Street	Portadown	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	41	-15,128	8,910
William Street	Portadown	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	58	-27,148	12,477
Castle Street	Rathfriland	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	56	0	0
Sinton Park	Tandragee	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	36	0	0
Dobbin Street Lane (ex surgery) split	Armagh	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	42	0	0
Gospel Lane	Banbridge	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	48	0	15
Castle Street	Portadown	Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	75	0	0
Ashdale Street	Belfast	Belfast	90	-11,550	5,668
Bankmore Street	Belfast	Belfast	46	-66,772	9,226
Charlotte Street	Belfast	Belfast	90	-173,126	15,522
Corporation Square	Belfast	Belfast	193	-150,858	23,427
Cromac Street	Belfast	Belfast	104	-145,143	16,017
Dunbar Street	Belfast	Belfast	34	-96,565	14,483
Dundela Crescent	Belfast	Belfast	26	0	0
Exchange Street	Belfast	Belfast	48	-92,044	13,353

Car Park Description	Town	(i) council area transferred to	(ii) Number of spaces	(iii) revenue generated in year immediately before transfer^ FYE 31/3/2015 £	(iv) enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer* FYE 31/3/2015 £
Grampian Avenue	Belfast	Belfast	42	0	0
Hope Street North	Belfast	Belfast	41	-121,918	9,602
Little Donegall Street	Belfast	Belfast	109	-54,352	7,832
Little Victoria Street	Belfast	Belfast	88	-157,731	19,420
Marlborough Avenue	Belfast	Belfast	36	-24,668	8,379
Northumberland Street	Belfast	Belfast	88	0	0
Ravenscroft Avenue	Belfast	Belfast	55	0	0
Sandown Road	Belfast	Belfast	54	0	0
Smithfield Market	Belfast	Belfast	109	-218,672	22,766
Station Street	Belfast	Belfast	114	-160,013	17,315
Wandsworth Road	Belfast	Belfast	24	0	0
Westminster Avenue East	Belfast	Belfast	11	0	0
Westminster Avenue West	Belfast	Belfast	10	0	0
Westminster Avenue North	Belfast	Belfast	70	0	0
Whitla Street	Belfast	Belfast	50	0	0
York Street (No1) 60 York Street	Belfast	Belfast	53	-26,413	1,747
Parkgate Avenue	Belfast	Belfast	40	0	0
Shaws Bridge	Belfast	Belfast	57	0	0
Glenburn Road	Dunmurry	Belfast	123	0	0
Kent Street	Belfast	Belfast	68	-66,352	13,748
Ann Street	Ballycastle	Causeway Coast & Glens	97	-27,138	6,216
Castle Street	Ballycastle	Causeway Coast & Glens	94	0	0
Fairhill Street	Ballycastle	Causeway Coast & Glens	58	0	0
Glenhead Road	Ballykelly	Causeway Coast & Glens	38	0	0
Castle Street	Ballymoney	Causeway Coast & Glens	117	-25,339	11,716
Church Street	Ballymoney	Causeway Coast & Glens	96	-60,130	10,935
Cockpit Brae East	Ballymoney	Causeway Coast & Glens	23	0	0
Cockpit Brae West	Ballymoney	Causeway Coast & Glens	22	0	0

Car Park Description	Town	(i) council area transferred to	(ii) Number of spaces	(iii) revenue generated in year immediately before transfer^ FYE 31/3/2015 £	(iv) enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer* FYE 31/3/2015 £
Dervock Road	Ballymoney	Causeway Coast & Glens	86	0	0
Gate End	Ballymoney	Causeway Coast & Glens	27	0	0
Seymour Street	Ballymoney	Causeway Coast & Glens	65	0	0
Townhead Street North	Ballymoney	Causeway Coast & Glens	156	-225	124
Townhead Street South	Ballymoney	Causeway Coast & Glens	64	0	0
Main Street	Bushmills	Causeway Coast & Glens	41	-3,780	4,002
Abbey Street	Coleraine	Causeway Coast & Glens	182	-185,935	29,695
Long Commons	Coleraine	Causeway Coast & Glens	140	-82,528	13,664
Mall	Coleraine	Causeway Coast & Glens	218	-215,049	35,411
Millburn Road	Coleraine	Causeway Coast & Glens	37	0	0
Railway Place	Coleraine	Causeway Coast & Glens	156	-55,370	11,912
Railway Road	Coleraine	Causeway Coast & Glens	321	-82,675	16,382
Terrace Row	Coleraine	Causeway Coast & Glens	135	-45	25
Waterside	Coleraine	Causeway Coast & Glens	203	-52,173	15,242
Bridge Street	Garvagh	Causeway Coast & Glens	104	0	0
Bridge Street	Kilrea	Causeway Coast & Glens	15	0	0
Ballyclose Street	Limavady	Causeway Coast & Glens	19	0	0
Central	Limavady	Causeway Coast & Glens	164	-91,308	20,121
Connell Street	Limavady	Causeway Coast & Glens	110	-74,024	14,688
Main Street	Limavady	Causeway Coast & Glens	68	-4,968	1,693
Protestant St	Limavady	Causeway Coast & Glens	16	0	0
Dunluce Avenue	Portrush	Causeway Coast & Glens	240	0	0

Car Park Description	Town	(i) council area transferred to	(ii) Number of spaces	(iii) revenue generated in year immediately before transfer^ FYE 31/3/2015 £	(iv) enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer* FYE 31/3/2015 £
Harbour Road	Portrush	Causeway Coast & Glens	36	0	0
Landsdowne Road	Portrush	Causeway Coast & Glens	219	0	13
Convention Avenue	Portstewart	Causeway Coast & Glens	107	0	0
The Diamond	Portstewart	Causeway Coast & Glens	11	0	0
Limavady by-pass	Limavady	Causeway Coast & Glens	16	0	0
Lever Road	Portstewart	Causeway Coast & Glens	12	0	0
Main Street	Dungiven	Causeway Coast & Glens	51	0	0
Albert Street	Castledearg	Derry & Strabane	90	0	0
Meeting House Lane	Castledearg	Derry & Strabane	14	0	0
William Street	Castledearg	Derry & Strabane	22	0	0
Market Square	Claudy	Derry & Strabane	70	0	0
Berryhill Road	Dunnamanagh	Derry & Strabane	40	0	0
Bishop Street	Londonderry	Derry & Strabane	176	-166,311	27,833
Carlisle Road	Londonderry	Derry & Strabane	22	-25,805	6,574
Foyle Road	Londonderry	Derry & Strabane	85	-87,296	6,922
Queens Quay	Londonderry	Derry & Strabane	66	-64,074	13,840
Shantallow HC	Londonderry	Derry & Strabane	104	0	0
Simpsons Brae	Londonderry	Derry & Strabane	14	0	0
Society Street	Londonderry	Derry & Strabane	20	-19,347	4,508
Spencer Road	Londonderry	Derry & Strabane	45	-34,146	6,573
Strand Road	Londonderry	Derry & Strabane	71	-58,551	9,748
Victoria Market	Londonderry	Derry & Strabane	83	-100,763	19,758
Waterside (Railway Station)	Londonderry	Derry & Strabane	42	0	0
William Street	Londonderry	Derry & Strabane	143	-116,830	14,217
Townhall Street West	Newtown-stewart	Derry & Strabane	37	0	0
Bowling Green	Strabane	Derry & Strabane	37	-2,031	833
Butcher Street	Strabane	Derry & Strabane	72	-59,178	10,576
Canal Basin South	Strabane	Derry & Strabane	161	0	0
Lower Main Street North	Strabane	Derry & Strabane	11	-9,164	2,393

Car Park Description	Town	(i) council area transferred to	(ii) Number of spaces	(iii) revenue generated in year immediately before transfer^ FYE 31/3/2015 £	(iv) enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer* FYE 31/3/2015 £
Lower Main Street South	Strabane	Derry & Strabane	47	-42,954	7,583
Mill Street	Strabane	Derry & Strabane	37	0	6,734
Railway Street	Strabane	Derry & Strabane	86	-46,578	9,087
Upper Main Street West & East	Strabane	Derry & Strabane	89	-27,092	7,801
Priests Lane	Castledearg	Derry & Strabane	34	0	0
Canal Basin North	Strabane	Derry & Strabane	123	0	0
Foyle Street	Londonderry	Derry & Strabane	54	-26,040	12,970
Main Street	Ballinamallard	Fermanagh & Omagh	88	0	0
Drumquin Road	Dromore	Fermanagh & Omagh	25	0	0
Main Street	Dromore	Fermanagh & Omagh	50	0	0
Castle Park	Enniskillen	Fermanagh & Omagh	230	0	0
Derrychara Road	Enniskillen	Fermanagh & Omagh	37	0	0
Down / Market / Cross Street	Enniskillen	Fermanagh & Omagh	104	-101,645	21,341
Eden Street	Enniskillen	Fermanagh & Omagh	148	-151,512	32,171
Head Street	Enniskillen	Fermanagh & Omagh	59	-46,141	13,156
Hollyhill Link	Enniskillen	Fermanagh & Omagh	187	0	0
Quay Lane North	Enniskillen	Fermanagh & Omagh	93	-78,477	16,146
Quay Lane South	Enniskillen	Fermanagh & Omagh	78	-41,834	12,076
Queen Street	Enniskillen	Fermanagh & Omagh	95	-1,260	481
Shore Road East	Enniskillen	Fermanagh & Omagh	68	-73,033	19,694
Shore Road West	Enniskillen	Fermanagh & Omagh	73	-18,769	7,613
Wellington Place	Enniskillen	Fermanagh & Omagh	272	0	0
Main Street	Fintona	Fermanagh & Omagh	62	0	0
Town Centre	Fintona	Fermanagh & Omagh	22	0	0

Car Park Description	Town	(i) council area transferred to	(ii) Number of spaces	(iii) revenue generated in year immediately before transfer^ FYE 31/3/2015 £	(iv) enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer* FYE 31/3/2015 £
Pound Street (Brownhill)	Irvinestown	Fermanagh & Omagh	65	0	0
Railway Street	Kesh	Fermanagh & Omagh	28	0	0
Fair Green	Lisnaskea	Fermanagh & Omagh	87	0	0
New Bridge Road	Lisnaskea	Fermanagh & Omagh	54	0	0
Old Quarry	Lisnaskea	Fermanagh & Omagh	35	0	0
Tattinderry Road	Maguires-bridge	Fermanagh & Omagh	20	0	0
Brook Street	Omagh	Fermanagh & Omagh	84	0	1
Campsie Road	Omagh	Fermanagh & Omagh	105	-1,980	945
Castle Street	Omagh	Fermanagh & Omagh	31	-1,890	895
Church Street North	Omagh	Fermanagh & Omagh	48	-2,565	1,119
Church Street South	Omagh	Fermanagh & Omagh	24	0	0
Cunningham Terrace	Omagh	Fermanagh & Omagh	18	0	16
Drumragh Avenue	Omagh	Fermanagh & Omagh	167	-79,600	4,230
Foundry Lane	Omagh	Fermanagh & Omagh	119	-90,004	12,396
Johnston Park	Omagh	Fermanagh & Omagh	194	-162,843	22,615
Market Place	Omagh	Fermanagh & Omagh	59	-46,804	11,413
Market Street	Omagh	Fermanagh & Omagh	80	-80,620	17,339
New Brighton Terrace	Omagh	Fermanagh & Omagh	93	-28,446	6,742
Old Mountfield Road	Omagh	Fermanagh & Omagh	50	0	0
The Diamond	Tempo	Fermanagh & Omagh	29	0	0
Main Street	Carrickmore	Fermanagh & Omagh	24	0	0
Ballynahinch Street	Hillsborough	Lisburn & Castlereagh	57	-30,109	847

Car Park Description	Town	(i) council area transferred to	(ii) Number of spaces	(iii) revenue generated in year immediately before transfer^ FYE 31/3/2015 £	(iv) enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer* FYE 31/3/2015 £
Antrim Street	Lisburn	Lisburn & Castlereagh	131	-184,592	38,845
Barrack Street	Lisburn	Lisburn & Castlereagh	27	-26,897	13,733
Benson Street	Lisburn	Lisburn & Castlereagh	135	0	2,798
Governors Road	Lisburn	Lisburn & Castlereagh	124	-69,598	27,538
Laganbank Road	Lisburn	Lisburn & Castlereagh	238	-224,780	41,243
Longstone Street Roundabout	Lisburn	Lisburn & Castlereagh	69	-27,176	17,935
Quay Street	Lisburn	Lisburn & Castlereagh	24	-900	2,135
Queens Road	Lisburn	Lisburn & Castlereagh	40	-11,413	10,968
Smithfield Square East	Lisburn	Lisburn & Castlereagh	52	-113,411	24,172
Union Bridge	Lisburn	Lisburn & Castlereagh	16	-945	833
Main Street	Moira	Lisburn & Castlereagh	59	0	0
Ahoghill	Ahoghill	Mid & East Antrim	93	0	0
Ballymoney Road	Ballymena	Mid & East Antrim	184	-66,436	13,748
Church Street 1	Ballymena	Mid & East Antrim	199	-118,014	60,124
Church Street 3 (Coach Entry)	Ballymena	Mid & East Antrim	140	-52,566	11,372
Galgorm Village	Ballymena	Mid & East Antrim	84	0	0
Broughshane Street 1 (Garfield Place)	Ballymena	Mid & East Antrim	248	-160,086	24,542
Harryville (Henry Street)	Ballymena	Mid & East Antrim	90	-23,338	3,719
Church Street 2 (Meeting House Lane)	Ballymena	Mid & East Antrim	117	-28,954	58,025
Mount Street 1	Ballymena	Mid & East Antrim	84	-720	533
Mount Street 2 (Park Street)	Ballymena	Mid & East Antrim	55	-90	89
Springwell Street (Multi Storey)	Ballymena	Mid & East Antrim	812	-473,444	174,184
Broughshane Street 2 (Summerfield)	Ballymena	Mid & East Antrim	76	-315	173
High Street	Carrickfergus	Mid & East Antrim	65	-60,074	15,809

Car Park Description	Town	(i) council area transferred to	(ii) Number of spaces	(iii) revenue generated in year immediately before transfer^ FYE 31/3/2015 £	(iv) enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer* FYE 31/3/2015 £
Joymount	Carrickfergus	Mid & East Antrim	76	-19,120	9,624
Lancasterian Street	Carrickfergus	Mid & East Antrim	110	-36,657	17,088
Agnew Street	Larne	Mid & East Antrim	88	-26,300	6,005
Bridge Street	Larne	Mid & East Antrim	37	0	0
Circular Road East	Larne	Mid & East Antrim	151	0	0
Circular Road West	Larne	Mid & East Antrim	109	-14,495	4,813
Exchange Road	Larne	Mid & East Antrim	88	0	0
Fairhill	Larne	Mid & East Antrim	25	-11,426	2,794
High Street	Larne	Mid & East Antrim	15	47	0
Inver	Larne	Mid & East Antrim	23	0	0
Narrow Gauge Road	Larne	Mid & East Antrim	69	-28,928	8,980
Ramp	Larne	Mid & East Antrim	31	0	0
Riverdale West / East	Larne	Mid & East Antrim	84	-9,118	5,479
Balmoral Avenue	Whitehead	Mid & East Antrim	23	0	0
Main Street	Clogher	Mid Ulster	40	0	0
Cornmill	Coalisland	Mid Ulster	56	0	0
Lineside	Coalisland	Mid Ulster	19	0	0
Burn Road	Cookstown	Mid Ulster	106	-360	556
Loy Street	Cookstown	Mid Ulster	54	0	0
Orritor Road	Cookstown	Mid Ulster	129	0	0
Union Place	Cookstown	Mid Ulster	117	-765	385
Anne Street East	Dungannon	Mid Ulster	60	-13,051	2,211
Anne Street West (17 Anne Street)	Dungannon	Mid Ulster	25	0	4
Castle Hill (31 Market Square)	Dungannon	Mid Ulster	100	-63,608	9,791
Perry Street East	Dungannon	Mid Ulster	92	0	1,539
Perry Street West	Dungannon	Mid Ulster	36	-15,675	2,573
Scotch Street North	Dungannon	Mid Ulster	97	-37,219	5,593
Scotch Street South	Dungannon	Mid Ulster	161	0	91
Edfield Road	Fivemiletown	Mid Ulster	100	0	0
The Commons	Fivemiletown	Mid Ulster	41	0	0
Fairhill	Maghera	Mid Ulster	21	0	0
ST. Lurach's Road	Maghera	Mid Ulster	119	0	0
Central South & North	Magherafelt	Mid Ulster	118	-31,420	10,619
King Street	Magherafelt	Mid Ulster	42	0	0
Rainey Street	Magherafelt	Mid Ulster	241	-184,045	31,160

