



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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

Volume 90

(29 November 2013 to 16 January 2014)

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Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sittings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 2 December 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matter of the Day

Helicopter Crash: Glasgow

Mr Speaker: Mr Gregory Campbell has been given leave to make a statement, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24, on the Glasgow helicopter disaster. If other Members wish to be called, they should rise continually in their place. All Members who are called will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject. Members will know that there will be no points of order and that no other issue will be discussed as we deal with this item of business.

Mr Campbell: A human tragedy unfolded in Glasgow at the weekend. I know, from speaking to one or two people from Northern Ireland who were in the area at the time, that it was a tragedy of immense proportions. All of us have watched, listened to and read about the suffering that resulted from the helicopter accident, with nine people dying and scores more being injured, several of whom are intensive care as we speak. Scotland was preparing to celebrate its national day, St Andrew's Day. It now appears that, for some years to come, the day will be a day of mourning rather than a day of celebration. As far as we are aware, the helicopter has an excellent safety record, and, of course, we now await the outcome of the investigation.

The intent today is to stand in solidarity with the people of Glasgow; to offer our condolences to the family and friends of those who have died; to offer good wishes to those who are injured and who will hopefully improve under hospital care; and to indicate to the entire people of the nation that all of us, in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, stand with a people who are mourning today as a result of a very tragic human accident.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Is tragóid uafásach ar fad í seo. Táimid ag smaoinreamh ar na daoine agus ar na clanna go léir.

This is a terrible tragedy. We are thinking about the families of the people who have suffered and who continue to suffer. We have seen tremendous local examples of heroism, and I put on record my party's support for the innovation and leadership shown by those people. We heard some of them on the radio this morning. They did things such as forming a human chain. Fortunately, one woman had a flashlight, which, in the darkness when the dust came down, helped to save lives.

Our thoughts are also with one father who has still has not found his son; certainly, he had not done so in the last report that I heard. Our thoughts are with those people.

This reminds me of two different occasions when I was working in Latin America, in Mexico and El Salvador. I was there just after the earthquakes. Buildings had fallen in, and it was awful to see families wait for three days and nights. I remember that one little baby was brought out of the rubble. He had been breastfeeding from his mother, and that is how he survived. I will never forget the euphoria when that happened.

The people of Ireland are thinking about our comrades in Scotland. We know that this is a really difficult time for them, and our thoughts are with them at this terrible time.

Dr McDonnell: On behalf of the SDLP, I show solidarity, express my deep sadness and offer my condolences to all those adversely affected by the helicopter crash in Glasgow, which has claimed the lives of nine people. At any rate, nine people are currently recorded as having died. They include civilian pilot David Traill, police officer Tony Collins, a woman police officer and at least five civilians. Also, numerous people have been seriously injured.

This is a terrible tragedy for Glasgow, and our thoughts and prayers must be with the families and friends of those who have lost their lives. For me, it is unimaginable what their loved ones must be going through right now. My thoughts and full sympathy are with each of them.

Having watched the harrowing scenes on television, I praise the unbelievable work of the emergency services that are involved in what must have been a complex rescue and recovery operation. Those heroic workers may very well say that they were just doing their job, but their work in helping people in those circumstances and in saving further lives was truly remarkable.

There has always been a close bond between the people of Ireland and Scotland, and, indeed, between the people of Belfast and Glasgow. There has always been emigration to Scotland and Glasgow from many parts of Northern Ireland. Indeed, one of my colleagues Colum Eastwood was in Glasgow on Friday night and spoke of the great sadness and shock that existed on what has been called a "dark day for Glasgow".

My commiserations are with all those who have suffered deep loss, their families and friends and, indeed, the wider community in Glasgow. The united and dignified way in which the people of the city pulled together in the face of such a massive tragedy is a reflection of the strong spirit of the Scottish people. We in the SDLP will send a letter of condolence to the Scottish First Minister, Alex Salmond, offering our condolences, and we wish all those involved a speedy recovery.

Mr Swann: On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I express our thoughts and sympathy to the family and friends of the nine individuals, crew and family, who lost their lives over the weekend. An incident such as this at a time such as this reminds us all of the fragility of life, how quickly it can be taken away and how loved ones can be removed from a caring family circle, especially just in the mouth of Christmas, when families will feel that loss immensely.

Like other Members, I pay tribute to the emergency services and to the general public, who did a sterling job in bringing those people from the rubble and wreckage. There is talk of a human chain and the use of torches. Specialist equipment was also brought in, including fibre-optic cameras, specialist sound equipment and carbon dioxide detectors. Those were all on hand and were made full use of.

Although we remember and congratulate the specialists and the emergency services in the work that they did in rescuing people, our thoughts also turn to the emergency services in hospitals that dealt with those who were seriously injured at that time. I believe that a number of people are still in intensive care, mostly with head and upper body injuries. Therefore, we commend those people to our thoughts and prayers.

All parties in Scotland joined in thinking of the loved ones and families at this time, and I am glad that all parties in this place have joined their colleagues in the Scottish Parliament. Thank you.

Mr Ford: There is no doubt that Glasgow is still a city in shock, and rescue operations are under way at the site. As we pass on our sympathy and condolences to the bereaved and those who were injured, we should also remember those who are still engaged in very difficult and dangerous work on the ground.

This morning, I spoke to Kenny MacAskill, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice in Edinburgh. He assured me that, as we expect public services across the UK to do, Police Scotland is doing an excellent job alongside its colleagues from the Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Service. If additional resources are required, I know that they will be made available by the PSNI or by forces in England and Wales. There are clearly issues around backup for air support.

I also spoke to Alistair Carmichael, the Secretary of State for Scotland, who, just before we spoke, had been in the control room. He spoke of the work being done by the emergency services and the city council and of the trauma being suffered by those who do that work. For those who lost colleagues in the helicopter, it is not just an anonymous incident. They are dealing with people with whom they worked daily, and they recognise the aftermath. As we add our sympathy to the bereaved and the injured, we should also remember the long-term effects on those who are engaged in that traumatic work.

There was heroism on the street from the rescue services and passers-by. There is also long-term work being done by those who are in the control room and those who continue to work in the hospitals. We should keep them all in our thoughts and prayers.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to Mr Campbell for tabling the matter of the day. Whether it was through Twitter

or the mainstream news, like all colleagues, it was with shock and horror that I learned about these events. The very horror that something like that could happen in one of the largest cities in the country is appalling. The devastation that it leads to and the split second in which lives are changed forever gives us all a real wake-up call as to how quickly lives can be changed in such dramatic circumstances.

On behalf of NI21, I offer my sympathies to all the families of the bereaved and to those who are still battling in intensive care and hospitals. I want to commend the police and the emergency services — the Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Service — for the work that they have done. I also commend the wider public, who literally did whatever they could to assist in any way.