Car Park Description	Town	(i) council area transferred to	(ii) Number of spaces	(iii) revenue generated in year immediately before transfer^ FYE 31/3/2015 £	(iv) enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer* FYE 31/3/2015 £
Union Road East & West	Magherafelt	Mid Ulster	192	-82,435	26,618
Hillhead Road	Castledawson	Mid Ulster	0	-2,295	2,725
Quay Street	Ardglass	Newry Mourne & Down	40	0	0
Antrim Road	Ballynahinch	Newry Mourne & Down	54	0	0
Lisburn Street (North)	Ballynahinch	Newry Mourne & Down	110	0	1,110
Lisburn Street (South)	Ballynahinch	Newry Mourne & Down	165	-9,737	6,573
Windmill Street	Ballynahinch	Newry Mourne & Down	65	-10,776	3,621
The Square	Crossgar	Newry Mourne & Down	61	-630	516
Church Street	Downpatrick	Newry Mourne & Down	27	-10,356	6,053
Irish Street	Downpatrick	Newry Mourne & Down	85	-81,794	18,201
Market Street North / South	Downpatrick	Newry Mourne & Down	316	0	0
Meadowlands	Downpatrick	Newry Mourne & Down	25	0	0
Mount Crescent	Downpatrick	Newry Mourne & Down	25	0	0
Scotch Street	Downpatrick	Newry Mourne & Down	36	-14,542	6,594
Ben Crom Place	Kilkeel	Newry Mourne & Down	25	0	0
Bridge Street	Kilkeel	Newry Mourne & Down	60	0	0
Harbour Road	Kilkeel	Newry Mourne & Down	18	0	0
Newry Street	Kilkeel	Newry Mourne & Down	56	0	0
Causeway Road	Newcastle	Newry Mourne & Down	49	0	0
Shimna Road	Newcastle	Newry Mourne & Down	53	0	0
Basin Walk	Newry	Newry Mourne & Down	67	-57,983	15,759
Bridge Street	Newry	Newry Mourne & Down	88	0	2

Car Park Description	Town	(i) council area transferred to	(ii) Number of spaces	(iii) revenue generated in year immediately before transfer^ FYE 31/3/2015 £	(iv) enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer* FYE 31/3/2015 £
Canal Bank 1	Newry	Newry Mourne & Down	176	-64,141	19,727
Canal Bank 2	Newry	Newry Mourne & Down	115	-68,670	21,567
Canal Bank 3	Newry	Newry Mourne & Down	13	0	2
Downshire Road	Newry	Newry Mourne & Down	129	0	0
Edward Street	Newry	Newry Mourne & Down	20	0	0
Kilmorey Street East	Newry	Newry Mourne & Down	32	0	0
Abbey Way / Mill Street	Newry	Newry Mourne & Down	304	-101,545	25,535
Monaghan Street	Newry	Newry Mourne & Down	115	-101,353	35,788
New Street	Newry	Newry Mourne & Down	44	-33,077	12,992
River Street	Newry	Newry Mourne & Down	27	0	0
The Square 1 & 2	Rostrevor	Newry Mourne & Down	18	0	0
Downpatrick Street	Saintfield	Newry Mourne & Down	66	0	0
East Street	Warrenpoint	Newry Mourne & Down	27	0	0
Kings Lane	Warrenpoint	Newry Mourne & Down	20	0	0
Mary Street	Warrenpoint	Newry Mourne & Down	36	0	0
Newry Street	Warrenpoint	Newry Mourne & Down	56	0	0
The Square	Warrenpoint	Newry Mourne & Down	136	0	0
Harbour Road	Ballyhalbert	North Down & Ards	15	0	0
Portavogie Road	Ballyhalbert	North Down & Ards	70	0	0
Springvale Road	Ballywalter	North Down & Ards	43	0	0
Abbey Street East	Bangor	North Down & Ards	70	-72,514	14,036
Abbey Street West	Bangor	North Down & Ards	38	-18,730	6,939
Bingham Lane	Bangor	North Down & Ards	59	-64,586	15,491
Castle Street	Bangor	North Down & Ards	85	-45,788	12,522
Central Avenue	Bangor	North Down & Ards	29	-2,100	6,739

Car Park Description	Town	(i) council area transferred to	(ii) Number of spaces	(iii) revenue generated in year immediately before transfer^ FYE 31/3/2015 £	(iv) enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer* FYE 31/3/2015 £
Clifton Road	Bangor	North Down & Ards	30	-21,166	7,162
Holborn Avenue	Bangor	North Down & Ards	76	-48,062	18,473
Mills Road	Bangor	North Down & Ards	76	-29,578	10,765
Newtownards Road \ Church Street	Bangor	North Down & Ards	32	0	1,399
The Vennel	Bangor	North Down & Ards	37	-39,490	12,063
Main Road	Cloughey	North Down & Ards	170	0	0
Castle / Bridge Street North / South	Comber	North Down & Ards	235	0	0
Glen Link	Comber	North Down & Ards	19	0	0
Killinchy Street	Comber	North Down & Ards	29	0	0
Newtownards Road (Copeland Road)	Comber	North Down & Ards	49	0	0
Railway Street	Donaghadee	North Down & Ards	36	0	0
Templepatrick Car Park (231 Millisle Road)	Donaghadee	North Down & Ards	112	0	0
Springwell Drive	Groomspoint	North Down & Ards	39	0	0
Church Road	Holywood	North Down & Ards	81	-69,099	13,090
Hibernia Street North	Holywood	North Down & Ards	120	-59,878	15,697
Hibernia Street South	Holywood	North Down & Ards	27	-28,390	7,903
Shore Road	Kircubbin	North Down & Ards	32	0	1,683
The Green (25 Main Street)	Kircubbin	North Down & Ards	45	0	0
Ballywalter Road	Millisle	North Down & Ards	300	0	0
Ballywhiskin (179 Ballywalter Road)	Millisle	North Down & Ards	120	0	0
Moss Road	Millisle	North Down & Ards	92	0	0
Ann Street	Newtownards	North Down & Ards	76	-38,733	7,310
Kennel Lane	Newtownards	North Down & Ards	106	-64,851	15,042
Mill Street Gas Works North	Newtownards	North Down & Ards	75	-23,192	10,994
Mill Street	Newtownards	North Down & Ards	64	-62,602	11,171
Old Cross Street East	Newtownards	North Down & Ards	18	-11,553	4,934
Old Cross Street West	Newtownards	North Down & Ards	80	-57,193	13,056
South Street / Court Street	Newtownards	North Down & Ards	155	-138,297	20,186
4 South Street (7 Court Street)	Newtownards	North Down & Ards	42	-18,895	6,642
Talbot Street	Newtownards	North Down & Ards	37	0	11

Car Park Description	Town	(i) council area transferred to	(ii) Number of spaces	(iii) revenue generated in year immediately before transfer^ FYE 31/3/2015 £	(iv) enforcement costs in the year immediately before transfer* FYE 31/3/2015 £
Upper Court Street	Newtownards	North Down & Ards	31	-13,408	6,431
West Street	Newtownards	North Down & Ards	60	-22,949	7,479
Meeting House Street	Portaferry	North Down & Ards	40	0	0
The Square	Portaferry	North Down & Ards	19	0	0
				-9,360,149	2,260,493

^ Includes both car park receipts and Penalty Charge Notice receipts from illegal parking within car parks.

* Included in these costs are all costs associated with enforcement for example Traffic Attendant Costs, Penalty Charge Notice Costs, cash collection costs, P& D machine maintenance etc. Please note direct costs are not included for example rent, rates etc.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the number of injury claims for compensation as a result of deficient streetlighting and; (ii) the amount paid out, for each of the last three years.

(AQW 5439/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department can provide information on personal injury claims involving street lighting in instances where defective street lighting is alleged to be the main cause of the injury sustained. Although there may be other personal injury claims where defective street lighting is a contributory factor, it is not possible to identify these claims from the Department's database.

Tables (i) and (ii) below provide the requested information for personal injury claims where defective street lighting is alleged to be the main cause of the injury sustained. It should be noted that the amount of compensation paid in any specific financial year may not necessarily relate to claims received in that year. This is because the timescale for dealing with claims can span financial years due to investigatory and legal processes which vary depending on the nature and specific details of each case.

Table (i)

Year	Number of Claims
2013/2014	6
2014/2015	14
2015/2016	16

Table (ii)

Year	Compensation c£k
2013/2014	3.5
2014/2015	19
2015/2016	59

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the timeline from when a streetlight report is logged until the streetlight is repaired.

(AQW 5441/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department aims to carry out the majority of street lighting repairs within five working days of a defect being logged. However, it should be noted that some repairs such as underground cable faults in the electricity supply, replacement of collision damaged equipment, etc. involve substantial works that require more than five days to complete.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline why services to and from Dublin do not collect passengers at Banbridge bus station.

(AQW 5485/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The bus stop for Dublin services in Banbridge is located outside the bus station on Kenlis Street. This service does not come into the bus station in order to expedite its journey through Banbridge and to maintain the express nature of the route to Dublin.

The stop and shelter is approximately 50 metres from the bus station and passengers can park alongside the stop to allow any luggage to be loaded or unloaded more easily. Bus station staff are also on hand during office hours to assist as required.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his plans for new legislation to enable traffic wardens to address vehicles that are blocking pavements in town centres, forcing pedestrians onto the road.

(AQW 5487/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Under current legislation Traffic Attendants are authorised to issue Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) to vehicles parked on pavements if they are adjacent to existing parking restrictions marked on the road. This includes double or single yellow lines, urban clearways, on-street charged parking bays within Controlled Parking Zones (Belfast, Lisburn and Newry) and within the zig-zag zones at pedestrian crossings. Whilst Traffic Attendants are not authorised to enforce pavements adjacent to roads which have no parking restrictions, the police on the other hand are, especially in situations where vehicles are causing an obstruction.

My Department is not currently planning any new legislation in this regard. However, please be assured that it takes the problem of footway obstruction from inconsiderately parked vehicles seriously and, where possible, my officials will deal with the problem to the extent of the powers available.

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline why traffic wardens are not authorised to issue fixed penalty tickets to drivers who park on pavements.

(AQW 5488/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Under current legislation Traffic Attendants are authorised to issue Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) to vehicles parked on pavements if they are adjacent to existing parking restrictions marked on the road. This includes double or single yellow lines, urban clearways, on-street charged parking bays within Controlled Parking Zones (Belfast, Lisburn and Newry) and within the zig-zag zones at pedestrian crossings. Whilst Traffic Attendants are not authorised to enforce pavements adjacent to roads which have no parking restrictions, the police on the other hand are, especially in situations where vehicles are causing an obstruction.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail what driving qualifications are required for ministerial drivers when employed by (i) his Department; and (ii) him or his party.

(AQW 5530/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Ministerial drivers are currently required to hold a valid current driving licence entitling them to drive a Group A Vehicle under the Road Traffic Act (Northern Ireland) 1970. This is the case whether the driver is employed by either my Department, myself or my party.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number of passengers using the Belfast to Derry railway, broken down by reason for travel, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5536/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink does not monitor the number of passengers using its services but rather records the number of passenger journeys. The table below details the number of passenger journeys on the Belfast to Derry railway in each of the last three years:

	2013	2014	2015
Passenger Journeys	1,935,980	2,210,987	2,448,748

Please note that Translink does not record passengers' reasons for travel.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the number of compensation claims for personal injuries and damage to vehicles arising out of potholes; (ii) the number rejected; and (iii) the amount paid out including legal fees, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5537/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Table (i) below details the number of personal injury and vehicle damage claims received for each of the last three financial years, where the cause of the incident was recorded as a pothole.

Table (i)

Year	Number of Claims Received
2013/2014	1,052
2014/2015	704
2015/2016	1,671

Table (ii) overleaf details the number of personal injury and vehicle damage claims rejected for each of the last three financial years, where the cause of the incident was recorded as a pothole. It should be noted that the number of claims rejected in a financial year may not necessarily relate to claims received in that year. This is because the timescale for dealing with claims can span financial years due to investigatory and legal processes which vary depending on the nature and specific details of each case.

Table (ii)

Year	Number of Claims Rejected
2013/2014	539
2014/2015	267
2015/2016	306

Table (iii) below details the total expenditure on all personal injury and vehicle damage claims for each of the last three financial years. Unfortunately the NICS accounting system does not differentiate between the causes of incidents which result in claims. In addition, as well as the compensation paid out and any associated legal costs, these figures include costs associated with investigating and defending claims. It should also be noted that the amount of compensation paid in any specific financial year may not necessarily relate to claims received in that year. This is because the timescale for dealing with claims can span financial years due to investigatory and legal processes which vary depending on the nature and specific details of each case.

Table (iii)

Year	Total Claim Expenditure c£m
2013/2014	£4.9
2014/2015	£4.6
2015/2016	£3.9

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the number of oil spills on roads; (ii) the cost of clear-ups; and (iii) the amount recovered from the perpetrators of oil spills, broken down by each Transport NI area over the last five years.
(AQW 5538/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Information on the number of oil spills on roads is not available for the entire period requested. However, following the introduction of a new road maintenance computer system in December 2013 the numbers of oil spills recorded on roads in each of the last 3 Financial years, is set out in the table below:

TransportNI Division	2013/14*	2014/15	2015/16
Northern	23	283	298
Southern	40	120	138
Eastern	102	136	68
Western	73	164	230
Total	238	703	734

* (recorded in the period December 2013 - March 2014)

As regards the costs of clean up and the amounts recovered from the perpetrators of oil spills etc my Department does not maintain a record of expenditure in the format requested.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister for Infrastructure when work will begin to connect the Belfast Rapid Transport system to Finaghy Road North.
(AQW 5539/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The implementation of the first phase of Belfast Rapid Transit is progressing well. This first phase will connect East Belfast, West Belfast and Titanic Quarter through the city centre.

Work is currently ongoing on a number of sections of the Belfast Rapid Transit routes including at the junction of the Andersonstown Road and Finaghy Road North. The works at this junction include carriageway widening to facilitate a new inbound bus lane and upgrades to the traffic signals and the associated pedestrian crossing facilities. The junction and the adjoining footways will also be resurfaced. In the immediate area Belfast Rapid Transit halts will be located near Slieve Gallion Drive (both inbound and outbound) and near Killeen Park (both inbound and outbound). It is anticipated that the work in the vicinity of this junction will be substantially completed in the next few weeks.

I am pleased to say that the Belfast Rapid Transit system remains within budget and on target to become operational in September 2018.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline how his Department is addressing traffic congestion on the M1 between Junctions 3 and 9 city bound between 07:00 and 10:00 on weekdays.

(AQW 5589/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department is very aware of the traffic congestion on the M1 motorway during peak hours. The Traffic Information and Control Centre (TICC) use a network of CCTV cameras to monitor the traffic flow and to work in co-operation with other agencies to ensure any incidents are managed as effectively as possible.

My Department has a proposal to extend the existing busway that runs city bound on the M1 hard shoulder. The existing busway, between Ballyskeagh over-bridge (near the service station under construction) and Black's Road (Junction 3), will be extended back to Junction 8, where Sprucefield Park & Ride is located. This will provide an additional 3.5km of busway and operate during the same hours as the existing busway, from 07:30am to 9:30am. It will provide improved journey times and journey time reliability to Belfast bound commuters travelling on buses. The scheme is currently being prepared for tender and it is anticipated that works will begin on the ground next year.

Commuters travelling on the M1 into Belfast can currently avail of Sprucefield Park & Ride. This facility currently caters for 345 cars and has a dedicated express bus service during the peak periods. My Department is currently in the process of trying to increase the size of this Park & Ride facility.

Mr Ford asked the Minister for Infrastructure when he intends to provide a response to (i) AQW 4038/16-21; and (ii) AQW 4037/16-21.

(AQW 5641/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I answered both AQW 4037/16-21 and 4038/16-21 on 19 October 2016.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to detail why so many street lights in Clady village were not functioning over the past week; and (ii) whether all lights have now been switched back on.

(AQW 5642/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The streetlights in Clady in the Bellspark Road area were not working in recent days following damage to an underground electricity supply cable.

TransportNI was made aware of this situation on Tuesday 18 October and repair works were carried out on the 18 and 19 October. The damaged cable has now been repaired and all lights are working with the exception of one which is likely to require a replacement lamp and this work is programmed.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the York Street interchange will be included in the Programme for Government 2016-21.

(AQO 513/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Programme for Government 2016 – 21 will provide a new outcome-based approach to decision making. It will set the strategic direction of the Executive.

The Programme for Government is central to the Executive's work and will inform the development of the Executive's budget over the course of this mandate. The Programme will provide a mechanism for ensuring our limited funds are directed to schemes and proposals where they can contribute most.

The Programme for Government will be supported by delivery plans. These delivery plans will include the priority flagship transport projects already identified by the 2016-2017 Budget. These include the Belfast Hub and Belfast Rapid Transit projects, as well as the A5 and A6.

It is important to note however that at this stage the delivery plans, cannot include all the individual schemes that I plan to take forward. There are of course other significant capital projects like York Street Interchange that I and my Executive colleagues fully recognise the importance of.

My Department has been pursuing alternative sources of funding for York Street Interchange and confirmed that it is a good fit for competitive European funding through the Connecting Europe Facility. However, the next call for major projects is

anticipated for early 2018. As a result, project funding goes beyond the timeframe set by the chancellor to guarantee financial shortfall arising from BREXIT.

Going forward, the progress of capital projects like York Street Interchange will be determined by the scale of resources available from the forthcoming budget process.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department plans to construct a pedestrian bridge linking the town centre to the bus centre in Strabane.

(AQW 5675/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department remains committed to providing a footbridge linking Strabane Town Centre to the Translink Bus Centre. Delivery of this project is subject to the availability of funding and in the current economic climate it is unlikely that the town centre footbridge will be able to proceed in the short term solely funded from my Department's resources.

My officials recently met with Derry City and Strabane District Council to review how the project might be advanced and the matter of funding formed part of those discussions.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to detail the amount his Department receives from fuel duty rebates; and (ii) whether he has plans to provide Translink with this money.

(AQW 5676/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Fuel Duty Rebate scheme ceased on 29 March 2015 and consequently, Translink or other eligible bus operators do not receive any rebate from my Department for fuel purchased. Translink does however receive subsidy for its bus services in the form of direct revenue and capital grant.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the average time it takes to process each planning application, broken down by local council area.

(AQW 5691/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The table below details the average processing times (in weeks), of major and local applications decided and withdrawn in 2015/16, broken down by council.

Major¹ and local² planning applications decided and withdrawn and average processing times³ 2015/16, by Council⁴

	Major applications		Local applications	
	Number decided/ withdrawn	Average processing time (wks) ³	Number decided/ withdrawn	Average processing time (wks) ³
Antrim & Newtownabbey	21	28.2	700	14.0
Ards & North Down	23	51.8	943	21.2
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	13	43.0	1,234	22.0
Belfast City	56	54.4	1,313	19.2
Causeway Coast & Glens	36	39.6	1,050	20.4
Derry City & Strabane	18	53.5	767	17.0
Fermanagh & Omagh	30	70.2	1,008	14.4
Lisburn & Castlereagh	26	45.4	846	20.6
Mid & East Antrim	17	37.0	883	14.4
Mid Ulster	16	52.4	1,275	15.2
Newry, Mourne & Down	30	56.5	1,169	34.8
All Councils	286	46.4	11,188	19.4

Source: NI Planning Portal

Notes:

- 1 Major Developments have important economic, social and environmental implications for a council area. The majority of major applications are multiple housing, commercial and government and civic types of development.
- 2 Local Development planning applications are mostly residential and minor commercial applications received and determined by a council.

- 3 The time taken to process a decision/withdrawal is calculated from the date on which an application is deemed valid to the date on which the decision is issued or the application is withdrawn. The median is used for the average processing time as any extreme values have the potential to inflate the mean, leading to a result that may not be considered as "typical".
- 4 This table excludes applications that the Department has processed.

This information is routinely published by the Department and can be found at the following address:
<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-planning-statistics-april-2015-march-2016>.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the average length of time a planning application takes from submission to conclusion, broken down by council area.

(AQW 5701/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The table below details the average processing times (in weeks), of major and local applications decided and withdrawn in 2015/16, broken down by council.

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Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will ensure that Planning Offices expediate the application process for applying for Rural Development Programme funding.

(AQW 5703/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I understand that the Rural Development Programme is a Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs initiative (DAERA). As part of the transfer of planning functions in April 2015, the majority of planning matters are now the responsibility of our 11 new councils.

Councils will set their own priorities in relation to both the processing of any applications received as part of Rural Development Programme funding and other local planning matters.

You may therefore wish to raise the issue with DAERA to ensure that this programme is brought to the attention of local councils.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Infrastructure why the York Street Interchange is the only Transport NI project on hold. (AQW 5709/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: To clarify my position, the York Street Interchange Scheme remains one of my priorities given its location at the confluence of our busiest roads, the M1/Westlink, M2 and M3.

I acknowledge, however, that York Street Interchange was the only scheme changed to “on hold” in the recent update of my Department’s TransportNI Procurement Plan 2016/17. This procurement plan, which lists the tender competitions scheduled to be awarded by TransportNI, is available to the construction industry through the TransportNI procurement portal on the Department’s web site. It is a ‘live’ plan and requires updating on an ongoing basis to ensure that the information is meaningful and current.

As I am sure you are aware, the York Street Interchange scheme had been highly likely to be eligible for a significant EU funding contribution towards construction. I had intended to award the contract for the design phase of York Street Interchange by October 2016. However as result of the funding uncertainty created by the EU referendum result the procurement period has been extended to allow further consideration of funding availability. To reflect this, the status of the York Street Interchange project was changed to “on hold” within the TransportNI Procurement Plan.

The procurement process for the York Street Interchange Scheme had been progressing in parallel with the statutory processes. The Public Inquiry was held in November 2015 and the Inspector’s report has been received by my Department. I intend to make a decision on the status of the scheme and release the Inspectors’ report from the Public Inquiry in the coming weeks.

There is no doubt that the outcome of the EU Referendum has presented considerable challenges for the Executive. However, we are working to address those challenges and this will form part of our considerations in the 2016 Budget process.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the estimated cost of planning for the York Street Interchange since 2009. (AQW 5764/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can confirm that the costs incurred in the development of the York Street Interchange Scheme since 2009 are as follows:

Year	Expenditure (£)
2009/10	399,640
2010/11	269,284
2011/12	602,684
2012/13	878,403
2013/14	850,468
2014/15	1,525,067
2015/16	1,836,931
2016/17	409,855

Please note that the expenditure for 2016/17 is to the end of September 2016.

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Infrastructure , following the York Street Interchange announcement on 19 October 2016, to detail his plans to address the daily traffic gridlock at the current York Street junction. (AQW 5766/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: To clarify my position, the York Street Interchange Scheme remains one of my priorities given its location at the junction of our busiest roads, the M1/Westlink, M2 and M3.

This scheme will address a major bottleneck on the strategic road network, replacing the existing signalised junction at York Street with direct links between Westlink, M2 and M3, the three busiest roads in the north. It will also separate strategic traffic from local traffic movements via underpasses below the existing road and rail bridges and underneath a new bridge at York Street.

I acknowledge, however, that York Street Interchange was the only scheme changed to “on hold” in the recent update of my Department’s TransportNI Procurement Plan 2016/17. This procurement plan, which lists the tender competitions scheduled to be awarded by TransportNI, is available to the construction industry through the TransportNI procurement portal on

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There is no doubt that the outcome of the EU Referendum has presented considerable challenges for the Executive. However, we are working to address those challenges and this will form part of our considerations in the 2016 Budget process.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure , pursuant to AQO 394/16-21, to detail the thirty five roads in the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council area that are included within the rural roads resurfacing programme.

(AQW 5790/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise that the following rural roads are included on the current resurfacing programme for Mid and East Antrim:

■ B93	Bellaghy Road	■ U2084	Ballymacvea Road
■ B100	Ballyrickard Road	■ U2085	Shankbridge Road
■ C43	Parkgate Road	■ U2089	Craigstown Lane
■ C57	Ballywatermoy Road	■ U2091	Byrestown Road
■ C57	Killagan Road	■ U2106	Glenhead Road
■ C57	Tullygrawley Road	■ U2109	Ballygelly Road
■ C68	Tullymore Road	■ U2119	Kilnacolpagh Road
■ U2001	Gortgole Road	■ U2130	Knowehead Road
■ U2022	Dromona Road	■ U2128	Elginney Road
■ U2028	Old Cullybackey Road	■ U2148	Tullyreagh Road
■ U2037	Craignageeragh Road	■ U2150	Dunbought Road
■ U2048	Aughnahoy Road	■ U3006	Dairylands Road
■ U2052	Culnafay Road	■ U4040	Ballybracken Road
■ U2065	Cloney Road	■ U4041	Ballygowan Road
■ U2067	Ballylummin Road	■ U4047	Browndod Road
■ U2081	Kellswater Road	■ U4051	Ballyvernstown Road
■ U2082	Island Road	■ U4063	Ballylig Road
■ U2083	Tullynamullan Road		

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail what assurances were sought from the Office of the European Commission in Northern Ireland in respect of European funding for the York Street Interchange Project.

(AQW 5861/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My understanding is that the remit of the Office of the European Commission in the north does not include the provision of assurances in respect of the funding of specific projects.

Notwithstanding this my Department engaged extensively with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE) in the development of the Connecting Europe Facility Regulation (Regulation (EU) No 1316/2013) and the North Sea – Mediterranean Core Corridor Work Plan. This resulted in the York Street Interchange Project being included as a pre-identified project within Annex I the Regulation and also on the Corridor Work Plan.

Whilst this does not assure or guarantee the project funding it would strengthen any application that my Department would make should a suitable call become available.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the Belfast Rapid Transit scheme.

(AQW 5895/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am fully committed to the delivery of Belfast Rapid Transit, including not only the current phase which connects East Belfast, West Belfast, and Titanic Quarter, via the city centre, but also future extensions to the North and South of the city. I regard Belfast Rapid Transit as a transformational public transport project for the city. It represents an exciting

opportunity for Belfast going forward and it is a major commitment for my Department in support of an Executive Flagship Project.

The implementation of Belfast Rapid Transit is progressing well. To date my Department has completed the new Dundonald Park & Ride facility, and sections of the routes on Falls Road and Upper Newtownards Road, including the introduction of new peak hour bus lanes.

The new peak hour bus lanes support a more reliable and attractive bus service for passengers using these busy arterial routes. Since the introduction of the new peak hour bus lanes, there have been increases in passenger numbers and improvements to journey times.

The detailed specification for the BRT vehicles has been finalised. This process included engagement with the disability and elderly sectors, through the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC).

The diesel-electric hybrid BRT vehicles will provide a high quality, accessible environment for passengers in terms of comfort, space, security and on-board information.

I am pleased to say that the Belfast Rapid Transit system remains within budget and is on target to become operational in September 2018.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how much has been spent on the York Street Interchange Project in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 5925/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can confirm that, since scheme development commenced in 2007, the costs incurred in the development of the York Street Interchange Scheme are as follows:

Year	Expenditure (£)
2007/08	12,200
2008/09	640,500
2009/10	399,640
2010/11	269,284
2011/12	602,684
2012/13	878,403
2013/14	850,468
2014/15	1,525,067
2015/16	1,836,931
2016/17	409,855

Please note that the expenditure for 2016/17 is to the end of September 2016.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will conduct a further traffic assessment on Lurgan Road, Lenaderg, adjacent to Milltown Primary School following a further accident at this location on 24 October 2016.

(AQW 5951/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: You will be aware that the PSNI are the authority tasked with the recording and reporting of traffic collisions. My Department's TransportNI considers the information provided by the PSNI.

When this information is received it will be reviewed in the normal manner.

Department of Justice

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for each hate crime category, broken down by policing district, in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 4882/16-21)

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): This is a matter for the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) as it holds data on the outcome of cases considered by a prosecutor to have involved hate crime which was 'Aggravated by Hostility'. You may, therefore, wish to direct your question to the PPS.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many prisoners are taking further education courses; (ii) how many are availing of 3rd level education; (iii) which universities are involved; (iv) the cost since 2011; and (v) how many prisoners received degrees, broken down by subject.

(AQW 4884/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The delivery of learning and skills for Prisons and Hydebank College has been outsourced from August 2015 to two Further Education Colleges; Belfast Metropolitan College and North West Regional College.

- (i) There are currently 882 people in custody enrolled in accredited courses across the three prison establishments for 2016/17.
- (ii) A new Distance Learning Policy outlines the delivery and support arrangements in respect of higher education, or 3rd level education and other distance learning. NIPS currently provide all funding for distance learning. There are 21 people enrolled in higher education through distance learning in custody.
- (iii) All students currently studying higher education are registered with the Open University.
- (iv) The estimated cost for the provision of 21 students in this academic year 2016/17 is £25,000. The total cost for the provision of higher education during the period 2011 – 2015 was £29,600*.
- (v) During this same period six prisoners received degrees in the following subjects:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1 x BSc (Hons) Social Sciences ■ 1 x BA (Hons) Philosophy & Psychological Studies ■ 1 x BA (Hons) Open (Social Sciences & Creative Writing) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1 x BSc (Open) (Environmental Science) ■ 1 x BA/BSc (Open) (Economics) ■ 1 x BA/BSc (Open) (Business Studies & Economics)
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Note - the costs specified above relate to all courses studied at higher education including certificates and diplomas.

* The cost for the period 2011 – 2015 relates to tutorials costs for NIPS only, course funding was provided by the Open University which ended in 2015.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline if all human trafficking victims of Ioan Lacatus and his co-defendants have received the appropriate support as per the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015; and provide a breakdown.

(AQW 4890/16-21)

Ms Sugden: In August 2014, four Romanian workers approached police claiming to have been trafficked for labour exploitation in the Portadown area. Police enquiries led to the discovery of a further eight potential victims of human trafficking. The twelve potential victims (nine males and three females) agreed to be referred into the National Referral Mechanism. They received assistance and support under my Department's support contract. This support was placed on a statutory footing in January 2015, in line with Section 18 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015. The twelve aforementioned victims were directly involved in the prosecution of Ioan Lacatus and his co-defendants.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to provide, or place a copy in the Assembly Library, of the risk assessment which covers staff stress at HMP Maghaberry.

(AQW 4891/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There is no current risk assessment report which covers staff stress at HMP Maghaberry available to be placed in the library. The Department of Justice is engaging with the Health & Safety Executive of Northern Ireland in relation to workplace stress issues and potential solutions across a number of its agencies. This includes the Northern Ireland Prison Service and consideration is being given to how this should be taken forward in this Agency.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline how many non-drugs amnesties have been carried in each of the last three calendar years to date per prison facility including Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre and Juvenile Justice Centre, stating the nature of each amnesty involved.

(AQW 4892/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I can confirm that at Hydebank Wood there was one clothing amnesty in the last three calendar years.

Non-drugs amnesties have not taken place in any of the other prison facilities.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3118/16-21, to outline why information relating to charges and convictions on Orange Hall attacks are not kept.

(AQW 4936/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There is no offence specific to an attack on an Orange Hall and offences relating to attacks on Orange Halls are recorded under generic offence descriptions, such as criminal damage or arson, of which there are a large number each year. For example, in 2015, there were 1,908 convictions where at least one offence was that of criminal damage.

Information on convictions datasets is sourced from ICOS, the NICTS information management system and, within this system, information on the type of building which may have been attacked is only held in the detail of charges for which an individual is prosecuted at court. Therefore, it would only be possible to identify convictions resulting from an attack on Orange Halls through a manual trawl of court records, which, given the numbers of cases involved, a subset of which are quoted in the example, would incur a disproportionate cost.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3692/16-21, to provide the (i) detail of those two cases; and (ii) total number of convictions for animal cruelty in each of the last five years.
(AQW 4942/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Offences relating to animal cruelty may be prosecuted under the Welfare of Animals (Northern Ireland) Act 1972, the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 and the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

- (i) The answer provided to AQW 3692/16-21 listed two cases in which the maximum penalty under the legislation in question was imposed in relation to a conviction for an animal cruelty offence. Additional details regarding these two cases are as follows:

Case 1: (2011)	Received the maximum sentence of three months imprisonment in relation to a charge of "terrifying an animal" contrary to Section 13(a) of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.
Case 2: (2012)	Received the maximum sentence of three months imprisonment in relation to a charge of "ill-treating an animal" contrary to Section 13(a) of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.

- (ii) A breakdown of the number of convictions in the period 2011 – 2015 has been provided in the following table.

Convictions for animal cruelty offences, 2011 - 2015

Year	Convictions
2011	41
2012	43
2013	16
2014	57
2015	44

Note:

- 1 Figures relate to convictions which included at least one count of the offences specified.
- 2 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.
- 3 Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.
- 4 Figures include prosecutions brought by PPS on behalf of PSNI and other bodies.
- 5 Data for 2014 - 2015 have been sourced from the DOJ Prosecutions, Convictions and Sentencing Dataset while data for 2011 - 2013 have been sourced directly from the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS).

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Justice to outline departmental procedures to investigate any evidence presented to her, relating to a miscarriage of justice.
(AQW 5018/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My Department would advise anyone who believes that they have suffered a miscarriage of justice in Northern Ireland to contact the Criminal Cases Review Commission which is the appropriate body to investigate such matters.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total expenditure on incarcerating people for drug related offences, in each year since 2008.
(AQW 5020/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not hold these costs. However each year NIPS sets out the average cost per prisoner place for the organisation as a whole in its Annual Report and Accounts.

The cost per prisoner place between 2010 (devolution of Justice) and 2016 is set out in the table below:

Financial Year	Cost per Prisoner Place
2010/11	£73,762
2011/12	£71,398
2012/13	£66,494
2013/14	£62,898
2014/15	£58,387
2015/16	£57,643

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Justice whether her Department will oppose the legal challenge currently before the High Court with regard to the legislation governing prostitution policy.

(AQW 5026/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My Department is the Respondent in this case and will therefore contest the grounds of the judicial review application on which the applicant seeks relief from the Department.

Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Justice whether her Department suggested Section 15 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 was incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, during its passage in the Assembly.

(AQW 5027/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I am advised that my Department did not make any claim of this nature.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice (i) how are police cross-border pursuits currently handled; (ii) what discussions she has had with her southern counterpart for potential new protocols in relation to cross-border pursuit; (iii) how many pursuits have the PSNI abandoned; and (iv) how many pursuits have An Garda Síochána abandoned since 2011.

(AQW 5051/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There is excellent day to day cooperation between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána (AGS) in relation to cross-border policing, including on matters such as cross-border pursuits.