It was a huge undertaking for people, and it was very challenging. As Mr Ford rightly reminded us, the horrors will live on with people for many years to come, as will the difficulties for all those who were involved, whether they are in the emergency services or members of the general public who were helping. The sheer horror of the scene of that crash will stay with them for many years.

We need to keep all the families of all the people involved and all the people of Scotland very much in our thoughts and prayers today, tomorrow, next week, next month and for many months to come. They will need our support as they come to terms with their loss and the grief and change in circumstances that was visited on them, literally in the blink of an eye. We will keep thinking about the families.

Mr McNarry: I am grateful to Mr Campbell for the opportunity to unite the House on such a harrowing subject after such a harrowing event. UKIP adds its support to the words that have been expressed by everyone today. It is appropriate for the Assembly to show our sorrow in solidarity with the Scottish people, the people of Glasgow and, in particular, the bereaved.

12.15 pm

It is important that those who are waiting for news of their loved ones know that we are thinking of them in this part of the United Kingdom — Northern Ireland. It is right also to acknowledge the efforts of the public and the police, fire and ambulance services in responding to this tragedy in the manner in which they did. Obviously, our thoughts and prayers are with them all today and for a lasting period.

Mr Eastwood: I add my condolences to those people who have lost loved ones and send a message of support to the people of Scotland, especially those who are still waiting on news of their loved ones.

I was in Glasgow on Friday night. I was with a doctor who got a phone call, and that is how we found out. He and many other doctors, nurses and other hospital staff rushed to their posts, as did the emergency services, and they need to be commended.

There is a real sense of shock and sadness in Glasgow, but there is also a sense of resilience, which is a sense that people in this part of the world know very well. There was also a panic that set in, and I think people have to understand this, as well: a panic right across Glasgow, with people worrying about where their loved ones were. It was a very busy Friday night, and many people were out enjoying themselves in the city centre. There was also

a sense of panic in places in Northern Ireland, because many loved ones from here are in Glasgow. In fact, I know somebody who regularly plays music in that very pub.

I echo the words of support for the people of Glasgow. They will get through this very difficult time, and they will get through it together.

Assembly Business

Committee Membership

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

Resolved:

That Ms Megan Fearon replace Ms Maeve McLaughlin as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; that Ms Michaela Boyle replace Ms Megan Fearon as a member of the Committee for Finance and Personnel; and that Ms Maeve McLaughlin replace Ms Michaela Boyle as a member of the Committee for Education. — [Ms Ruane.]

Ministerial Statements

Rate Collection and Recovery

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I will make a statement to update Members on the work that my Department is taking forward to carry out a strategic assessment of rate collection and recovery.

You will all be aware that one of my key priorities is to encourage reform of the public sector. I want our public services to be more innovative and more productive, and to give consistently good outcomes. Those ambitions in themselves are important, but I also want reformed public services that are better able to stimulate and maintain economic growth.

One of the key ways that businesses maintain a competitive advantage is by being innovative in the development of products and services. I am firmly of the belief that such innovation should not be constrained to the private sector.

The public rightly expects its Government to deliver high-quality services. It expects us to make the most of every pound of taxpayers' money we spend. In an era of increasing demand on public services and a constrained financial outlook, it will simply not be possible for the public sector to continue in the manner that it currently does. We have to be smarter in the delivery of our services, and we have to find new and innovative ways to serve the people of Northern Ireland. We also have to meet the needs of an increasingly demanding population.

I am keen that the Department of Finance and Personnel, as part of the strategic centre of the Stormont Administration, should seek to play the fullest of roles as an enabler and a catalyst for reform and innovation across the entirety of the public sector. But I have also made it clear that I cannot preach public sector reform for everyone else without practicing it in my own Department.

The way we collect and recover rates is an area where we are looking to be innovative to improve how we engage with the public and how we deliver our services. Rates are an extremely important source of revenue for the Northern Ireland Executive. Land and Property Services (LPS) was responsible for collecting over £1.1 billion in revenue last year. This revenue helps fund vital public services such as health, education, housing, roads and emergency services. It also provides a significant stream of income to all district councils in Northern Ireland.

As Members will be well aware, the last few years have been an extremely challenging period for individuals and businesses alike. We became well used to bad news about shop closures and the impact that the economic downturn had, and is continuing to have, on local traders in our towns and cities. I see it in my constituency, and I see it in other constituencies that I have visited in my capacity as Finance Minister.

It is not simply the economic downturn that is causing such difficulties. The retail industry is undergoing a fundamental shift in the way that people shop for goods and services. Online stores and big retail outlets are taking an increasing share of consumer spending. While there are many encouraging signs that the economy is entering recovery, with falling unemployment, rising employment, increasing business activity and an improving housing market, times

remain tough for many individuals. Only recently, the Northern Ireland Court Service released figures on the startling increase in possession orders. They reported a 20% increase in orders granted in the July to September quarter this year compared with the same quarter last year. Debt advice organisations are reporting increased numbers of applications for advice. There is no doubt that many ratepayers are finding it increasingly difficult to meet their financial obligations.

Such an economic backdrop makes the job of collecting rates an increasingly challenging one. More ratepayers struggling to pay increases the administrative burden of collecting rates. LPS has seen increasing numbers of bankruptcy and liquidations, which leads to debt being written off. More people seeking arrangements to pay, or seeking to pay by instalment, increases the collection timeline. Within that context, LPS has pursued a number of actions to reduce rate arrears. Those include offering payment arrangements, where appropriate; offering, where conditions are met, benefits, reliefs and allowances; pursuing court processes, obtaining court decrees, referral of debt to the Enforcement of Judgments Office and initiation of bankruptcy proceedings, where appropriate; using Land Registry information and data-sharing agreements with other public bodies; and utilising tracing services to locate debtors.

Despite this difficult economic environment, LPS has stabilised the amount of rating debt and has increased the cash collected by over £125 million since 2008-09. The Public Accounts Committee hearing of October 2012 acknowledged the improvement journey that LPS rate collection has been on but recognised the need for further and continuous improvement. The Committee also recommended the need for a review of rate collection processes to ensure that they remain effective.

I am conscious of the volume of change that LPS has dealt with since its formation in 2007. In that time, LPS has implemented 42 rating reforms, when counterparts in Great Britain have had a stable council tax system for over 20 years, with relatively little change. LPS has learned many lessons from this period of change, and heading into the 2015-16 period, where more significant change lies ahead, I am keen for them to prepare for that challenge. I am also keen to make clear that when I talk about public sector reform, I am not just talking about reform in other Departments. I am prepared — indeed, I am enthusiastic — to ensure that my Department leads by example.