The practical and strategic co-operation that exists between the two police services has been enhanced over recent years by the Cross Border Policing Strategy, an up-dated version of which was launched last month. The strategy highlights the breadth of co-operation that exists, and the tools available to both organisations to ensure that those who cross the border for criminal ends will not succeed.

Whilst we have not discussed the specific issue of cross border pursuit, Minister Fitzgerald and I have set out our commitment to working together to ensure that both police services have the powers they need to ensure that criminals are prevented from exploiting the border.

With regard to the number of cross-border pursuits that have been abandoned since 2011, PSNI have advised that they do not have conclusive statistics available in respect of this matter. I cannot comment in respect of another jurisdiction.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Justice what action her Department and its arms-length bodies took to manage the risk of anti-social behaviour in Armagh city including, Dobbin Street, Thomas Street, Scotch Street, and Market Street at peak times throughout the summer.

(AQW 5054/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My Department is represented on several working groups to strategically address anti-social behaviour (ASB) and its associated issues. These include Reducing Offending Partnerships, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs), Interagency Advisory Groups and ASB forums, all of which have key strands that focus on addressing ASB through local initiatives.

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland, with the other criminal justice agencies in the Armagh area, continues in its endeavours to prevent and deal with ASB through supervision of offenders and is a designated member on the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon PCSP.

The PCSP assumed the lead role in coordinating a response to community concerns relating to an increase of anti-social behaviour and on street drinking by establishing a task group including the PSNI, Council Environmental Health, City Centre Councillors, local trader representatives and Management of the Simon Community Hostel.

This task group meets regularly and has developed and is implementing an action plan that includes awareness raising of the drinking bylaws and a zero tolerance approach to nuisance behaviour, anti-social behaviour and on street drinking with focused PSNI and Council enforcement patrols in hot spot areas at peak times.

Since the action plan has been implemented the PSNI has confirmed that there has been a reduction in the number of reported incidents and community confidence has increased. In addition the business sector is satisfied with the actions taken.

The PCSP is presently working with the Cinnamon Network and local churches to explore the possibility of an outreach programme to further address the issue.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number and character of planning determinations taken to the Planning Appeals Commission; and how many of these were upheld in (i) Omagh; and (ii) Strabane in each of the past five years.

(AQW 5056/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) retains the status of a Tribunal NDPB and as such is required to respond directly to requests for information. Your question has been forwarded to the Commission for immediate reply.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the five shortest durations that new intake NIPS officers have remained in post, providing length of time in post per instance.

(AQW 5062/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Of the new intake officers recruited from the last external competition which was advertised in October 2015, only 1 has left. The duration of their service was 1 day.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline how many drugs amnesties were carried out in each of the last three calendar years to date, shown per prison facility including Hydebank Wood Young Offenders' Centre and Juvenile Justice Centre.

(AQW 5063/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The table below shows the amount of drug amnesties carried out in the last three calendar years to date:

	2014	2015	2016 to Date
HMP Maghaberry	0	0	2
HMP Magilligan	3	0	1
Hydebank Wood	1	1	2
Woodlands	0	0	0

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether non-medical prison staff have been or are to be trained in the STORM assessment.

(AQW 5064/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are currently no plans to train non-medical prison staff in the STORM assessment. Applied Suicide Interventions Skills Training (ASIST) and Safetalk are routinely delivered to non- medical prison staff.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of successful convictions for sexual assault crimes against children in West Tyrone, broken down over the past three years.

(AQW 5079/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Sexual offences involving children may be prosecuted under various legislation, including the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968, the Punishment of Incest Act 1908, the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 and the Offences Against the Person Act 1861.

Departmental databases do not contain information on the location of an offence, therefore information in relation to convictions at Dungannon, Strabane and Omagh courts has been provided. The most recent three year period for which information in relation to convictions at court for sexual offences against a child is available is 2013 – 2015.

Convictions at Dungannon, Strabane and Omagh courts for sexual offences specifying the involvement of a child, 2013 – 2015

Year	Convictions
2013	12
2014	6
2015	5

Notes:

6 Figures relate to convictions which included at least one count of the offences specified.

- 7 The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.
- 8 Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.
- 9 Figures relate to offences in the sexual offences category that specify the involvement of a child. Other offences, with more generic descriptions, but where the victim may have been a child, have not been included, as there is no way to identify victim age from data held.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Justice for the conviction and clearance rates across the hate crime categories, by policing area, per year over the last ten years.

(AQW 5133/16-21)

Ms Sugden: This is a matter for the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) as it holds data on the outcome of cases considered by a prosecutor to have involved hate crime which was 'Aggravated by Hostility'. You may, therefore, wish to direct your question to the PPS.

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Justice when information on the provisions which fall to her Department within the detailed Action Plan to tackle paramilitarism, due to be published before the end of June 2016 as provided by paragraph 4.3 of "A Fresh Start" and referenced in the foreword to the "Executive Action Plan" published on 19th July 2016, will be published.

(AQW 5157/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Executive action plan, as provided by paragraph 4.3 of A Fresh Start, was published on 19 July 2016 and sets out the proposed actions that my Department will progress to fulfil the commitments made in the action plan. Further implementation plans referenced in the foreword to the Executive action plan will be submitted to the Executive for consideration as and when appropriate.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4043/16-21 and in relation to senior managers in Maghaberry stating that containing vulnerable prisoners within one area is detrimental to individual prisoners, to outline the opinions taken on this point from (i) prison officers; (ii) prison medical staff; and (iii) external medical clinicians.

(AQW 5164/16-21)

Ms Sugden: In regards to prisoners who are at a heightened state of vulnerability and who require to be housed within an Observation Cell, the strategy of the Senior Managers is founded on the fact that the entire Senior Management Team have experiences of such prisoners as officers, Senior Officers, and as Governors. The placement of these vulnerable prisoners is predicated on the location where there is an available Observation Cell. The medical needs of all prisoners are assessed by a Nurse employed by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) prior to any placement in an Observation Cell.

There are other landings within Maghaberry Prison where prisoners are held collectively, either due to a Mental Health/Donard assessment, or due to the nature of their index offences.

The Donard landing, formerly known as the REACH Landing, is a multi-disciplinary landing which was a joint enterprise between NIPS and SEHSCT. As part of this process NIPS attended relevant training with the SEHSCT. This demonstrates the collaborative approach to protecting those prisoners who are in the care of both organisations.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the Public Protection Arrangements in Northern Ireland's role for (i) public safety; (ii) offender management in communities; (iii) victim protection/safeguarding; and (iv) offender welfare.

(AQW 5165/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Each of the agencies operating the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI) exercises its own statutory and organisational responsibilities for protection of the public. The Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 placed a statutory duty on these agencies and bodies to cooperate in the sharing of information about certain serious offenders to maximise the effectiveness of risk management procedures and thereby assist in maintaining public safety.

The PPANI arrangements facilitate a collaborative approach to the risk assessment and risk management of sexual and violent offenders assessed as posing a risk of serious harm to the public. The assessed risks are managed through the development of individualised risk management plans coordinated by designated risk managers and monitored through multi-Agency Local Area Public Protection Panel (LAPPP) meetings. Where offenders fail to comply with statutory requirements imposed on them, by means of their sentence or other court orders, appropriate enforcement action is taken.

Preventing the re-victimisation of the original victim is a central element of the LAPPP process. All victims of PPANI eligible offenders are provided with a PPANI Victim Information Booklet outlining how victims can engage with the PPANI process and signposting appropriate support services. Representations made by victims in respect of their safety are discussed as part of the LAPPP agenda. Victims can also register with the Victim Information Scheme to receive certain information about the offender's current and future risk management. If information comes to light regarding any potential risk to the original victim, or any potential new victim, verifiable disclosure will be made in the interests of public protection.

PPANI agencies deploy a balance of enforcement and encouragement techniques when working with offenders. Offender support is provided by designated risk managers and may include support in finding suitable accommodation and employment

and accessing health services or treatment programmes. In the event that negative publicity or community reaction places an offender at an increased risk of harm, agencies will work collectively to minimise the risk to their welfare.

At the start of the current mandate the PPANI Coordinator extended an invitation to all Members to receive a personal briefing to inform their understanding of the operation of the PPANI arrangements and a considerable number have already taken up that offer. The invitation still remains open and I have asked the Coordinator to provide a further opportunity to you to do so.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the additional measures in place for the management in the community of a convicted offender who has been classified as dangerous as per the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008.

(AQW 5166/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Where an offender is convicted of a serious or specified sexual or violent offence, as set out in Schedules 1 and 2 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, the Court makes an assessment as to the risk of serious harm posed to the public in determining the most appropriate sentence. In cases meeting the appropriate criteria the Court may impose either an indeterminate custodial sentence or an extended custodial sentence. The Court may also impose other statutory requirements or orders, on conviction, which impose additional prohibitions or restrictions on individual offenders when they return to the community.

Relevant sexual and violent offenders are assessed for risk management within the Public Protection Arrangements. Offenders are assessed using a validated risk assessment methodology which identifies their PPANI categorisation and assigns a particular risk management framework commensurate with the level of risk of serious harm they currently pose. All Category 2 and 3 offenders are risk managed on a multi-Agency basis with Category 3, the highest risk offenders, being centrally managed by a co-located multi-Agency Public Protection Team.

All PPANI offenders are subject to risk management plans addressing their specific risks which are monitored by a designated risk manager and regularly reviewed by a multi-Agency Local Area Public Protection Panel. The risk management plan will include the specific licence conditions imposed on the offender's release, any statutory notification requirements imposed and restrictions or prohibitions set in other Court orders such as a Sexual Offence Prevention Order.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice in relation to the incident in HMP Maghaberry Quoile, on Sunday 2 September 2016 in which cell doors unlocked, to clarify if the smoke-detectors wired into this system were on or off.

(AQW 5167/16-21)

Ms Sugden: No smoke-detection system is linked to a door locking system.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to outline her Department's actions in conjunction with key agencies to reduce prisoners re-offending after their release.

(AQW 5194/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Northern Ireland Prison Service works with a number of key agencies to reduce reoffending and prepare prisoners for release, including the Probation Board for Northern Ireland which supervises prisoners subject to licence conditions in the community.

Multi-disciplinary Prisoner Development Units operate in each prison establishment to assess individual risks, needs and strengths. The resultant Personal Development Plans identify ways that offending behaviour can be challenged.

This structured multi-agency planning with statutory bodies and partners in the voluntary and community sector focuses on preparing people for release by addressing a range of factors such as accommodation, health, behaviour, substance misuse, employment, education and training, finance and social relationships.

For example, in prison custody high priority is given to enhancing educational attainment and improving an individual's capacity for employment. With the outsourcing of learning and skills provision, a wide curriculum is offered across all prison sites including essential skills and accredited vocational courses which have been identified as offering the best opportunities for personal development and for employment upon release from custody.

Tackling homelessness, addressing mental health issues and difficulties with substance misuse are also key areas on which we must improve how we support offenders after release from custody. These areas are wider than my remit as Justice Minister and it is imperative that the Executive works together to provide appropriate support to reduce reoffending, prevent future victims and build a safer society.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice her Department's actions to reduce firework misuse.

(AQW 5195/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002, as amended by the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015 contain the law on the use of fireworks. In summary, any fireworks beyond those which can be used indoors require a licence to be obtained before they can be purchased, possessed and discharged. In addition, those wishing to sell fireworks must be registered under the Manufacture and Storage of Explosives Regulations (NI) 2006. This requires the seller to satisfy a level of fitness and their premises must also be deemed suitable for the type and quantity of fireworks to be held for sale. Breach of the law can carry a maximum fine of £5,000 or six months imprisonment.

The purpose of the legislation is to regulate both the buyer and the seller in order to ensure public safety. Guidance and the legislation governing the use of fireworks can be found on the NIDirect website - <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/fireworks>

My Department works closely with the PSNI, District Council Environmental Health departments and the Health & Safety Executive NI to reduce fireworks misuse and illegal sales.

When reports are received regarding suspicious activity or possible illegal sales, we will share this information with the relevant authority to enable further investigation. Where necessary this results in fireworks being seized and/or registrations being revoked.

Council Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) are warranted by my Department to inspect premises registered to sell fireworks and proposed fireworks display sites to ensure all legislative and health and safety requirements are met.

Information on fireworks licences issued, broken down by constituency area is not available, however broken down by council area the number of licences issued in the past five years is listed below. These figures represent the previous council structure.

Council Area	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Antrim	25	13	20	20	19
Ards	27	31	32	40	32
Armagh	17	21	20	19	21
Banbridge	4	9	11	15	5
Belfast	60	62	49	47	59
Ballymena	27	30	32	24	24
Ballymoney	6	7	8	4	6
Carrickfergus	14	13	5	9	9
Castlereagh	15	11	12	14	8
Coleraine	15	11	15	13	10
Cookstown	6	9	11	11	10
Craigavon	13	32	22	34	32
Derry	19	25	13	23	18
Down	40	25	27	31	29
Dungannon	17	15	19	20	15
Fermanagh	52	47	40	45	38
Larne	4	6	6	7	9
Limavady	8	9	6	10	5
Lisburn	33	30	26	24	24
Magherafelt	12	7	9	9	10
Moy	7	7	5	6	6
Newry and Mourne	79	77	74	73	57
Newtownabbey	25	22	17	20	23
North Down	36	31	25	34	24
Omagh	13	15	8	11	15
Strabane	15	11	7	14	7
	589	576	519	577	515

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice her Department's actions to deal with the illegal sale of fireworks.
(AQW 5196/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002, as amended by the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015 contain the law on the use of fireworks. In summary, any fireworks beyond those which can be used indoors require a licence to be obtained before they can be purchased, possessed and discharged. In addition, those wishing to sell fireworks must be registered under the Manufacture and Storage of Explosives Regulations (NI) 2006. This requires

the seller to satisfy a level of fitness and their premises must also be deemed suitable for the type and quantity of fireworks to be held for sale. Breach of the law can carry a maximum fine of £5,000 or six months imprisonment.

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Ballymena	27	30	32	24	24
Ballymoney	6	7	8	4	6
Carrickfergus	14	13	5	9	9
Castlereagh	15	11	12	14	8
Coleraine	15	11	15	13	10
Cookstown	6	9	11	11	10
Craigavon	13	32	22	34	32
Derry	19	25	13	23	18
Down	40	25	27	31	29
Dungannon	17	15	19	20	15
Fermanagh	52	47	40	45	38
Larne	4	6	6	7	9
Limavady	8	9	6	10	5
Lisburn	33	30	26	24	24
Magherafelt	12	7	9	9	10
Moy	7	7	5	6	6
Newry and Mourne	79	77	74	73	57
Newtownabbey	25	22	17	20	23
North Down	36	31	25	34	24
Omagh	13	15	8	11	15
Strabane	15	11	7	14	7
	589	576	519	577	515

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total number of firework licences issued in each of the last five years, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 5197/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002, as amended by the Pyrotechnic Articles (Safety) Regulations 2015 contain the law on the use of fireworks. In summary, any fireworks beyond those which can be used indoors require a licence to be obtained before they can be purchased, possessed and discharged. In addition, those wishing to sell fireworks must be registered under the Manufacture and Storage of Explosives Regulations (NI) 2006. This requires the seller to satisfy a level of fitness and their premises must also be deemed suitable for the type and quantity of fireworks to be held for sale. Breach of the law can carry a maximum fine of £5,000 or six months imprisonment.

The purpose of the legislation is to regulate both the buyer and the seller in order to ensure public safety. Guidance and the legislation governing the use of fireworks can be found on the NIDirect website - <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/fireworks>

My Department works closely with the PSNI, District Council Environmental Health departments and the Health & Safety Executive NI to reduce fireworks misuse and illegal sales.

When reports are received regarding suspicious activity or possible illegal sales, we will share this information with the relevant authority to enable further investigation. Where necessary this results in fireworks being seized and/or registrations being revoked.

Council Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) are warranted by my Department to inspect premises registered to sell fireworks and proposed fireworks display sites to ensure all legislative and health and safety requirements are met.

Information on fireworks licences issued, broken down by constituency area is not available, however broken down by council area the number of licences issued in the past five years is listed below. These figures represent the previous council structure.

Council Area	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Antrim	25	13	20	20	19
Ards	27	31	32	40	32
Armagh	17	21	20	19	21
Banbridge	4	9	11	15	5
Belfast	60	62	49	47	59
Ballymena	27	30	32	24	24
Ballymoney	6	7	8	4	6
Carrickfergus	14	13	5	9	9
Castlereagh	15	11	12	14	8
Coleraine	15	11	15	13	10
Cookstown	6	9	11	11	10
Craigavon	13	32	22	34	32
Derry	19	25	13	23	18
Down	40	25	27	31	29
Dungannon	17	15	19	20	15
Fermanagh	52	47	40	45	38
Larne	4	6	6	7	9
Limavady	8	9	6	10	5
Lisburn	33	30	26	24	24
Magherafelt	12	7	9	9	10
Moy	7	7	5	6	6
Newry and Mourne	79	77	74	73	57
Newtownabbey	25	22	17	20	23
North Down	36	31	25	34	24
Omagh	13	15	8	11	15
Strabane	15	11	7	14	7
	589	576	519	577	515

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total number of convictions for firework related offences in each of the last five years, broken down by court division.