Today, I would like to announce that, as part of my reform agenda, my Department is carrying out a strategic assessment of rate collection and recovery, with the assistance of external advice and expertise from Ernst and Young, who have experience in engaging with leading collection agencies in the public and private sectors. It will be a short, focused review, which will be completed by the end of this year. The main objective of the review is to establish the effectiveness of current rate collection and recovery processes by delivering a set of prioritised opportunities for improvement. It is particularly important that Land and Property Services prepares for the challenges that we know lie ahead.

From 2015 onwards, LPS will see a number of strategic projects impact on the rate collection and recovery process. The implementation of new council structures will require reorganisation of LPS data and systems to

accommodate the new 11-council model. Councils will require additional support from LPS in penny product calculation for their new council areas. That will need to be managed without impacting on the effectiveness of rate collection.

A non-domestic revaluation will also be implemented in 2015-16. That will redistribute the rate burden based on more up-to-date valuation assessments. This is a major project that requires significant preparation from LPS and will generate increased volumes of follow-up work, as ratepayers will naturally seek to query and contest their valuations. That, too, will impact on the billing and collection process.

We are also preparing in earnest for the rate rebate replacement scheme, which will see significant change in the administration of rate rebates in Northern Ireland. LPS will be taking on a much greater workload in administering the new scheme. The transition to a rate replacement scheme must be managed effectively to avoid a negative impact on existing collection and recovery processes.

To ensure that LPS is fully prepared for the challenges ahead, the strategic assessment of rate collection will focus on the following key objectives: an appraisal of LPS rating performance over the past few years, highlighting significant milestones, successes and obstacles and how those might inform future performance; an assessment of the effectiveness of current processes, with clear recommendations identifying opportunities for improvement; and an appraisal of how recommendations will impact on LPS strategy and readiness for the programme of change ahead.

I hope that Members will appreciate the efforts we are taking to prepare LPS for the changes ahead through this work. With your support, I believe that LPS has the potential to be a leading collection agency. I want to benchmark what LPS does against the best in Britain, because I want LPS to become the best. A reformed public sector that provides people with first-rate public services needs a cutting-edge rate collection agency. This review and its outcomes can assist us in achieving the aim of having an innovative and reform-orientated public sector, as well as underpinning our efforts to deliver world-class public services to the people of Northern Ireland. I commend the statement to the House.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement. I also welcome the fact that the assessment will be short and sharp, and that it will be concluded by the end of the year because, given the amount of work that is in the pipeline for LPS, it is important that such an assessment does not hang over the organisation. Obviously, the Committee has concerns about debt write-off and the level of rating debt. Some £47 million was written off between 2009 and 2012. That has increased year on year, so it is a problem that, unfortunately, is not going away, and I hope that the Minister is successful in his efforts.

Can the Minister give an assurance to LPS workers that this is not a major reform, but simply a change to ensure that we get the right strategy and focus in place? Does the Minister believe that, given the performance over the past three to four years, the targets that LPS is setting are challenging enough for the organisation?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Chair for his question. Yes, I can confirm that it is a short, sharp review of LPS. It has commenced and will be completed by 20 December, which is the end date for this six-week review. I can assure him, the House and, most importantly, the staff of LPS that this is not a fundamental review of LPS as an entity, or its structures. I hope that the review will, ultimately, manifest itself through changes to processes, because I think that the fair criticism of LPS has been more about processes not necessarily working best for the customer than about the way in which it is constructed being wrong and inappropriate for the job that it has to do.

In fact, I think the way that LPS has been constructed, particularly with the merger of four different departments, makes its structure absolutely fit for purpose. However, that does not mean that there are not changes that could be brought forward that would make it even better. The objective of this review is to take a system, which I think compares favourably with other collection agencies, be they local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland or utility companies or entities like HMRC, and ensure that it continues to compare favourably. I think that it will compare favourably, but that does not mean that there is not scope for improvement. That is the focus of this review.

Debt write-off concerns us all, although it is a manifestation of the economic problems that we have, which we could rehearse ad infinitum. It is also worth noting that the amount of rate debt that we wrote off in Northern Ireland historically was much lower than in authorities across England and Wales. The fact that we have increased that write-off to get a better and more accurate picture of the debt reflects some changes that have taken place over the past number of years to put us more in line with standard practice.

12.30 pm

The Chair will know that a lot of that debt that has been written-off is the result of bankruptcies and insolvencies, and LPS simply cannot recover it. Last year, it was 50% of the total debt write-off; this year, to date, that figure has increased to close to 60%. So, it sort of shows us something of the problems that we are facing. I think it is right that, where we cannot recover the debt, we write it off, but it is a worrying reflection of where we are economically.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement. What specific plans are in place to deal with the issue of rates convergence that will arise from the review of public administration (RPA)?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. The impact of the review of public administration is one of the three challenges that LPS faces in 2015-16, and I was careful about the need to do this review now. If we were to leave this review, which would have been necessary at any stage, until later, we would have been getting into the very heavy lifting around RPA, revaluation and rates rebate replacement. So, we needed to do it now.

We are making good progress on coming up with a transitional relief scheme to deal with the issue of rates convergence that is arising from the review of public administration. The Member and the House will know that there are a few council areas that will merge with little or no impact for the ratepayer, but there are quite a few where

there will be a significant difference in the current rates levels between one council area and another.

The Executive agreed earlier this year to provide funding of up to £30 million for a scheme. Officials from my Department continue to work through the DOE-led finance working group and its rates convergence subgroup. They both report to the regional transition operational board for RPA to try to come up with a scheme that ensures that, where a council that has fairly low rates is being merged with one that has much higher rates, people do not see the impact on their rates bill in the first few years of RPA becoming a reality.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis. I thank the Minister for his statement. The current level of debt, at £153.5 million, is a huge loss of resource to public services. Not to dwell too much on the negative, I notice that there has been an increase in cash collection by over £125 million since 2008-09. How is that made up? Is it from new customers or as a result of better debt retrieval? Are there any lessons that can be learned from the methodologies involved in increasing that figure?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. There is a lot of focus and attention, understandably and naturally, on the debt figure for rates. At £160 million, which has risen in the past number of years, it is an incredibly worrying position. The Member mentioned £153 million, but it is £160 million when you include the rating of empty homes debt, which has been realised over the past couple of years. The level of debt is very high. Again, it is affected by some of the issues in the economy over those years, and any rate collection agency or council tax agency — indeed, any collection agency of any kind — has experienced similar problems over the past number of years.

If so many people are having difficulties, going bust and becoming insolvent, you would expect that figure to rise. It has risen to a very worrying level, but the Member is right to highlight the fact that, since 2008-09, we have increased the rates that we have collected by £125 million. That has been done through a variety of measures, including, at times, taking a much more sympathetic approach towards those who have fallen into difficulties but are still in a position to pay some of their rates back. So, a significant number of payment arrangements have been put in place over the past number of years. At some stage in this year to date alone, 63,500 people have had a payment arrangement. At the minute, there are about 23,500 active ones, and those payment arrangements have brought in over £45 million this year alone. That shows that, where you show a little latitude and work with people who want to pay their rates and are in a position to do so, you can get more in. Therefore, by showing some sympathy and a willingness to work with people and also by aggressively pursuing those who do not want to pay, have tried not to pay, or have, perhaps, understandably, fallen into difficulties and have tried not to pay their rates debt, we have been able to increase the amount of money that we have brought in.

There is a lot of focus on the £160 million of debt. It is right to focus on that. However, in reality, it sometimes masks some of the very positive efforts that have been taken to recoup that money for all of us to spend on improving the services that we are meant to deliver to the people who elect us to Stormont.

Mr Cree: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. He referred to the review of councils and the importance of the penny product rate. Recently, one of the difficulties has been getting new properties and developments onto the valuation list. Will the Minister's review take care of that problem?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. The review will not look specifically at valuation issues. However, that is something that we may come to through a similar piece of work in the future. I am happy to provide the Member with more detailed figures. Again, in its work in reviewing that, the Public Accounts Committee accepted that LPS was making significant progress in a range of areas. However, that was one area that was highlighted as a particular problem.

We have continued to focus particularly on getting newbuilds onto the valuation list. The number of days and weeks that it takes to get them on the list has started to drop, as has the backlog of requests for valuations. Although it is still at a very high level, that number is falling. I do not have instant recall of the figures, but it is an improving position. I am happy to share the precise figures with the Member, so that he can be better informed on that. It is an area that has received a lot of attention and focus. It is showing positive results. If I am not satisfied that it is moving quickly enough in the right direction, I will be happy to undertake a similar piece of work for valuations as well.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his statement, in which he referred to some of the options for pursuing arrears. I have examples of businesses in my constituency that have arrears purely due to errors that were made by LPS for previous years. Those businesses have asked to settle that liability separately from the current financial year and deal with it through a different payment plan. Unfortunately, the computer says no. Will the Minister look at that issue to try to assist those small businesses? Does he have any plans to deal differently with arrears that are purely down to LPS errors?

Mr Hamilton: I, like my predecessor, am very willing to hear from all Members. In fact, my Department gets a considerable volume of correspondence from Members of the House and elsewhere about particular issues that arise in constituency work. I am always very happy and keen to work through those issues with the Member and, above all else, most importantly, the customer. It is an area that concerns me. Again, as I said in my response to Mr Cree, LPS has improved over the past number of years; it has been mindful of the criticism that it has faced in respect of its customer service, and its customer service has improved. However, there is always scope for improvement.

On the particular issue that the Member raises, which is, if I have picked her up correctly, the issue of taking previous years' debt into the existing year's bill and the difficulty that that poses for some people. They want to clear this year's debt and, then, deal separately and differently with previous years' debt. One of the reasons why previous years' debt is tackled first is that, if we do not secure that debt and get it within six years, it falls off the edge and cannot be collected. We do not want people to gain through the system either. However, I am mindful of and understand the very point that the Member makes. In fact, the review will look carefully at whether we can,

through the systems that we have, through better use of the computer and getting it to say yes, actually separate those out and allow people to deal with it. At the end of the day, as far as I am concerned — whether it is this year's debt or historical debt — I want it to be paid because it is legitimate debt.

If errors are being made, I ask the Member and, indeed, all Members to come forward as quickly as possible to me or directly to LPS. We will endeavour to make our best efforts to ensure that those errors are corrected and that people get accurate rates bills.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his statement. I want to go back to the point that Mr Bradley and Mrs Cochrane made. If debt is accrued because a bill is not sent out on time, businesses can find it difficult to pay two years' rates inside one year. The Department seems to be reluctant to allow businesses to carry the debt forward and to pay the current year's debt along with a small amount of the previous year's arrears over a longer period. What action is LPS taking to recover that and other debts?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. There should not be any lack of willingness on the Department's part to enter into payment arrangements. In fact, the numbers reflect that we are prepared to do so. At the moment, some 23,500 payment arrangements are going on. So, particularly where we understand that companies, businesses and individuals are having difficulty in the current economic climate, we are prepared to enter into reasonable payment arrangements. We cannot allow those debts to be paid off at some unspecified stage in the future; the arrangement has to be very clear and defined, and its terms have to be met.

It is important that, when LPS takes the time to engage and agree a payment arrangement, those with whom it enters into the agreement stick to its terms. I have seen a number of cases where people have perhaps entered into an agreement in good faith but have not stuck to it. I am also aware of cases where I am not sure that they have entered into payment arrangements in good faith. We cannot expect LPS to sit back and to habitually allow the terms of payment arrangements to be breached without taking some other form of action. That is when, sometimes, we move from payment arrangements to pursuing the debt through a legal process.

We have, unfortunately, seen an increase in the number of legal processes that have gone through. Last year, there were about 46,000, and this year there had been close to 30,000 by the end of October, which represents a year-on-year increase of 10%. It is not something that we like to do or want to do, but it is something that, unfortunately, we sometimes have to do. So, it is about a combination of trying to work with people through payment arrangements while always having the option of going through a legal process to secure the debt via the court. LPS will always hold that option to itself, because, at the end of the day, it is legitimate debt that is pursued to get money into Executive accounts so that it can be invested for the betterment of health, education, housing and other public services.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his statement. My question is probably influenced by the coming of Christmas and goodwill and peace to everyone. The Minister recognises that the Public Accounts Committee

(PAC) has acknowledged a significant improvement in how rates are collected. Does that mean that the tetchy relationship that we had with his predecessor is now at an end and that he will work in partnership with the Public Accounts Committee from now on for the greater good of the people whom we serve?

Mr Hamilton: I think that my predecessor would consider "tetchy" to be an insult. *[Interruption.]* I think that he would consider himself to have been far worse than tetchy from time to time.

I know that the Member and, indeed, the Chairperson of the PAC hope to meet me if not before Christmas, very early in the new year. I hope to have a very productive discussion with them about the very good work that the PAC can do and has done, and about where I see it helping to ensure that not only do we get best value for money, which is critical, but how we can use the skills, ability, focus and attention that the PAC's experience brings to get better outcomes.

I appreciate the work that the PAC did on rate collection. Many of the recommendations that came forward in that report have informed both this announcement and the work that is going on at the moment. As an example of where we can work together and do things positively, if I think that things are not being done positively, I will speak up about it. That is something that I learned from my predecessor. I hope that we can have a productive and fruitful relationship, working together to ensure that those important principles of value for money and better outcomes for our people are always achieved.

12.45 pm

Mr I McCrea: The Minister's statement was on the strategic assessment of rate collection. Turning the use of rates another way, I ask the Minister to give an assessment of how Land and Property Services rates are collected, and how that compares?