(AQW 5198/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Offences relating to fireworks may be prosecuted under a range of legislation, including the Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) from 1996, 1997, 1999 and 2002.

Information in relation to convictions handed down at court in the period 2011 – 2015, the latest five year period for which information is available, where at least one offence was related to fireworks, has been provided in the following table.

Convictions at courts for firework related offences by court division, 2011 – 2015

Convictions	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Antrim	10	6	7	4	5
Ards	15	2	7	10	6
Armagh & South Down	9	4	5	6	6
Belfast	10	10	6	7	6
Craigavon	11	3	2	4	3
Fermanagh & Tyrone	15	8	14	8	3
Londonderry	4	5	7	2	3
Total	74	38	48	41	32

Notes:

10. Figures relate to convictions which included at least one count of the offences specified.
11. The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.
12. Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for using a mobile phone while driving in (i) 2013-14; (ii) 2014-15; and (iii) 2015-16, broken down by post code of the defendant.

(AQW 5202/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Offences relating to using a mobile phone whilst driving may be prosecuted under Article 56A of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

The most recent three year period for which conviction information is available is 2013 – 2015 and information for convictions handed down during that period, for the offence specified, has been provided in the following table:

Convictions at courts for using a mobile phone whilst driving by defendant postcode, 2013 – 2015

Postcode	Convictions		
	2013	2014	2015
BT1	<=3	<=3	<=3
BT2	<=3	0	0
BT3	0	0	0
BT4	5	7	5
BT5	7	10	12
BT6	5	7	7
BT7	7	5	4
BT8	5	7	9
BT9	4	4	7
BT10	0	<=3	<=3
BT11	9	12	7
BT12	6	4	8
BT13	9	4	12

Postcode	Convictions		
	2013	2014	2015
BT14	12	9	13
BT15	9	9	11
BT16	<=3	4	4
BT17	23	13	14
BT18	6	<=3	<=3
BT19	6	9	8
BT20	<=3	9	6
BT21	<=3	<=3	<=3
BT22	10	<=3	8
BT23	16	10	12
BT24	7	9	7
BT25	8	5	<=3
BT26	<=3	<=3	0
BT27	6	8	<=3
BT28	18	9	24
BT29	6	<=3	5
BT30	13	10	24
BT31	6	5	<=3
BT32	13	6	4
BT33	4	<=3	4
BT34	26	26	36
BT35	26	23	29
BT36	12	12	10
BT37	<=3	<=3	9
BT38	9	5	7
BT39	4	<=3	7
BT40	4	5	5
BT41	10	6	17
BT42	12	11	13
BT43	11	7	8
BT44	7	7	8
BT45	22	21	16
BT46	9	8	<=3
BT47	53	44	36
BT48	78	64	40
BT49	9	13	12
BT51	12	8	7
BT52	4	<=3	<=3
BT53	5	5	14
BT54	<=3	<=3	<=3

Postcode	Convictions		
	2013	2014	2015
BT55	<=3	<=3	0
BT56	<=3	<=3	<=3
BT57	0	0	<=3
BT60	25	25	24
BT61	12	6	11
BT62	20	24	21
BT63	9	7	12
BT64	0	<=3	<=3
BT65	5	5	6
BT66	15	12	19
BT67	5	14	14
BT68	<=3	0	<=3
BT69	<=3	0	<=3
BT70	10	9	10
BT71	25	28	22
BT74	8	9	5
BT75	<=3	<=3	0
BT76	<=3	0	0
BT77	<=3	<=3	0
BT78	13	14	13
BT79	13	15	10
BT80	14	6	11
BT81	20	15	5
BT82	40	38	23
BT92	6	5	7
BT93	8	<=3	<=3
BT94	6	4	<=3
No valid NI postcode	224	256	142
Total	1,034	960	878

Notes:

13. Figures relate to convictions which included at least one count of the offences specified.
14. The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.
15. Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.
16. Please note that the figures for BT28, BT49, and BT8 may be distorted due to the presence of Hydebank, Maghaberry, and Magilligan prisons.
17. Figures relating to 3 or fewer cases have been suppressed to prevent potential identification of defendants. This is referenced as "<=" in the above table.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for traffic offences in (i) 2013/14; (ii) 2014/15; and (iii) 2015/16, broken down by post code of the defendant.

(AQW 5203/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Motoring offences may be prosecuted under various pieces of legislation, for example, the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and the Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations (Northern Ireland) Order 1999.

The most recent three year period for which conviction information is available is 2013 – 2015 and information for convictions handed down during that period, for the offences specified, has been provided in the following table:

Convictions at courts for traffic offences by defendant postcode, 2013 - 2015

Postcode	Convictions		
	2013	2014	2015
BT1	15	23	16
BT2	*	*	8
BT3	<=3	5	<=3
BT4	157	142	117
BT5	261	217	234
BT6	186	174	157
BT7	102	116	99
BT8	116	122	96
BT9	107	112	82
BT10	63	48	40
BT11	238	238	205
BT12	236	254	241
BT13	197	161	178
BT14	251	276	255
BT15	207	191	183
BT16	68	60	69
BT17	292	267	218
BT18	48	51	46
BT19	161	156	148
BT20	74	114	80
BT21	36	32	24
BT22	143	123	95
BT23	260	256	268
BT24	79	99	84
BT25	66	48	47
BT26	32	26	18
BT27	92	101	92
BT28	229	209	202
BT29	85	80	78
BT30	249	234	192
BT31	59	63	49
BT32	140	134	104
BT33	65	68	76
BT34	362	374	386
BT35	426	400	351

Postcode	Convictions		
	2013	2014	2015
BT36	296	272	213
BT37	131	122	97
BT38	147	143	163
BT39	91	92	104
BT40	117	127	125
BT41	213	202	193
BT42	208	141	148
BT43	136	124	109
BT44	147	107	109
BT45	284	267	200
BT46	93	87	54
BT47	521	453	346
BT48	558	562	428
BT49	155	144	123
BT51	135	137	89
BT52	89	79	97
BT53	134	134	124
BT54	48	28	30
BT55	38	34	30
BT56	42	40	19
BT57	20	17	18
BT60	254	220	203
BT61	114	94	93
BT62	225	213	257
BT63	115	101	97
BT64	23	22	25
BT65	82	73	64
BT66	230	226	208
BT67	124	128	122
BT68	9	5	10
BT69	14	26	18
BT70	138	155	133
BT71	291	333	272
BT74	100	99	126
BT75	20	17	16
BT76	16	19	15
BT77	9	6	*
BT78	191	174	167
BT79	232	191	194
BT80	166	150	164

Postcode	Convictions		
	2013	2014	2015
BT81	92	70	59
BT82	285	248	179
BT92	94	111	106
BT93	66	50	39
BT94	72	76	77
BT96	0	<=3	0
No valid NI postcode	1,351	1,218	997
Total	13,029	12,316	11,003

Notes:

18. Figures relate to convictions which included at least one count of the offences specified.
19. The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.
20. Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.
21. Please note that the figures for BT28, BT49, and BT8 may be distorted due to the presence of Hydebank, Maghaberry, and Magilligan prisons.
22. Figures relating to 3 or fewer cases have been suppressed to prevent potential identification of defendants. This is referenced as "<=" in the above table.
23. The totals in the above tables are correct. However, because figures relating to 3 or fewer cases have been suppressed (see point 5 above) it would be possible to identify the value of suppressed cases using the total figure. Therefore, one other figure has been suppressed to prevent this. The other figure that has been suppressed is referenced as "*" in the above table.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Justice to list the incidents of attacks on prison officers inside prisons in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5214/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The table below shows the number of incidents recorded which resulted in assaults on prison officers in prisons in Northern Ireland in each of the last three calendar years.

No of Recorded Incidents

	2013	2014	2015
Maghaberry Prison	66	63	52
Magilligan Prison	6	6	6
Hydebank Wood	22	38	40

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of convictions for drugs offences, broken down by offence, in Fermanagh and South Tyrone over the last three years.

(AQW 5215/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Drugs offences may be prosecuted under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, the Medicines Act 1968, the Criminal Attempts and Conspiracy (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 and the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979.

Departmental databases do not contain information on the location of an offence, therefore information in relation to convictions at courts in the Fermanagh and Tyrone court division in the period 2013 – 2015, the latest three years for which information is available, has been provided.

Convictions at courts in Fermanagh and Tyrone court division for drug related offences, 2013 – 2015

Offence type	Convictions		
	2013	2014	2015
Possession	160	111	144
Supply	28	23	18

Offence type	Convictions		
	2013	2014	2015
Importing/Producing/Other	19	12	14
Total	207	146	176

Notes:

24. Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.
25. The figures provided relate to convictions for all classifications of the offences specified.
26. Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Justice (i) to detail the number of departmental and arm's-length body staff that exited under the Voluntary Exit Scheme, broken down by grade; (ii) how many of these posts were then suppressed; and (iii) (a) what proportion; and (b) how many posts were later (1) advertised; and (2) filled by internal promotion.

(AQW 5242/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The number of departmental and arm's-length body staff that exited under the Voluntary Exit Scheme, broken down by grade is set out in the tables below:

Department of Justice and Agencies		Arms Length Bodies	
SCS Grades	2	SCS Grades	2
G6 & Analogous	1	G6 & Analogous	3
G7 & Analogous	11	G7 & Analogous	8
DP & Analogous	42	DP & Analogous	10
SO & Analogous	45	SO & Analogous	30
EO1 & Analogous	27	EO1 & Analogous	44
EO2 & Analogous	31	EO2 & Analogous	50
AO & Analogous	80	AO & Analogous	131
AA & Analogous	29	AA & Analogous	15
Non GS Grades	120	Non GS Grades	20
Totals	388	Totals	313

Of the 388 posts vacated by the exit of Departmental and Agency staff under the Voluntary Exit Scheme, 251 posts were suppressed. Ninety-seven posts were subsequently advertised which represents a proportion of 25%. Eight posts were filled by internal promotion which represents a proportion of 2%.

Of the 313 posts vacated by the exits of Departmental arms-length body staff under the Voluntary Exit Scheme, 310 were suppressed. Three posts were subsequently advertised which represents a proportion of 0.95%. None were filled by internal promotion.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what arrangements have been made with her Department to promote co-operation as required by Section 2(2) of the Children's Co-operation Act.

(AQW 5246/16-21)

Ms Sugden: At a strategic level, my Department will deliver on Section 2(2) of the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 through the development and implementation of the new Children and Young People's Strategy. A significant amount of work has taken place on this to date, to which my Department has contributed fully. One of the common messages coming through from stakeholders as part of this development process is the need for better co-operation across Executive Departments and agencies. It is anticipated that once formal consultation has taken place, the resulting Strategy will provide a clear plan for promoting and delivering co-operation to improve the well-being and life outcomes for children and young people.

In addition to this Strategy of course, the Executive is developing the new Programme for Government based on agreed outcomes, many of which will only be achieved by significant co-operation.

At an operational level, my Department and its executive agencies – in particular the Youth Justice Agency – regularly work to promote co-operation with many of the authorities listed in Section 9 of the Act, as they aim to improve the well-being of children who come into contact with the justice system. This can be seen in, for example, the drive to deliver improved

healthcare and education services to children in custody at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre through co-operation with the Departments of Health and Education, the South-Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, and the Education Authority.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice , pursuant to AQW 3750/16-21, what (i) input was sought; and (ii) consultation was held with prison officers prior to this decision, particularly those that were victims of malicious allegations by prisoners.
(AQW 5281/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not hold any records to indicate what process of consultation was followed in respect of this change.

The rationale for the change was that prisoners should not be deterred from making complaints; to reverse the decision and re-introduce the charge would be a retrograde step.

This may mean that in some instances a complaint may be malicious in nature. Through proper and timely investigations prison officers are protected from unfounded accusations and disciplinary action that may result.

There are already a number of support mechanisms available to prisoner officers and these include a dedicated Staff Welfare service, access to the Occupational Health Service and a confidential counselling service provided by Carecall.

My officials continue to seek to improve the working environment and support services which are available to staff within available resourcing constraints.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether she can give an assurance that the operation of the proposed Marie Stopes clinic in Belfast will be closely monitored to ensure there are no infringements of the law on abortion.
(AQW 5299/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Regulation of private health care facilities is a matter for the Health Minister.

Any infringement of the criminal law is a matter for police investigation.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice , pursuant to AQW 3850/16-21, to answer from the perspective of the increased usage following the transfer of Divisional Crown Courts.
(AQW 5303/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The sitting Judge for the Division of Fermanagh and Tyrone has decided to centralise Crown Courts for Omagh and Dungannon in Dungannon Courthouse from mid-October until Christmas 2016. This is a temporary judicial initiative to reduce a backlog of Crown Court cases in the Division.

The main factor that impacts upon footfall and car-parking in respect of Crown Courts is jury panel attendance. It is expected that a maximum of 115 jury panel members will be summonsed to Dungannon on both 14 and 16 November 2016 to be selected and sworn as jury members during November and December 2016. This is in comparison to 100 panel members called each day in the same period last year. This is an increase of 15 panel members on the days of the week that juries are sworn.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice , pursuant to AQW 3750/16-21 and with the abolition of the charge, what mechanism exists as a deterrent to malicious complaints by prisoners.
(AQW 5304/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not hold any records to indicate what process of consultation was followed in respect of this change.

The rationale for the change was that prisoners should not be deterred from making complaints; to reverse the decision and re-introduce the charge would be a retrograde step.

This may mean that in some instances a complaint may be malicious in nature. Through proper and timely investigations prison officers are protected from unfounded accusations and disciplinary action that may result.

There are already a number of support mechanisms available to prisoner officers and these include a dedicated Staff Welfare service, access to the Occupational Health Service and a confidential counselling service provided by Carecall.

My officials continue to seek to improve the working environment and support services which are available to staff within available resourcing constraints.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice , pursuant to AQW 3750/16-21 and given the abolition of the charge, what mechanism exists to protect prison officers from disciplinary action or similar, including anxiety caused following malicious complaints by prisoners.
(AQW 5305/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not hold any records to indicate what process of consultation was followed in respect of this change.

The rationale for the change was that prisoners should not be deterred from making complaints; to reverse the decision and re-introduce the charge would be a retrograde step.

This may mean that in some instances a complaint may be malicious in nature. Through proper and timely investigations prison officers are protected from unfounded accusations and disciplinary action that may result.

There are already a number of support mechanisms available to prisoner officers and these include a dedicated Staff Welfare service, access to the Occupational Health Service and a confidential counselling service provided by Carecall.

My officials continue to seek to improve the working environment and support services which are available to staff within available resourcing constraints.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Justice how many prison officers retired due to mental ill health in each of the last three years. (AQW 5346/16-21)

Ms Sugden: It is not possible to confirm how many Prison Officers have retired in each of the last three years due to mental ill health as the Department does not hold this information.

The Occupational Health Service (OHS) confirms if an employee meets the criteria for retirement on medical grounds. The OHS does not confirm the nature of the employee's medical condition to the Department as this information is confidential.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2857/16-21, for her assessment of the need for equal environmental allowances between serving prison officers and serving police officers. (AQW 5355/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Supplementary Risk Allowance was introduced in January 2014 on the recommendation of the Prison Service Pay Review Body (PSPRB). In their report issued in December 2013 the PSPRB set out their analysis and recommendations. The Body did not consider that Northern Ireland Prison Service staff should receive the same allowance as staff of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. I accept the analysis of the PSPRB in this regard.

The PSPRB noted the need to review the allowance every 2 years or when there was a significant change to the threat level.

I am actively considering the allowance in the context of the ongoing pay negotiations and recent security related events.

A full copy of the December 2013 PSPRB report can viewed using the link below:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/266299/NI_Allowance_report_website_publication.pdf

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Justice for an update on teacher recruitment for Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre. (AQW 5359/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Education Authority (EA) will assume responsibility for the recruitment of permanent teaching staff for Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre in line with the transfer of responsibility for the provision of education for young people in Woodlands from the Youth Justice Agency to the EA. In the meantime, temporary teachers have been employed from the NISTR list to maintain delivery of a broad-based curriculum.

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Justice how many permanent staff are currently employed in the Education Learning Centre at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre. (AQW 5360/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are four permanent staff currently employed in the Education and Learning Centre at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre - one Head of Education, two Teachers and one Instructor.

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Justice how many teachers are currently employed at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre. (AQW 5361/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are two permanent Teachers and three substitute Teachers currently employed in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre.

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Justice to outline the status of the transfer of education provision to the Education Authority. (AQW 5362/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Officials from the Department of Education, the Education Authority (EA) and the Department of Justice are currently finalising the transfer arrangements. It is anticipated that the permanent transfer of existing education staff to the EA will be completed by the end of Autumn 2016. In the meantime, temporary teachers have been employed from the NISTR list to maintain delivery of a broad-based curriculum.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4368/16-21, and in light of her response to AQW 3010/16-21, to outline whether she plans to reconsider her response, with regard to accountability and her description of the Probation Board NI as having complete operational autonomy.

(AQW 5389/16-21)

Ms Sugden: As advised in my response to previous related questions, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) has operational autonomy. It would be inappropriate of me, as Justice Minister, to seek to interfere in operational matters.