Mr Hamilton: Like issues around debt and the percentage of rates that we collect, it is one of the areas in which I want to see us working very closely as part of the review. What percentage of rates are we collecting? The latest figure is around 96.5%. That has improved significantly over the past number of years, from 94% in 2008-09. For every 1% increase that we make, that is roughly an extra £10 million that we get in to spend on public services, so you can see that it is important that we get the percentage as close to 100% as we possibly can.

It is difficult to take a direct read-across from what a local authority in England, Wales or Scotland is doing and compare it with here, because we have very different systems, but there are benchmarks against which you can grade LPS, and I want to see those form part of the report.

The data that we have on the cost of collection, which is not current but not that old — it comes from 2009-2010 and 2010-11 — shows that we compare reasonably favourably with Great Britain. In 2009-2010, the cost of collecting for LPS was £27.74 million. In the next year, it was £28.2 million. The GB benchmark was £29.56 million for 2009-2010, with £27.46 million for the following year. Those are only two years of figures, so it is hard to extrapolate from those a trend, but they do show our costs slightly rising and GB's slightly falling. If that continues, it is something that will worry me, although, to go back to the

points that I made in the statement, the 42 rating reforms that we have put through and the three major ones that we are facing in 2015 all put a burden on the administrative cost of collecting rates as well. However, it is an area in which we have to continue to bear down on the costs, because if the trend of increasing cost continues, it will cause a problem that we will need to take action against.

Mr Givan: I thank the Minister for his response. Given his previous role as a councillor — a role that I shared — he will recognise the benefits of councils being helpful. I know that Lisburn council carried out an exercise to identify vacant properties, not least through refuge collectors. When they were collecting bins, they checked their database and found out that property owners had not been paying rates. Sometimes it was not their own fault — they had requested to pay them — but on other occasions there was an avoidance of paying rates. In taking forward the review, can we ensure that there is joined-up working with local authorities, which often can provide useful information?

Mr Hamilton: Absolutely. I want to see that continue, not just in that area of work but in others, because LPS, on behalf of central government, and individual councils have mutual interests. At the end of the day, the more money that we collect, the more money that we have to spend on serving our people.

The Member is right about empty domestic properties. A lot of work was undertaken a number of years ago in advance of the rating of empty homes coming in to ensure that we had as accurate a valuation list as possible. Another area in which work is ongoing is in LPS working with councils to ensure that business properties that are supposedly vacant are in fact vacant. It is a similar type of work but in a slightly different sector. I am open to all types of work with local government, whether on an individual, council-by-council basis or with the totality of local government, to ensure that we can work towards having as accurate a valuation list as possible, because, at the end of the day, that serves all of our interests.

Mr Allister: The Minister mentioned the £160 million of rating debt. Can he tell the House how much rating debt is being written off annually? In consequence of writing it off, who makes up the shortfall? Is it the paying ratepayer, or is there an assumption about bad debt built into the rating system? Can he assure us that the revaluation will be ready and implemented in just 16 months' time?

Mr Hamilton: Typically of the Member, there are quite a few questions there. I will endeavour to answer all of them, or certainly as many as I can. The issue of £160 million of debt comes up once again. It is absolutely right that there is a lot of focus and attention on what is an incredibly high figure, one that has risen over the past number of years. I can stand here and Members can say, "Well, look, we are in difficult economic circumstances. We know that many businesses have gone to the wall and many continue to struggle. We know that it is difficult and that cost-of-living increases put pressure on individuals", as if that somehow excuses the fact that debt has risen to £160 million.

Although I understand those reasons, it is not acceptable just to pass over £160 million of debt because of that. However, a significant portion of that debt figure, probably over half, is not recoverable debt in the traditional sense. It is taken up by payment arrangements, as I mentioned

previously. Some is tied up in ongoing insolvencies and bankruptcies, so the accurate figure of what is recoverable debt within that £160 million needs to be hollowed out. It is something that I am keen to see presented much more accurately than is done currently.

Debt write-off has grown from £10.2 million in 2009-2010 to £29.1 million in 2012-13. That is a significant increase and reflects the times that we are in. In terms of who pays for that, it does not affect local government until it is written off, and then it is adjusted in penny product.

I appreciate the Member asking about rate revaluation, because it is another opportunity to mention it and emphasise that I think there is a belief writ large that revaluation will be the panacea that will sort out everybody's rates bill, and everybody's rates bill will go down. The Member will appreciate that it is a fairer redistribution of rates burdens across non-domestic ratepayers. So, some people will see their bills go up, others will see their bills go down and the vast majority will see their bills remain more or less the same.

He asked whether it will be ready. I accept that we face an incredibly challenging timeframe. Given the circumstances of the economy, and the fact that there has been less movement than you would like ordinarily in terms of property letting and rents to get a more accurate picture of what a property is renting at, that presents huge challenges for LPS. However, every effort and resource is being put in to ensure that we get as accurate a picture and as fair a distribution of the rates burden as we possibly can — and, of course, that it is done on time. That is of critical importance.

Undoubtedly, it is a challenge. England and Wales have delayed theirs by a further two years. Given that it is a decade since we did a non-domestic revaluation, I do not think that I could have got away with delaying it any further.

North/South Ministerial Council: Aquaculture and Marine

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With your permission, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the 1998 Act regarding the twenty-third meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in aquaculture and marine sectoral format. The meeting was held in Derry on Wednesday 23 October 2013.

The Executive were represented by me and junior Minister Jonathan Bell. The Dublin Government were represented by Pat Rabbitte TD, Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, and Fergus O'Dowd TD, Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. I chaired the meeting. This statement has been agreed with junior Minister Bell, and I am making it on behalf of us both.

Ministers received a detailed progress report on the activities of the Loughs Agency. We welcomed the agency's participation in the City of Culture, and in particular its proactive role in partnering with Tate Britain to supply local oysters at Turner Prize events in the city.

Ministers congratulated the Loughs Agency on receiving a tourism award at the chamber of commerce business awards; its role in the flavours of the Foyle seafood festival, which attracted 18,000 visitors; its role in the Carlingford oyster festival, which attracted 10,000 visitors; and its successful role in hosting the sea angling competition in the World Police and Fire Games.

Ministers welcomed progress on a range of EU-funded marine tourism initiatives that the agency brought forward. Those include securing £208,400 in INTERREG funding to develop the area around Malin Head, the most northerly point in Ireland, to facilitate visitors to that iconic site; and, in partnership with Limavady Borough Council, securing £486,500 in INTERREG funding to develop the visitor experience at Benone.

The Council discussed the key issue of conservation. It was advised that the rivers Faughan and Roe were maintaining relatively stable populations of Atlantic salmon and meeting their management targets and conservation limits. In addition, the agency reported that there had been an incremental improvement in the populations in the Rivers Finn and Mourne since 2010-11.

Ministers received a detailed and highly informative presentation on the monitoring of oyster stocks in Lough Foyle and noted the practical use of that information and how it is applied in management decisions made by the Loughs Agency in the Foyle catchment.

We approved the Loughs Agency business plan 2013 and recommended a budget provision for 2013 of £4.25 million. Key priorities include the conservation and protection of fisheries in the Foyle and Carlingford areas; licensing and development of aquaculture; and the development of marine tourism and angling.

We also received an update on the Loughs Agency annual report and draft financial statement 2012, which, following certification, will be laid before the Assembly and the Oireachtas.

The Council acknowledged the progress on the development of the Loughs Agency corporate plan 2014-

16 and the business plan 2014-16. It was agreed that the Loughs Agency will apply further efficiency savings to the 2014-16 budget.

The Council also agreed the key priorities for the corporate planning period. Those included carrying out a strategic review and economic appraisal of agency premises and accommodation needs and a strategic review of the Loughs Agency's enforcement and development roles. The corporate and business plans will be brought to a future Council meeting for approval.

The meeting concluded with Ministers noting the date of the next aquaculture and marine sectoral meeting in February 2014.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement this afternoon. Will she expand on the Loughs Agency's involvement in City of Culture events and, indeed, any other major tourism events over the past while?

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. The agency has been very successful over the past wee while. As I outlined in my statement, it has also been a tremendous year for Derry as the City of Culture. The Loughs Agency played a very significant role in that, working in partnership with other agencies to provide, among many other things, quite a lot of tourism events. A lot of people think that the Loughs Agency is purely a policing and enforcement body, but the events that it has showcased throughout this year proves that that is certainly not the case; it is much more than that.

The Turner Prize is being held in Derry, and this is the first time that the award ceremony has ever been held outside England. The Loughs Agency was able to partner with Tate Britain to supply local oysters, and I was delighted to be at a reception on board an Irish naval vessel, LÉ Aisling, on Lough Foyle where we got to sample the oysters. That was a fantastic event, and it was great to see the Loughs Agency partnering up with Tate Britain to be able to do that.

The Foyle pontoon project received an award for the best tourism initiative at the city's chamber of commerce business awards. We also had the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race, which is hoping to come back again in 2014 and 2016; the World Police and Fire Games; and the twelfth World Youth Fly Fishing Championship, which helped to showcase the brilliant angling amenities that exist right across the island of Ireland. So there has been a fantastic array of events, and it is great to see the Loughs Agency partnering up with other organisations. The agency's policing and enforcement role is obviously a key element of what it does, but it is able to deliver on a whole lot more.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister. Minister, you referred to salmon conservation. Were there any further discussions about the complete removal of nets, or the provision of any compensation for the removal of nets, to increase salmon numbers?

Mrs O'Neill: Salmon conservation is a key area for the NSMC and the Loughs Agency. Salmon conservation was discussed but not the issue of compensation or anything like that. At the meeting, the Loughs Agency set out the work done on the ground by its dedicated protection and conservation staff. They are out there enforcing and ensuring compliance with the suite of regulations on the protection of salmon and sea trout.

We are also gathering a lot of scientific evidence. As I said in the statement, we got some feedback on the different rivers that are relevant to the Loughs Agency. The discussion was really about conservation and all the things that we need to do. There was no discussion about nets, because that cannot happen in any of the Loughs Agency's rivers at this time.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for her statement and, in particular, the announcement of funding for Malin Head and Benone. She will, of course, be aware that the critical element in developing cross-border tourism there is missing, and that is the Foyle ferry service. I acknowledge that the Minister does not have direct responsibility for that, but will she ensure that the issue does not move off the agenda and that both Governments recognise that they have a responsibility to ensure that Greencastle and Magilligan have a ferry service, like the one in Strangford, in order to get maximum benefit from that funding?

1.00 pm

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. I totally agree with the Member. The two projects that I outlined are major investments to help us to unlock the tourism potential of that whole area. Anything that helps to enhance that potential, including the ferry, is welcome. As you recognised, that is not within the remit of the Loughs Agency, but I fully support the service being available. It will help us to unlock that massive tourism potential. I am happy to raise that issue with the relevant people.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister made reference to sampling oysters on board a ship on Lough Foyle. No doubt that is one of the perks of the job. Will she elaborate on the development of oyster stocks in the Foyle?

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. As I said, it was a great opportunity to be on board the LÉ Aisling with the Irish Navy. The fact that the Loughs Agency was able to partner with it really added to the whole atmosphere around the Turner Prize. We are doing a lot of research into oyster stocks. An initial finding is that 29 tons of oysters were recorded in the landings data received in October by the agency for the first two weeks of the oyster season, which runs from 19 September to 31 March. At this stage, it is not possible to accurately gauge the end result, but 29 tons were recorded up to October. The development of the oyster stock in Lough Foyle is a vital priority for the Loughs Agency. The agency reported an increase in the population from the data gathered in the 2012 stock assessment. That is positive. The agency assisted in the improvement of landings of the oyster fishery, and it reports a reduction in disease-related mortality in Lough Foyle. That is also positive.

At the meeting, we had a presentation from the agency on the monitoring of oyster stocks in Lough Foyle. That highlighted some of those recent improvements and trends in the population dynamics in Lough Foyle for 2013. A lot of excellent work is going on in the Loughs Agency to protect the oyster stock and make sure that it is sustainable in future for the industry. A lot of the work that the agency has been doing on Marine Stewardship Council certification for the Lough Foyle native oyster fishery has been taken forward in 2013. A lot of positive work is going on.

Mr Allister: The Minister previously told the House about the alarming level of poaching and, indeed, assaults on agency staff, particularly at the Foyle basin. Can she update the House on the present level of illegal activity in connection with fishing in that part of the country?

Mrs O'Neill: I am happy to update the House. On previous occasions when I have spoken to the House in this regard, it was because of the number of attacks on Loughs Agency staff. I am pleased to report that, in 2013, there have been no major attacks on Loughs Agency staff. We all very much welcome that. I appreciate that Loughs Agency staff are often involved in potentially dangerous areas of work, given that they are enforcing regulations. They are, obviously, putting themselves at risk, but I am delighted to say that, this year, we have not recorded any major incidents. I put on record my thanks to Loughs Agency staff for their efforts in what I recognise are very difficult situations.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I apologise to the Minister for missing the start of her statement. I assure her that I have read it. The Committee is aware that one of the major issues for the Loughs Agency in carrying out its business is the lack of a management agreement for seabed leasing. Will the Minister elaborate on how far advanced the negotiations on that management agreement are? She also mentioned further efficiency savings. Will she elaborate on that?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure you that I have given the Loughs Agency my full support in its attempts to finalise the management agreement. I have written to Simon Coveney TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and I have discussed the issue with him in person. At a previous NSMC meeting, we had a discussion about moving that forward. I was advised by Minister Pat Rabbitte that officials in his Department would liaise with Simon Coveney's Department. We hope to see some movement towards the end of the year to get that resolved. Obviously, we do not want it to slip any further.