PBNI is accountable to me as Justice Minister. I, in turn, account to the Assembly for the activities and performance of PBNI.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice to outline the preventative work her Department and its agencies are doing, in partnership with statutory and community groups, arising from unwanted bonfires this year.

(AQW 5396/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My Department and the Northern Ireland Policing Board provide funding and support to the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) to enable issues to be identified at a local level and to help develop solutions that will tackle crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.

PCSPs are a leading partner in a number of multi-agency bonfire working groups and committees comprising of councils, the PSNI, the Housing Executive, Transport NI, the NI Environmental Agency and the NI Fire and Rescue Service. The role of these groups is to consider operational difficulties, improve the statutory response to public safety, reduce ASB around bonfires as well as reducing the environmental risks they pose, and engage with bonfire builders and local and elected representatives.

My Department also makes Priority Youth Intervention funding available to PCSPs to support, where appropriate, the delivery of bonfire engagement and help provide positive alternatives to bonfires, particularly amongst young people, for example the delivery of sport events and family friendly fun days.

I am also aware that this year the PSNI deployed Evidence Gathering Teams to those bonfire sites where potential offending was suspected, recording evidence of the material displayed and, if possible, identifying those responsible.

Multi-agency debriefs provide the opportunity for collective learning and this is to be encouraged to assist in developing a strategy moving forward.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4280/16-21, and notwithstanding her refusal to order a Serious Case Review, whether she will revise her view that the current charges against Mr James White do not meet the serious violent offence threshold, given the charges are proceedings on indictment.

(AQW 5402/16-21)

Ms Sugden: For clarity, the offences in question are not serious violent offences. As I previously stated the serious harm threshold for either sexual or violent offences centres on the specific offence committed and not, when it is a hybrid offence, the fact that it is being proceeded with on indictment rather than summarily.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4115/16-21, to outline why Prison Officers are not given the same health care including mental health support, as police officers.

(AQW 5412/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Staff of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, both operational and administrative, are all members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and therefore the NICS terms and conditions of employment apply to all staff regardless of the grade or discipline. The same applies in relation to the support services available to NIPS staff.

Staff of the Police Service for Northern Ireland are not members of the NICS and therefore have a different set of employment terms and conditions than staff of the NICS.

There are already a number of support mechanisms available to prison officers and these include a dedicated Staff Welfare service, access to the Occupational Health Service and a confidential counselling service provided by Carecall. These services are provided to staff to supplement the support and treatment available through the National Health Service.

My officials continue to seek to improve the working environment and support services which are available to staff within available resourcing constraints.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline how many prisoners per NIPS facility are (i) subject to a Supporting Prisoner at Risk scheme; of these how many are (ii) referred for mental health assessment or treatment; and (iii) receiving mental health treatment.

(AQW 5413/16-21)

Ms Sugden:

- (i) As of 18 October 2016 the number of prisoners, in each prison facility, who are subject to a supporting Prisoner at Risk (SPAR) scheme is as follows:
 - 16 prisoners in Maghaberry Prison are subject to the SPAR process

- One prisoner in Magilligan Prison is subject to the SPAR process
 - Three prisoners in Hydebank Wood College are subject to the SPAR process.
- (ii) (iii) The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the provision of mental health support in prisons.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether she will consider establishing an independent panel to conduct reviews and investigations into the performance of statutory bodies and agencies within her remit, in instances of failures or concerns in relation to public protection and safeguarding.

(AQW 5414/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Mechanisms already exist to conduct reviews and investigations into such matters. The Public Protection Arrangements NI (PPANI) is subject to the multi-agency serious case review arrangements contained within the guidance provided by the Department under Article 50 of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008. Such a review can take the form of either an internal multi-agency review or an independent case review.

I consider that the current arrangements are appropriate and do not plan to establish an independent panel.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many candidates were considered for the post of Ministerial Special Adviser; (ii) what account was taken of any potential imbalance in religious background or gender in the pool from which she selected her Special Adviser; (iii) how wide was the trawl for candidates; (iv) how did she ensure that it was broadly based as required by the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers; and (v) to publish the job description and person specification drawn up before the Special Adviser was appointed.

(AQW 5472/16-21)

Ms Sugden: A Code of Practice on the appointment of Special Advisers was first drawn up in 1999 and approved by the Executive. This has been subsequently updated (see link below to the latest version dated 20 June 2016). The Code of Practice makes clear that each Minister and the Minister alone is the appointing authority for their Special Adviser. Given the personal nature of the appointment it is ultimately for each Minister to decide the basis on which to appoint their Special Adviser.

<https://www.financeni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dfp/Code%20Governing%20the%20Appointment%20of%20Special%20Advisers%20-%202027%20June%202016.pdf>

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to outline the current laws addressing road rage.

(AQW 5502/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are no current laws directly addressing road rage nor is there a legal definition of what constitutes road rage.

Existing road traffic legislation includes offences related to careless and dangerous driving which, depending on the circumstances, might be appropriate in cases of road rage. Should a driver threaten or carry out an assault or other serious offence against another person or their property their actions would be subject to the appropriate criminal justice legislation.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the agency that takes responsibility for the public's protection when a prisoner completes a sentence for a crime involving sexual or violent offending and must by law be released, but is not rehabilitated from the prison process.

(AQW 5516/16-21)

Ms Sugden: An offender convicted of a sexual or violent offence, and sentenced under the provisions of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 to a term of imprisonment of 12 months or more, will be subject to mandatory post-release supervision on licence by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. In addition to the standard licence conditions prescribed in statute, there are additional licence conditions which can be imposed concerning, amongst other things, accommodation, restrictions on movements, prohibitions on certain behaviours and participation in programmes aimed at securing their rehabilitation.

Relevant offenders who are assessed as presenting a risk of serious harm to the public through carrying out a contact sexual or violent offence, will be risk managed on a multi-Agency basis under the Public Protection Arrangements. A single Agency will act as Designated Risk Manager but a multi-Agency Local Area Public Protection panel will regularly review an individual's risk management.

Where the risk assessment concludes that on the basis of current risk factors that there is little evidence that the offender could cause serious harm to the public, they will be managed by a Designated Risk Manager from a single Agency which may be Probation Board, PSNI or a Health Trust. Where there are also statutory notification requirements imposed on conviction or the Court has granted a Sexual Offences Prevention Order, PSNI are responsible for monitoring compliance with those requirements.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline how many prisoners became unwell or showed adverse symptoms as a result of ingesting drugs triggering the recent amnesty in HMP Maghaberry; and how many had to be moved to an outside hospital for treatment.

(AQW 5517/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Four prisoners became unwell and showed adverse systems, believed to be as a result of ingesting drugs, triggering the recent amnesty in Maghaberry Prison. Following assessment by nursing staff all four were escorted to outside hospital.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline why monitoring and/or management is not mandatory for violence recidivist offenders, particularly given the risk to public safety.

(AQW 5518/16-21)

Ms Sugden: All offenders convicted of an offence and sentenced, under the provisions of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, to a term of imprisonment of 12 months or more are subject to mandatory post-release supervision on licence by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. This ensures that those considered by the Courts as serious offenders receive a sentence which has both a custodial part and a licence part served under supervision in the community.

Relevant violent offenders, about whom an Agency has current evidence of behaviour indicating their risk of causing serious harm to the public has increased, can be referred into the Public Protection Arrangements even where the disposal they receive for a further violent offence does not meet the threshold for mandatory post-release supervision. Relevant violent offenders are those who currently, or have previously between relevant dates, been convicted of a violent offence against a child or vulnerable adult, in domestic or family circumstances or in circumstances aggravated by a hate crime.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4369/16-21, to outline why a mental health referral and/or treatment is not triggered as standard.

(AQW 5519/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Not all prisoners availing of the Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR) process have mental health issues. Some stresses and risks which initiate the SPAR process are momentary and fleeting. Mental Health support should be targeted towards those individuals who specifically require such help. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the provision of mental health support in prisons.

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Justice the number of hours per week of education received per person, including core curriculum teaching for (i) under 16's; and (ii) over 16's, in the Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre.

(AQW 5543/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Woodlands Education and Learning Centre has recently transitioned to become an Education Authority designated Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) Centre, where academic and vocational learning combine with other interventions to support the educational and personal development needs of each young person.

My officials have been working closely with colleagues in the Department of Education and Education Authority to develop a core curriculum appropriate to needs and age and to roll-out programmes that are reflective of the change in population demographic within Woodlands.

It is too soon to have a detailed breakdown under the EOTAS framework by age group of the hours delivered but we do anticipate a significant improvement towards the 22.5 hours per week standard set for EOTAS students, compared with the 15 hours per week average, per child, during 2015 that had resulted from short-term difficulties in maintaining levels of teaching cover.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Justice whether she is aware of any plans to close Bangor PSNI station.

(AQW 5544/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are no plans to close Bangor PSNI station. That has been confirmed by both the PSNI and the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

The PSNI Estate Strategy is due for discussion with the Policing Board later this month and includes plans for the disposal of a number of stations that are no longer operationally required. Bangor station is not one of those.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment on the Review of Family and Civil Justice by Lord Justice John Gillen.

(AQW 5593/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I very much welcome the initiative of the Lord Chief Justice in commissioning the Review of Civil and Family Justice and the significant work undertaken by Lord Justice Gillen who, supported by his Review and Reference Groups, has produced two draft Reports for consultation. It is right that the judiciary and others working in the civil and family justice system should play an active role in considering how it can be improved to deliver the best possible outcomes for court users.

Together the two draft reports contain almost 400 recommendations spanning a wide range of issues; some of which are strategic and some operational.

I expect to receive a final report from the Lord Chief Justice in early 2017 which will inform my overall policy on improving access to justice in the civil and family courts.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice when a remand prisoner is granted bail with the stipulation of an address to be approved by the PSNI and/or a Designated Risk Manager, is the specified residency condition enforceable as part of court appointed bail terms.

(AQW 5595/16-21)

Ms Sugden: When a remand prisoner is granted bail with a specified residency condition then the condition may be enforced under Article 6(3) of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. The Article provides that a constable may arrest without warrant any person who has been released on bail if the constable has reasonable grounds for believing that that person is likely to break any of the conditions of his bail or has reasonable grounds for suspecting that that person has broken any of those conditions.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline any current investigations to ascertain how the rogue drug, that led to the recent amnesty, entered HMP Maghaberry.

(AQW 5597/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Efforts are constant and ongoing to interrupt the smuggling of illicit items into Maghaberry prison. Staff, acting on intelligence and on suspicion, have been proactive in intercepting such items recently. While it cannot be determined how a drug responsible for a specific incident came into the prison, it has been seen that trafficking in family visits is one of the main routes used. Another route for the trafficking of drugs is by prisoners returning from periods outside of the prison, including compassionate bail.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to outline any meetings she has had with (i) Government ministers in the Republic of Ireland; and (ii) Government ministers in the United Kingdom, since taking up office.

(AQW 5615/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Details of meetings I have held with Government ministers in the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom since taking up office are outlined in the table below.

Date	Nature of Meeting
2 June	Introductory meeting with Theresa Villiers, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.
29 June	Introductory meeting with Charlie Flanagan TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. Meeting on Fresh Start – Theresa Villiers in attendance.
4 July	Attendance at the North South Ministerial Council – Irish Cabinet Ministers also in attendance. Private introductory meeting with the Frances Fitzgerald, Tánaiste
9 July	Attendance at the 100th Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme – Islandbridge, Dublin Invitation issued from the Taoiseach.
18 July	Introductory meeting with James Brokenshire, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
15 Sept	Meeting with Dr Philip Lee, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice.
15 Sept	Meeting with Robin Walker. Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union.
15 Sept	Introductory meeting with Amber Rudd, Home Secretary & Sarah Newton, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Home Office
26 Sept	Introductory meeting with Kris Hopkins, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office
28 Sept	Attendance at the Cross Border Organised Crime Conference – Meeting with Frances Fitzgerald, Tánaiste

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of prosecutions for animal cruelty in the (i) Magistrates Court; and (ii) Crown Court over each of the last five years.

(AQW 5630/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Offences relating to animal cruelty may be prosecuted under the Welfare of Animals (Northern Ireland) Act 1972, the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 and the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Prosecutions at court for animal cruelty offences, 2011 – 2015

Year	Crown Court	Magistrates' courts
2011	0	62
2012	1	58
2013	2	33
2014	10	65
2015	0	75

Note:

- 1 Figures relate to prosecutions which included at least one count of the offences specified.
- 2 The figures provided relate to prosecutions for all classifications of the offences specified.
- 3 Figures relate to initial disposals at court: disposals as a result of appeals are not included.
- 4 Figures include prosecutions brought by PPS on behalf of PSNI and other bodies.
- 5 Data for 2014 - 2015 have been sourced from the DOJ Prosecutions, Convictions and Sentencing Dataset while data for 2011 - 2013 have been sourced directly from the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS).

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice to detail the current number of young people held in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre, broken down by (i) gender and age; (ii) those sentenced, on remand and admitted under the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (PACE); (iii) geographical location prior to admission when admitted under PACE; (iv) number of PACE admissions to date this year; (v) percentage that are looked after children; (vi) those whose stay has been extended due to not being able to perfect bail; (vii) those receiving support for mental health needs; (viii) drug and alcohol misuse; and (ix) special educational needs.

(AQW 5657/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The following details relate to the current number of young people resident in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre on Friday 21 October 2016:

- (i) There were 22 young people in custody – 20 males and 2 females
Their ages are broken down as follows:
 - 17 years – 15
 - 16 years – 4
 - 15 years – 1
 - 14 years – 2
- (ii) There were 5 young people sentenced, 17 on remand and none held under PACE.
- (iii) There were no young people held in Woodlands under PACE on 21 October 2016.
- (iv) There were 152 PACE admissions from 1 January 2016 to 21 October 2016.
- (v) 36.4% (8) of the young people currently in Woodlands are looked after children.
- (vi) One of these young people had their stay extended due to not being able to perfect bail.
- (vii) Eleven of these young people are receiving support from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for mental health needs.
- (viii) Nineteen of these young people are noted to have issues with drug and/or alcohol misuse.
- (ix) Eight of these young people have special educational needs.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the specific type or name of drug which led to the recent amnesty in HMP Maghaberry.

(AQW 5669/16-21)

Ms Sugden: It was not possible to identify the drug or drugs that led to concerns being raised.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice to outline the departmental support provided to communities affected by the misuse of fireworks.

(AQW 5707/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The purpose of fireworks legislation is to regulate both the buyer and the seller in order to ensure public safety. In addition, firework licences are granted for a specific date and time in order to prevent them being set off at unreasonable times or night after night.

My Department works closely with the PSNI, District Council Environmental Health departments and the Health & Safety Executive NI to reduce fireworks misuse and illegal sales. If members of the public are concerned about firework nuisance they should report it to either the Council Environmental Health Officer or the PSNI. AQW/5198/16-21 details firework related convictions.

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Justice whether she intends to (i) seek agreement for proposed Westminster legislative provisions to pardon those convicted of abolished sex offences to be extended to Northern Ireland; or (ii) introduce legislation. **(AQW 5776/16-21)**

Ms Sugden: The amendment to the Policing and Crime Bill builds on existing legislation already in place in England and Wales for disregarding convictions for old homosexual offences which are no longer unlawful. These provisions, which are in the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, do not extend to Northern Ireland, therefore the proposed new law could not work here by extension.

A change to the law in Northern Ireland would therefore require Assembly legislation. I am happy to consider this policy issue.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4523/16-21 and as it was considered by the Prison Service Management Board that the analysis backing up the report was limited and therefore there was not a sufficiently robust evidence base from which to formulate an action plan, to detail (i) if archived material and research evidence were fully examined by PSMB; and (ii) why were the findings and recommendations dismissed instead of seeking further evidence in the event there was alleged limitations to the analysis. **(AQW 5902/16-21)**

Ms Sugden:

- (i) The Prison Service Management Board considered that evidence which was presented within the report.
- (ii) This report was commissioned by the Board and it chose not to accept it. There is no onus on the Management Board to seek further evidence to bolster an inadequate report.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4523/16-21, why this report was considered only by the Prison Service Management Board and not shown to or shared with the former Minister for Justice or departmental officials. **(AQW 5903/16-21)**

Ms Sugden: This was a report commissioned by the Board and it chose not to accept it. There was therefore no reason for the Board to share the report with the former Minister or Departmental officials.

The October 2013 meeting of the Prison Service Management Board was attended by the entire Board which consisted of:-

- Sue McAllister (Director General)
- Brian McCaughey (Director of Rehabilitation)
- Paul Cawkwell (Director of Offender Policy and Operations)
- Max Murray (Director of Estates)
- Joanne McBurney (Director of Finance and Corporate Services)
- Mark Adam (Change Manager)
- Phil Wheatley (Non Executive Director)
- Paul Leighton (Non Executive Director)
- Patricia Gordon (Non Executive Director)

In addition to the Board Members listed above the following members of staff also attended the meeting to present papers and contribute to the discussion:-

- Board Secretary
- NIPS Press Officer
- Head of Psychological Services
- Capital Estates Programme Manager

A copy of the minute from the October 2013 meeting is attached.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4523/16-21, (i) to outline the persons on the Prison Service Management Board as of October 2013; and of those, to detail which were present at the meeting when the report was discussed; and (ii) provide a copy of the minutes or place same in the Assembly Library.