The Loughs Agency, like any other agency, is trying to find efficiency savings in the best way possible. It has been able to do that in a very practical manner. The reports are now a matter of public record, but I am very happy to send details to the Chair of the Committee of how it has gone about finding those 3% efficiency savings.

Mr Rogers: I apologise for missing the start of the statement; I have read it as well. I thank the Minister for the statement. What steps are being taken to ensure that the issues that we had in Carlingford lough and in Foyle last year with our oyster stock are being dealt with effectively to ensure that our oyster fishermen can rebuild and develop their industry?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will probably be aware that, in November, I met a number of oyster growers who had suffered loss as a result of the herpes virus outbreak in Carlingford over the summer. It was a very useful and very positive engagement with them. We totally share the same principle of wanting to help that aquaculture sector to grow, and I was delighted to hear from them that they are very optimistic about their future. The conversation centred around what we can do together, how I can support them through the Department and what we need to be doing. A lot of the areas that are lacking are around research, so

we need to look at other countries, particularly France, for example, which has been able to deal with this issue. I think that Hull in England also experienced this disease. We need to look at best practice and good examples to see how we can learn from that.

We agreed to take forward a number of issues with the oyster growers, particularly around a research session. We will have researchers come in and let the oyster growers tell them what they require as opposed to the other way around. The oyster fishermen were very pleased about that. We are also looking towards grant aid under the European Fisheries Fund, and we will work together in the time ahead.

One of the issues that I raised at the NSMC was the need to transfer the science that we have gathered, particularly around Lough Foyle, to Carlingford also. We had a discussion around how we might best do that. So, there is plenty going on there, and I think that there are a number of issues that we need to take forward. There are a number of simpler things to iron out that the oyster fishermen raised, and I am content to take those forward.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for her statement and her responses thus far. Her statement is lacking on the practical efficiency savings that the agency is undertaking. That is mentioned in point 13. Can she provide more detail on that? How successful have these been in recent years, and what are her views on the measures that the agency should apply when looking to future budgets?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, we recently agreed the efficiencies. The corporate plan sets them out very clearly, and it is now on public record. You can have a look at a detailed breakdown of the 3% efficiency savings. The agency, like any other body, has to find those savings. It has done so quite successfully each year over the past number of years. It is on public record. I do not have the details, but I said to the Chair of the Committee that I will forward that to the Committee. I am sure that the Member can pick that up through the Committee.

Executive Committee Business

Road Races (Amendment) Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Kennedy, to move the Consideration Stage of the Road Races (Amendment) Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development).]

Mr Speaker: Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments detailing the order for consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate on the provisional grouping of amendments selected list. There is one group of amendments. The debate will be on amendment Nos 1 to 4, which propose certain requirements where a contingency day falls on a Sunday. Once the debate of the group is completed, any further amendments in the group will be moved formally, and the Question on each will be put without further debate. The Question on clause stand part will be taken at the appropriate time. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Clause 1 (Specification of contingency days in orders under Road Races (Northern Ireland) Order 1986)

Mr Speaker: We now come to the group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 1, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 2, 3 and 4. These amendments relate to the requirements where a contingency day is a Sunday.

Mr Allister: I beg to move amendment No 1: In page 1, line 7, at beginning insert "Subject to paragraph (1BA),".

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In page 1, line 11, at end insert

"(1BA) A contingency day may not be—

(a) the whole of a Sunday; or

(b) any part of a Sunday beginning before 1.30pm or ending after 6pm."— [Mr Allister.]

No 3: In page 1, line 11, at end insert

"(1BB) An order may not specify the whole or part of a Sunday as a contingency day unless the Department is satisfied that the terms of the order are such as to minimise as far as reasonably practicable any disruption to the activities of the local community on that day."— [Mr Spratt.]

No 4: In page 1, line 20, at end insert

"(1CA) Where a contingency day is a Sunday, a direction under paragraph (1C) requires the approval of the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly."— [Mr Spratt.]

Mr Allister: Amendment No 1 is, quite clearly, a paving amendment in respect of amendment No 2, to which I will also speak. I will perhaps make some comments on the other amendments, which stand in the names of other Members.

The purpose of amendment Nos 1 and 2 is to address, in as rational and reasonable way as possible, the tension that will exist in respect of any prospect of racing on Sunday as a contingency day. The tension that will exist

will be between the ambition and enthusiasm of the road racers and their supporters to maximise the hours that they might race to make up for what they have lost in respect of the Saturday, in the event of Sunday being a contingency day, local residents, whoever they may be, who have other things that they wish to do and, in particular, those who are churchgoers living on any of these circuits.

The main focus of the debate last week, and I suspect today likewise, was on the North West 200 circuit, which is a highly populated circuit. It is populated not just by many residents but by churches on the actual route. This legislation applies across the board and to any circuit, be it on a heavily populated residential route, church route, or not. Therefore, it is right that, since there will be that same tension, to varying degrees because there will be churchgoers on all the routes — the issue is not whether there are churches on all the routes, it is whether there are churchgoers on all the routes, and of course there are — it is matter of resolving the tension between the extension of racing into Sunday and meeting the fundamental rights of the churchgoing community.

At this stage, I will pause to remind the House, because I think the Bill, in its processes to date, has not adequately addressed the human rights issues lying at the heart of this, that I wrote to the Minister raising issues under articles 9 and 11, and I cannot say that I thought the answer really addressed the issues. No doubt, if the Bill proceeds in its present fashion, the Attorney General, at the end of the process, will have to take a view on its compatibility with human rights legislation. I remind the House of article 9 of the convention, which says:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion”.

It goes on to say that this includes the right to:

“manifest one’s religion or beliefs, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.”

It is very clear that the right to go to church is a human right.

Article 9 then goes on to underscore the circumstances where that right can be trumped, so to speak. It says:

“Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”

Those are the only qualifying conditions that can be placed on the fundamental human right to exercise religion. With respect, I suggest that the right to supplant freedom to worship with the leisure activity of closing public roads so that people can enjoy road racing is not something that meets any of the categories set out in article 9. Likewise, in article 11 we have similar matters at stake when it comes to freedom of expression, which ties into article 9.

I think there is a fundamental human rights issue for the resident who lives on any of these routes and who wishes to exercise their human right to manifest their religion by going to their place of worship. That is the tension that the Bill has failed to address thus far.