(AQW 5904/16-21)

Ms Sugden: This was a report commissioned by the Board and it chose not to accept it. There was therefore no reason for the Board to share the report with the former Minister or Departmental officials.

The October 2013 meeting of the Prison Service Management Board was attended by the entire Board which consisted of:-

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- Paul Cawkwell (Director of Offender Policy and Operations)
- Max Murray (Director of Estates)
- Joanne McBurney (Director of Finance and Corporate Services)
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- Board Secretary
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A copy of the minute from the October 2013 meeting is attached.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline which agency had or has responsibility for the monitoring and/or management of convicted sex offender Frank Massey; (i) up to February 2016; (ii) between February and June 2016; and (iii) to date thereafter.

(AQW 5959/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Probation Board for Northern Ireland acted as Designated Risk Manager for the period to 11 September 2016 at which point on the expiry of his sentence his ongoing risk management in relation to extant Court Orders became the responsibility of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether she has sought an update on the PSNI review of On The Run cases; and with what result.

(AQW 5991/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The PSNI is undertaking a review of the On The Run cases in the wake of

'The Report of the Hallett Review - an Independent Review into the On The Run Administrative Scheme'.

As the review is an operational matter it would not be appropriate for me, as Justice Minister, to become involved with it. However, I understand that the Chief Constable is providing periodic updates on its progress to the Policing Board Northern Ireland.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQO 406/16-21, to outline any discussions she has had with the Chief Constable on the cost of the ongoing disputes between criminal gangs in Carrickfergus.

(AQO 520/16-21)

Ms Sugden: As Justice Minister I have regular discussions with the Chief Constable about a wide range of policing-related issues.

I understand there are ongoing tensions in the Castlemara area, and a resultant high police presence. PSNI are currently finalising costings for this operation. These are not yet available, but will be shared with me as soon as possible.

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Justice to outline the progress made by her Department and its arm's length bodies in implementing the recommendations of the Fresh Start Panel Report on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups.

(AQO 524/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I am pleased with the progress we are making on implementing the Panel's comprehensive and helpful recommendations. Since we received the Panel's report at the end of May we have made significant progress in a number of areas. Firstly we agreed an Executive response, involving all Departments, to this complex and difficult issue, and published an Executive action plan setting out how we intend to take each of the recommendations forward. We have also made some

early allocations of funding to support work in communities and law enforcement and have begun preparatory work on a number of actions, including the programme for women. I reiterate what I said previously, that this is about ensuring that we develop a comprehensive and cohesive programme of work that does not just become a tick box exercise. To do this meaningfully and in collaboration with the communities who this will impact does take time. We have been working to develop an implementation plan and to consider how to allocate funding meaningfully. We will be taking forward a process of co-design with local communities to develop appropriate interventions, and Officials and statutory partners held a Design Day on 27 September to begin planning this.

The programme of work needed to tackle paramilitarism and associated criminality is much broader than simply a justice response. However, I recognise that my Department and its arm's length bodies will have a significant role to play, and this represents a significant programme of work for us. We have begun planning and preparatory work on all the justice recommendations and this will inform the development of the implementation plan. For example, we will soon launch a public awareness campaign, we are implementing reforms aimed at speeding up justice, we have begun work to review legislation on serious and organised crime and we are taking forward a feasibility study for a restorative justice centre of excellence.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the role played by access to police officers in local police stations in giving the public confidence in the rule of law.

(AQO 525/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I have been advised by the PSNI that almost all policing services are delivered outside of stations. These services are provided by officers working with the community, in the community. I believe this is the best way to maximise community confidence in policing and in the rule of law.

Policing is a 24 hour, 7 day a week service. The public can contact the police at any time via the 999 emergency telephone number or by using 101 to report non-emergencies. Information is also readily available via the PSNI Facebook pages and Twitter feeds.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the current staffing levels within the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

(AQO 526/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The most up to date workforce statistics available for the Northern Ireland Prison Service are at 1 October 2016. At that date there were 1218.97 Prison Grade staff and 235.49 Non Prison Grade staff. These figures are Full Time Equivalent figures.

Preparations are being made for a further 20 new Custody Prison Officers and Night Custody Officers recruits to begin their training in January 2017.

In addition, work is underway to appoint 14 Prisoner Custody Officers by January 2017.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Justice to outline the steps she is taking to prevent financial cyber-crime.

(AQO 527/16-21)

Ms Sugden: More than 50% of all crimes committed nowadays utilise the cyber environment to some degree – it is a massive problem and one which neither individuals nor organisations can afford to ignore.

E-crime is a priority for the PSNI, who work closely with the National Cyber Security Centre and other stakeholders.

The Organised Crime Task Force, which I chair, together with PSNI has a wide reaching engagement process utilising business briefings, local media and other engagement events to highlight the issue and educate people and businesses. This October's Get Safe Online Day was marked by a series of events at shopping centres in Belfast, Londonderry and Lisburn on 20-22 October.

The PSNI has also introduced a dedicated reporting portal for businesses affected by cyber-crime, they work with Action Fraud and many local companies have also signed up to the national Cyber Information Sharing Partnership - a joint industry and government initiative set up to exchange cyber threat information in real time, in a secure, confidential and dynamic environment.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Justice how many arrests and convictions have been made in relation to dissident activity since 2014.

(AQO 528/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Information on the number of arrests made in relation to dissident activity is an operational matter for the Chief Constable.

Convictions for terrorist-related activity, including dissident-related activity, can be prosecuted under the Terrorism Act 2000, the Terrorism (Northern Ireland) Act 2006 and the Counter Terrorism Act 2008. In 2014, 2015 and 2016 (January - August), there were 21, five and three convictions respectively for offences under this legislation.

It is also possible for convictions to be secured for dissident-related activity in relation to non-terrorism legislation offences, for example, in the case of possession of a firearm. Information is not held centrally on these convictions.

It should be noted that the figures relate to convictions for the offences in question, whether or not they were the primary offence at conviction. Further, they relate to all categories of the offences specified, and to initial disposals at court. Disposals as a result of appeals are not included. Figures for 2016 are provisional.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the progress made on addressing the ongoing issue of fuel laundering.
(AQO 529/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Excise evasion is a reserved matter and policy and legal responsibility rests with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. However HMRC is a key member of the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Taskforce, which I chair, and it works closely with other members across Northern Ireland law enforcement and government.

Following joint work by HMRC and its Irish counterparts, a new fuel marker, Accutrace, was introduced into UK fuel supplies on 1 April 2015. Her Majesty's Treasury has just issued the one-year review of the performance of this marker which has confirmed a reduction in the number and size of laundering plants, consistent with an overall shift away from illicit laundering. There is no evidence of successful laundering of the new marker.

I think we can all acknowledge that the fuel marker represents a success story for law enforcement and is an excellent example of cross border co-operation. We must, however, accept that criminals prevented from fuel laundering are likely to move to other forms of criminality such as fuel smuggling and we therefore cannot lower our guard in the fight against organised crime.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether she will order a serious case review into the alleged further offending of convicted sex offender Frank Massey, including why allegations were able to go on for five months.
(AQW 6058/16-21)

Ms Sugden: It is not the responsibility of the Minister of Justice to order a Serious Case Review. It is the Strategic Management Board, responsible for oversight of the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI), who commissions such reviews where they meet the required criteria. A Serious Case Review has not been commissioned in this case as the matter does not meet the criteria set out in the PPANI Manual of Practice.

Information regarding an alleged breach of conditions of a Court Order was shared with PSNI as soon as it was made known to his designated risk manager and a police investigation initiated.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr McKee asked the Assembly Commission why it has not ensured there are sufficient Bill Clerks within the Assembly Bill Office to meet the demand for legislative support.
(AQW 4528/16-21)

Mr Attwood (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Due to reductions in the Commission's budget, Assembly staffing levels have reduced from 412.7 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) in 2011 to 333.2 FTE in 2016. An additional 0.8 FTE AG5 (Senior Assistant Clerk) was added to the Bill Office complement prior to the commencement of the new Assembly mandate in response to the increasing demand for support for Private Members' Bills.

The level of staffing in the Bill Office required to support the record number of Members' Bills that the Speaker has agreed will be supported at this early stage of the mandate is being reviewed with a potential in-year resource bid from within the Assembly's budget. A business case for additional staff resource for this important strand of parliamentary work is being prepared. The business case will take account of current demand for Private Members' Bills but will also seek to ensure that resources are in place which enable the Assembly to respond positively to the findings of the Committee on Procedures' review of both the procedural and support framework for the development of Members' Bills.

Mr McKee asked the Assembly Commission what level of additional resource has been calculated as being required within the Assembly Bill Office to allow it to meet the full current demand for Private Members' Bills.
(AQW 4529/16-21)

Mr Attwood (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The increased interest in Members seeking to legislate is a very positive development which a number of recent actions taken by the Speaker, in his procedural capacity, were designed to encourage. These include requesting a review by the Committee on Procedures to ensure procedures are fit for purpose to deal with a greater number of Private Member's Bills across the life of this Assembly, ensuring that a record number of bills are being supported at this stage in the mandate, and taking steps to ensure resources are in place following the review.

The level of staffing in the Bill Office required to support the record number of Members' Bills that the Speaker has agreed will be supported at this early stage of the mandate is being reviewed with a potential in-year resource bid from within the Assembly's budget. A business case for additional staff resource for this important strand of parliamentary work is being prepared. The business case will take account of current demand for Private Members' Bills but will also seek to ensure that

resources are in place which enable the Assembly to respond positively to the findings of the Committee on Procedures' review of both the procedural and support framework for the development of Members' Bills.

Mr McKee asked the Assembly Commission to detail the full time equivalent number of staff employed in the Assembly Bill Office, broken down by grade, (i) over each of the last five years; and (ii) as of 1 October 2016.

(AQW 4530/16-21)

Mr Attwood (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The table below provides details of the full-time equivalent number of staff in the Bill Office as of the 1st of October each year. Staffing levels in the Bill Office vary significantly across the mandate in response to legislative pressures.

	AG4	AG5	AG6	AG7	AG8	Total
2011	2.8	0	1	2	1	6.8
2012	2.8	0	0.9	1	1	5.7
2013	2.8	0	0.9	2	1	6.7
2014	2.8 ¹	1 ¹	1.9	2	1	8.7
2015	2.9 ²	1	1.9	3	1	9.8
2016	2	1.8	1	1.8	1 ³	7.6

Notes:

- 1 An AG4 was added to the team in 2014 in preparation for end of mandate legislative pressures to make a total of 3.8 but then, due to Assembly-wide budget reductions, the staffing level at that grade was reduced to 2.8 again, with a new post at AG5 (Senior Assistant Clerk) being added to the complement.
- 2 An AG4 joined the team in the last three months of the mandate from the Houses of the Oireachtas, increasing staffing levels at this grade to 3.9 for a temporary period.
- 3 The position listed has very recently become vacant on a temporary basis.

Mr McMullan asked the Assembly Commission to list the energy saving schemes in use in Parliament Buildings; and to outline the estimated annual saving of each scheme.

(AQW 5153/16-21)

Mr Wells (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Over recent years, the Sustainable Development Office has implemented a range of measures to improve the environmental performance of Parliament Buildings, including replacing light bulbs with more energy efficient bulbs, reviewing the heating schedules for the building, installing 'hippos' in toilets to reduce the amount of water used per flush and reviewing the time schedules for external lighting etc.

As part of the recently completed roof project, further initiatives were undertaken to improve the environmental performance of Parliament Buildings. These included:

- Rain water collecting;
- Photo Voltaic (PV) Panels;
- Solar Thermal tubes;
- Replacement of the heating boilers;
- Upgrading and rationalisation of the air-handling units (AHUs), and;
- Upgrading of the Building Energy Management System (BEMS)

Following completion of the project the following benefits have been realised in the past year:

- PV Panels - 34,219 KWH of Solar Electricity has been generated;
- Rain Water Collecting - 57,980 Litres of rainwater has been collected; this has been distributed back into the building's toilet cisterns;
- Solar Thermal tubes – these have contributed to the supply of hot water in the building reducing the energy use.

In addition to this, the replacement boilers are more efficient and redundant AHUs have been replaced by more efficient models, all of which will result in improved performance and associated energy savings.

It can be difficult to measure the contribution made by individual environmental initiatives; the table below gives some indication of improvements that have been made in recent years:

Electricity usage	16.1% reduction since 2008/2009
Gas usage	19.1% reduction since 2008/2009
Recycling rate	74.26% increase since 2008/2009
Paper consumption (measured by number of A4 sheets used)	2013-2014: 17881 2014-2015: 15572 (equates to a 13% reduction in 1 year)

I hope this gives you an indication of the improvements that have been made; please let me know if you require anything further.

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.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 21 October 2016

Revised Written Answer

Department of Finance

Replace the answer given for AQO 216/16-21 with:

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Finance following a submission to the Executive by his predecessor in 2015, for an update on the issue of equal pay for PSNI, Department of Justice and Northern Ireland Office staff.

(AQO 216/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): The paper submitted to the Executive fell at the end of the previous Assembly session as it was not considered by the previous Executive.

As Minister Sammy Wilson said in 2013 "The arguments put forward by those lobbying on this issue do not change the fact that the position in terms of eligibility has been clear from the outset of the equal pay settlement and this has now been upheld in the County Court, which found that the settlement applied only to periods of service in the 11 NICS departments and did not apply to bodies such as the NIO and PANI/PSNI, who had lawfully received delegation for pay matters, which was still in effect during the relevant time period. No legal liability has been established upon which to base any rationale to approve payment of the settlement to PSNI staff."

That said, I have sympathy for those affected. At the time of the NICS equal pay settlement, and during the reckonable period on which the settlement was based on, the British Government, through the NIO pay group, were responsible for the pay negotiations for many of those affected. I have therefore written to the British Secretary of State, urging him to take responsibility for this issue and to come forward with a resolution.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 28 October 2016

Revised Written Answers

Department for Infrastructure

In this Bound Volume, page WA 275, replace the answer given for AQW 4257/16-21 with:

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) the criteria used to decide what amount of the overall available budget is allocated to each local council area for both structural and routine maintenance of the road network; and (ii) the reasons that the Ards and North Down Borough Council area is allocated the smallest amount of budget of all the local council areas for both functions.

(AQW 4257/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure):

- (i) My Department allocates funding to its four TransportNI Divisions on the basis of need, using a range of weighted indicators, tailored to each maintenance activity i.e. resurfacing, patching, gully emptying, grass cutting etc. Divisions also use a range of indicators when apportioning across council areas to ensure, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of funds. These take into consideration criteria such as road mileage, structural condition and population.
- (ii) Ards and North Down Borough Council area is allocated funding for structural and routine maintenance on the same basis as other District Councils, using indicators such as road mileage, structural condition and population. Allocations across council areas do therefore vary year on year.

With reference to the out-turn expenditure figures for the financial year 2015-16, I can advise that contractual difficulties resulted in the non-availability of both a resurfacing contractor to carry out resurfacing and patching works, as well as a gully cleaning contractor, both of which had a considerable impact on the ability of the Section to deliver works, and on the out-turn expenditure for the Borough Council area.

Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 17 October 2016

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement – Inter-Governmental Agreement on Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters

The Minister of Justice, Ms Claire Sugden, made a statement regarding the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters, following which she replied to questions.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion – EU Special Status for Northern Ireland

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the current public concern arising from the European Union Referendum vote; endorses the proposal of the Irish Government and others that there should be legal recognition of the unique status of Northern Ireland and the circumstances on the island as part of the arrangements to leave the European Union; believes that this is one mechanism that can safeguard the interests of the people of Northern Ireland, including future access to European Union funding opportunities; and calls on the British Government to fully endorse, and to negotiate for, this outcome in discussions on leaving the European Union.

Mr C Eastwood

Ms C Hanna

Mr A Attwood

Mr M Durkan

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Speaker took the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 The Executive Office

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. The junior Minister, Ms Megan Fearon, also answered a number of questions.

4.2 Finance

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance, Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) took the Chair.

5. Executive Committee Business

5.1 Statement – The Sustainable Schools Policy and Area Planning

The Minister of Education, Mr Peter Weir, made a statement regarding The Sustainable Schools Policy and Area Planning, following which he replied to questions.

6. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

6.1 Motion: EU Special Status for Northern Ireland (cont'd)

Debate resumed.

The Question being put, the motion **fell** (Division).

6.2 Motion: Domestic Abuse, Rape and Sexual Crime

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses deep concern at the levels of domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime; encourages victims of these crimes to come forward; welcomes the increased reporting of domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime but recognises that a high level of underreporting still exists; further welcomes the commitment from the Minister of Health and the Minister of Justice to prioritise addressing this type of crime; and calls on the Executive to work together to support victims and survivors and address domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime.

*Ms M Boyle
Mr D Kearney
Mr P Sheehan
Ms J McCann*

6.3 Motion: Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'exists,' and insert:

'notes that an analysis of final prosecutorial decisions between 2010 and 2014 shows that in 83 per cent of rape cases no prosecution was recommended; calls on the Executive to work together to address domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime and to support victims and survivors of such crimes; and further calls on the Public Prosecution Service to work to improve rape prosecution and conviction rates.'

*Ms C Bailey
Mr S Agnew*

6.4 Motion: Amendment 2

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'type of crime,' and insert:

'notes that the criminal justice system currently treats each reported occurrence of domestic violence as an individual, isolated act and not as a pattern of behaviour or an extended course of conduct; calls on the Executive to work together to support victims and survivors and address domestic abuse, rape and sexual crime; further calls for the immediate extension of the Justice Support Worker scheme to all policing districts so patterns can be identified from victims making multiple reports; and calls on the Minister of Justice to introduce urgently legislation to criminalise such patterns of abuse and coercive control which victims are subjected to by their abusers.'

*Mr A Attwood
Mr M Durkan
Ms N Mallon*

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) took the Chair.

The Question being put, Amendment 1 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 6.26pm.

Mr Robin Newton

The Speaker

17 October 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly

17 October 2016

Division

Motion – EU Special Status for Northern Ireland

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the current public concern arising from the European Union Referendum vote; endorses the proposal of the Irish Government and others that there should be legal recognition of the unique status of Northern Ireland and the circumstances on the island as part of the arrangements to leave the European Union; believes that this is one mechanism that can safeguard the interests of the people of Northern Ireland, including future access to European Union funding opportunities; and calls on the British Government to fully endorse, and to negotiate for, this outcome in discussions on leaving the European Union.

Mr C Eastwood
Ms C Hanna
Mr A Attwood
Mr M Durkan

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 46

Noes: 47

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Ms Dillon, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Ms Hanna, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCrossan, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Mr McMullan, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McNulty, Mr Mullan.

NOES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lyons, Mr McCausland, Mr McKee, Mr Middleton, Lord Morrow, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Smith, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Cameron, Mr Robinson.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Carroll and Mr E McCann

The motion **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 12 October 2016 – 17 October 2016

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
 - Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner: Annual Report 2015-16 (DoJ).
 - Ilex Urban Regeneration Company Limited Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (TEO).
 - Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland: Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DfE).
 - The Annual Report and Accounts of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council 2015-16 (DoH).
 - The Annual Report and Accounts of the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council (NIPEC) 2015-16 (DoH).
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
 - SR 2016/373 The Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Prescribed Police Stations) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
 - SR 2016/377 The County Court (Amendment No. 2) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
 - Department for Infrastructure Driver, Vehicle, Operator Enforcement Statistics Quarter One – 1 April 2016 to 30 June 2016 (DfI).
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 18 October 2016

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Opposition Business

2.1 Motion – Housing

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes that in June 2016 there were 37,347 households on the social housing waiting list, of which 22,986 were deemed to be in housing stress and 15,474 were deemed to be statutorily homeless; and calls on the Minister for Communities to commit to providing at least 8,800 new build social housing units and 2,900 affordable housing units over the term of the Programme for Government 2016-21.

Mr C Eastwood

Mr A Allen

Ms N Mallon

Mrs J Palmer

2.2 Motion – Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'notes' and insert:

'that since 2007-08 until today the number of households in housing stress has remained constant, averaging around 22,000 per year despite significant investment by the Executive in new social housing; calls on the Minister for Communities to suspend the House Sales Scheme to ensure that housing can be retained within the social sector; and further calls on the Executive to ensure that the Housing Executive has the powers to allow it to build social homes and to work with Housing Associations to ensure maximum investment in social housing.'

Mr F McCann

Ms C Ní Chuilín

Ms M Gildernew

2.3 Motion – Amendment 2

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'homeless;' and insert:

'further notes the Executive's success in exceeding the last Programme for Government target by providing 7,669 new social homes and 4,685 new affordable homes between 2011 and 2016; and acknowledges the plans of the Minister for Communities to deliver 9,600 new social homes and 3,750 new affordable homes between 2016 and 2021.'

Mr J Bell

Mr A McQuillan

Mr C Stalford

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) took the Chair.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.

The Question being put, Amendment 1 **fell** without division.

The Question being put, Amendment 2 was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

2.4 Motion – Deterioration in Cancer Services

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the recent publication of cancer waiting times, which revealed that the crisis affecting cancer services in Northern Ireland is continuing to deteriorate; further notes with anger that in June 2016 only 6.7 per cent of breast cancer patients in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area were seen within 14 days, despite the target being 100 per cent; accepts the importance of timely diagnosis and treatment of cancer, as any delay can reduce the likelihood of a successful outcome; notes that these figures are symptomatic of the wider unprecedented crisis engulfing the Northern Ireland Health Service, with 392,000 people now on waiting lists; and calls on the Minister of Health to intervene to ensure patients receive swift, safe and sustainable healthcare and to ensure patient safety is not further compromised.

Mrs J Dobson

Mr R Butler

Mr M Durkan

Mr C McGrath

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 1.01pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Health

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

3.2 Infrastructure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Infrastructure, Mr Chris Hazzard.

The Speaker took the Chair.

4. Opposition Business (cont'd)

4.1 Motion: Deterioration in Cancer Services (cont'd)

Debate resumed.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) took the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the motion **fell** (Division).

5. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker.

Mrs Naomi Long spoke to her topic regarding Development at the Titanic Quarter.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.07pm.

Mr Robin Newton

The Speaker

18 October 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly

18 October 2016

Division

Motion – Deterioration in Cancer Services

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the recent publication of cancer waiting times, which revealed that the crisis affecting cancer services in Northern Ireland is continuing to deteriorate; further notes with anger that in June 2016 only 6.7 per cent of breast cancer patients in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area were seen within 14 days, despite the target being 100 per cent; accepts the importance of timely diagnosis and treatment of cancer, as any delay can reduce the likelihood of a successful outcome; notes that these figures are symptomatic of the wider unprecedented crisis engulfing the Northern Ireland Health Service, with 392,000 people now on waiting lists; and calls on the Minister of Health to intervene to ensure patients receive swift, safe and sustainable healthcare and to ensure patient safety is not further compromised.

*Mrs J Dobson
Mr R Butler
Mr M Durkan
Mr C McGrath*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 32

Noes: 62

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr E McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Aiken, Mr Mullan.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Milne, Ms Seeley.

The motion **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

**Papers Presented to the Assembly on
18 October 2016**

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
Waterways Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2015 (DfI).
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 18 October 2016

2016-2021 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Budget (No.2) Bill 1/16-21	13.06.16	14.06.16	/	/	20.06.16	21.06.16	27.06.16	29.07.16
Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Bill 76/11-16	12/01/16	25/01/16	/	/	02.02.16	16.02.16	23.02.16	22.07.16
Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill 2/16-21	19/09/16	27/09/16	15/11/16					

2016-2021 Mandate

Non-Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent

/ Bills progressing by accelerated passage

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 24 October 2016

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Motion – Draft Welfare Supplementary Payment (Benefit Cap) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016

Proposed:

That the draft Welfare Supplementary Payment (Benefit Cap) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 be approved.

Minister for Communities

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion on the Draft Welfare Supplementary Payment (Benefit Cap) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016, was **carried** without division.

3. Committee Business

3.1 Motion – Trustees of the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme

Proposed:

That the following Members are appointed as the Trustees of the Assembly Members' Pension Scheme; Mr Ross Hussey, Mr Trevor Lunn, Mr Richie McPhillips, Ms Caitríona Ruane and Mr Jim Wells.

Mr A Maskey

Mr A Attwood

Mr S Dickson

The Question being put, the motion was **carried** without division.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion – Ending the Separation of Paramilitary Prisoners at HMP Maghaberry

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes that HMP Maghaberry is unique in the British Isles and much of Europe for the challenges it faces as a result of housing prisoners with such opposing political and ideological views, and criminal backgrounds; further notes the continuing implementation of a flawed decision, taken in 2003, to separate paramilitary prisoners, and the impact that this is having on the operation of the prison and on the morale of public servants who live with its consequences; believes that the prison should gradually revert back to its integrationist policy and that this should be reflected in the Executive's Action Plan on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality, and Organised Crime; and calls on the Minister of Justice to put in place the framework to ensure that, by 2021, there are no new admissions to separate paramilitary wings and that by 2026 there is a fully-integrated prison regime.

Mr D Beattie

Mr R Beggs

4.2 Amendment – Ending the Separation of Paramilitary Prisoners at HMP Maghaberry

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Maghaberry' and insert:

'is unique on these islands and much of Europe for the challenges it faces as a result of housing prisoners with diverse backgrounds who are subject to different court processes depending on the nature of their charges; recognises that all prisoners and all prison staff must be treated with dignity and respect; believes that there is a need for ongoing and comprehensive prison reform; and calls on the Minister of Justice to work jointly with the planned independent review to examine the operation of the separated regime, evidencing the need for any changes and providing useful information for stakeholders to take forward, as proposed by the report from the Fresh Start Panel on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups.'

Mr D Kearney

Ms J McCann

Mr G Kelly

Mr R McCartney

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 1.54pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) in the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Ms Claire Sugden.

5.2 Communities

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Communities, Mr Paul Givan.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.

6. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

6.1 Motion: Ending the Separation of Paramilitary Prisoners at HMP Maghaberry (cont'd)

The Question being put, the amendment was **made** (Division 1).

The Question being put, the motion as amended was **carried** (Division 2).

6.2 Motion – Addressing Nursing Shortages

Proposed:

That this Assembly acknowledges the ongoing problem of nursing shortages in Northern Ireland; recognises the work carried out by former Health Ministers and Health and Social Care Trusts to address this problem; and calls on the Minister of Health to build on these efforts by working proactively with our colleges and universities to promote nursing as a career choice, and to work collaboratively with the relevant bodies to train and retain more nurses, thus reducing the total spend on agency workers and assisting long-term workforce planning.

Mr S Anderson

Ms P Bradley

Mr G Middleton

Mr T Clarke

6.3 Amendment – Addressing Nursing Shortages

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'ongoing' and insert:

'pressures facing nursing and midwifery staff in Northern Ireland; is concerned about the number of vacant nursing and midwifery posts across each Health and Social Care Trust; acknowledges that staffing shortages have exacerbated pressures in the health system, impacted on the working conditions of staff and affected patient outcomes; and calls on the Minister of Health to work proactively with our colleges and universities to promote nursing and midwifery as a career choice, and to work collaboratively with the relevant bodies to train and retain more nurses and midwives.'

Mr M Durkan

Mr C McGrath

Mr D McCrossan

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the amendment **fell** (Division 3).

The Question being put, the motion was **carried** without division.

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.44pm.

Mr Robin Newton

The Speaker

24 October 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly

24 October 2016

Division 1

Motion – Ending the Separation of Paramilitary Prisoners at HMP Maghaberry (Amendment)

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Maghaberry' and insert:

'is unique on these islands and much of Europe for the challenges it faces as a result of housing prisoners with diverse backgrounds who are subject to different court processes depending on the nature of their charges; recognises that all prisoners and all prison staff must be treated with dignity and respect; believes that there is a need for ongoing and comprehensive prison reform; and calls on the Minister of Justice to work jointly with the planned independent review to examine the operation of the separated regime, evidencing the need for any changes and providing useful information for stakeholders to take forward, as proposed by the report from the Fresh Start Panel on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups.'

Mr D Kearney

Ms J McCann

Mr G Kelly

Mr R McCartney

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 50

Noes: 15

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Carroll, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Ms Hanna, Mr Hazzard, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr E McCann, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCrossan, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McMullan, Mr McNulty, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilin, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Robinson, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Ms Sugden.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney.

NOES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allister, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Kennedy, Mr McKee, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Aiken, Mr Beattie.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result:

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

The amendment was **made**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

24 October 2016

Division 2

Motion – Ending the Separation of Paramilitary Prisoners at HMP Maghaberry (as amended)

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes that HMP Maghaberry is unique on these islands and much of Europe for the challenges it faces as a result of housing prisoners with diverse backgrounds who are subject to different court processes depending on the nature of their charges; recognises that all prisoners and all prison staff must be treated with dignity and respect; believes that there is a need for ongoing and comprehensive prison reform; and calls on the Minister of Justice to work jointly with the planned independent review to examine the operation of the separated regime, evidencing the need for any changes and providing useful information for stakeholders to take forward, as proposed by the report from the Fresh Start panel on the disbandment of paramilitary groups.

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 50

Noes: 15

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Carroll, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Gildernew, Ms Hanna, Mr Hazzard, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Long, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr E McCann, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCrossan, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Mr McMullan, Mr McNulty, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilin, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Robinson, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Ms Sugden.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney.

NOES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allister, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Kennedy, Mr McKee, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Aiken, Mr Beattie.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result:

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

The motion, as amended, **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

24 October 2016

Division 3

Motion – Addressing Nursing Shortages (Amendment)

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'ongoing' and insert:

'pressures facing nursing and midwifery staff in Northern Ireland; is concerned about the number of vacant nursing and midwifery posts across each Health and Social Care Trust; acknowledges that staffing shortages have exacerbated pressures in the health system, impacted on the working conditions of staff and affected patient outcomes; and calls on the Minister of Health to work proactively with our colleges and universities to promote nursing and midwifery as a career choice, and to work collaboratively with the relevant bodies to train and retain more nurses and midwives.'

Mr M Durkan

Mr C McGrath

Mr D McCrossan

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 34

Noes: 57

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Ms S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Butler, Mr Carroll, Mr Chambers, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Ms Hanna, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Long, Mr E McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McGrath, Mr Mullan.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Anderson, Mr Robinson.

The amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 19 October 2016 – 24 October 2016

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
 2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
 3. Orders in Council
 4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
 - Report on the 2016 Review of the Effects of the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DoF).
 - Retention and Disposal Schedule for Department for Communities (DFC).
 5. Assembly Reports
 6. Statutory Rules
 - SR 2016/378 The Richmond Crescent, Bangor (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
 - SR 2016/382 The Church Street/Mullagh Road, Maghera (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
 - SR 2016/383 The Baronscourt Lane, Carryduff (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
 - SR 2016/384 The Health and Personal Social Services (Superannuation), Health and Social Care (Pension Schemes) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoH).
 - SR 2016/000 Draft The Water Meters Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- For Information Only**
- SR 2016/379 The Belfast Road, Carrickfergus (Part-Time 20mph Speed Limit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
 - SR 2016/380 The Cycle Routes (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
 - SR 2016/381 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Newtownabbey) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
7. Written Ministerial Statements
 8. Consultation Documents
 9. Departmental Publications
 10. Agency Publications
 11. Westminster Publications
 12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 25 October 2016

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement – Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together

The Minister of Health, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, made a statement regarding Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together, following which she replied to questions.

2.2 Statement – October Monitoring

The Minister of Finance, Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, made a statement regarding October Monitoring, following which he replied to questions.

The sitting was suspended at 12.59pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Miss Michelle McIlveen.

3.2 Economy

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for the Economy, Mr Simon Hamilton.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) took the Chair.

4. Executive Committee Business (cont'd)

4.1 Statement – October Monitoring (cont'd)

The Minister of Finance, Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, replied to questions on the statement regarding October Monitoring.

4.2 Statement – Rationalisation of the Court Estate

The Minister of Justice, Ms Claire Sugden, made a statement regarding the Rationalisation of the Court Estate, following which she replied to questions.

4.3 Motion – Rates (Increased Reduction for Recreational Hereditaments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016**Proposed:**

That the Rates (Increased Reduction for Recreational Hereditaments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 be affirmed.

Minister of Finance

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion on the Rates (Increased Reduction for Recreational Hereditaments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016, was **carried** without division.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion – Small and Medium-sized Enterprises**Proposed:**

That this Assembly notes the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises to the economy of Northern Ireland; recognises their resilience in the face of many challenges; believes that many small and medium-sized enterprises are not realising their growth and development potential; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to ensure that the Economic Strategy supports small and medium-sized enterprises that want to grow.

Mr M Storey

Mr G Dunne

Mr T Buchanan

Mr G Lyons

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the motion was **carried** without division.

5.2 Motion – Partnership Working in Education Services**Proposed:**

That this Assembly recognises the value of partnership working between schools and community services, including the role that this can play in increasing educational achievement for pupils; and calls on the Minister of Education to ensure adequate resources are invested in developing and expanding such services.

Ms J McCann

Ms M Gildernew

Mr F McCann

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the motion was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

Mr Mike Nesbitt spoke to his topic regarding the Future of Movilla High School.

The Assembly adjourned at 7.28pm.

Mr Robin Newton

The Speaker

25 October 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 25 October 2016

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules

For Information Only

SR 2016/387 (C. 29) The Justice (2015 Act) (Commencement No. 7 and Saving Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together (DoH).
Systems, Not Structures: Changing Health and Social Care (DoH).
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 25 October 2016

2016-2021 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Budget (No.2) Bill 1/16-21	13.06.16	14.06.16	/	/	20.06.16	21.06.16	27.06.16	29.07.16
Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Bill 76/11-16	12/01/16	25/01/16	/	/	02.02.16	16.02.16	23.02.16	22.07.16
Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill 2/16-21	19/09/16	27/09/16	15/11/16					

2016-2021 Mandate

Non-Executive Bills

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent

/ Bills progressing by accelerated passage.