1.15 pm

That tension arises elsewhere in the world. There is nowhere more noted for its road racing than the Isle of Man. The starting point on the Isle of Man is that you do not have Sunday racing, but you can have it in a contingency situation where the weather has been such that the races must be run. However, the law on the Isle of Man is exactly what I am proposing: a contingency day cannot be before 1.30 pm on a Sunday or after 6.00 pm. The proposition in amendment No 2 is an exact reflection of what has been tried and tested for many years in the Isle of Man, which we could say is the capital of road racing. If it is good enough for the Isle of Man, I would have thought that it would be good enough for Northern Ireland. That contingency is in place to deal in a rational and reasonable way with the tension that exists so that you can accommodate the respective rights of the churchgoer with those of someone who wants to use the public roads for road racing, which prevents the churchgoer from going to church.

I made this comment last week, and I will repeat it. There is all the difference in the world between organising a racing event on private property or on property that is not a public road where people have the choice of whether to go and on what day, and organising it on a public road, where you immediately get to the point of saying, “In fact, the public roads will not be available to the public today; they will be available exclusively for road racing”. That is when you trump and supplant the rights of the person who uses those roads to exercise their freedom of worship and for churchgoing. That is a legitimate and protected right, which is why I am concerned that the Bill does not adequately address that tension in a way that provides a satisfactory resolution. I want to create certainty for the local residents, for the road race organisers and participants and for those who attend. The way to create that certainty is as it has been done on the Isle of Man by saying that, if the racing is compelled to be on a Sunday, a portion of Sunday will be exempted from racing taking place to protect the interests of others on public roads. That is the essence of the amendments that I am proposing: to protect the local residents and, equally, to protect the organisers.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. I suspect that there is a fair amount of sympathy for many of the Member’s points, but an amendment that is a blanket cover for part of a Sunday, whether that is before 1.30 pm or after 6.00 pm, will cover circumstances where the clash that he talks about might not exist. I do not know enough about all the circuits to say whether there are particular circuits where that would not be the case. Does he accept that, if there is such blanket coverage, racing that could perhaps take place before 1.30 pm or after 6.00 pm would not be allowed because the amendment that he is proposing covers all roads, regardless of whether there is a clash between churchgoing and road racing?

Mr Allister: The Bill covers all roads that are utilised for road racing, so in making an amendment, it is pretty difficult to avoid equally taking that blanket approach. However, the point that I will make again, which I made earlier, is that all circuits might not have churches on them. Many might, and some might not, but all circuits will have churchgoers living on them who use those roads to get to church. The time of 1.30 pm seems to be a proven and acceptable cut-off point in the Isle of Man. It seems to me that, given that many church services in Northern Ireland

start somewhere between 11.00 am and 12.00 noon, 1.30 pm seems a reasonable time to have a cut-off point.

This Bill will have a further stage. If the amendments find favour with the House, someone who wants to fine-tune them can do so at Further Consideration Stage. If someone feels that it is overkill for a particular circuit, there will be an opportunity to address that issue. What I am putting to the House is fundamentally the principle that we need to do something to address the tension between the competing uses of the roads on a Sunday.

I also think that this proposal is a protection for the race organisers. We heard in the House — I have no reason to doubt it — that, in the case of the North West 200, people such as Mervyn Whyte, who fronts Coleraine and District Motor Club, have no inclination or desire to promote Sunday racing and will take alternatives if they can. I accept that, but they are not the only players. Huge, unspoken of players in that operation are the sponsors. Huge, unspoken of players in it are the large road racing teams, who may not have the same respect for the sensitivities of local residents and whose prime motivation is to get the racing done, and done as soon as possible.

Indeed, given the juxtaposition of the North West week and the beginning of the Isle of Man Manx fortnight of racing, many of the large teams exit immediately the racing is over at the North West to head for the ferry to the Isle of Man. I have seen it myself. As soon as the roads open, some of the large teams head down the road, with their huge vehicles and with great fervour, to get to the Isle of Man. If racing is delayed to a Sunday, the compulsion and desire of those participants will be to get the racing over as early on a Sunday as they can so that they can still get to the Isle of Man for the start of practice on the Monday.

Whereas Coleraine and District Motor Club and others might be more than willing to accommodate people by ensuring that the racing takes place only in the afternoon, there will be pressures from sponsors and the large road racing teams to get it started sooner, never mind the interests of the residents. That is why I suggest that the amendments are a protection for the organisers. They will be able to say, "The law is very clear. It is like the Isle of Man. No matter how much we might want to, we cannot start before 1.30 pm". It takes the pressure off the organisers, and, in that, it is a good thing.

It also gives much-needed certainty to local residents. Most residents in the vicinity whom I know are very appreciative of the North West and what it brings to the area for that week: the huge numbers, the help to the economy and all of that. It is still an inconvenience for many, but they put up with that because they recognise the greater good. Those people could be told, "In that week, you might be planning on going to church on Sunday morning, or you might be planning to do something quite the reverse of going to church on Sunday morning. However, we cannot give you any certainty that you will be able to, because there could well be racing on Sunday morning". We are talking about hundreds and hundreds of houses on this circuit. Think of the sad situation of a bereavement. The natural order may suggest that the funeral take place on a Saturday, but it cannot because the racing is on. The family accepts that and adjust their plans to Sunday only to discover that the roads are also closed on Sunday.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: In a moment.

Giving that family the certainty that the roads will not be closed, at least before 1.30 pm, indicates to them that they can organise a funeral, for example, for 12.00 noon. It will not be supplanted or overwhelmed by a sudden decision to close the roads. It is practical, humane issues like that that cause me to say that, not only in the interest of churchgoers but in the general interest of residents, we need to bring certainty to those arrangements, and the way to bring certainty to those arrangements is to have a cut-off and a finish time, as they do elsewhere.

Mr Wilson: I have listened intently to the argument that the Member has made around the whole issue of certainty. Does he not accept that, if we are looking for certainty, we would not have this Bill at all because the very essence of it is that, to a degree, it removes certainty, insofar as, if there is bad weather, there is the option of moving from a race day to a non-race day to carry out the races. So the argument the Member has made for a Sunday is the same for a Saturday, Friday or Thursday or whatever, depending on the contingency.

Mr Allister: Of course. Flexibility is introduced. At present, we have Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday affected. The flexibility of all this could range from Monday to Sunday, with racing and practising at different times. Yes, of course there is a lack of certainty. However, the point I am making is that people who live on these circuits — and we are dealing specifically with the north-west — are familiar with the fact that there will be a practice night early in the week, a practice day later in the week and a race day at the weekend. They build their lives around that and cope in a very accommodating way. However, there is a particular issue when the contingency day is a Sunday, because it cuts across a fundamental human right that they have to exercise freedom of worship. If, for example, they are adherents of one of the four churches inside the circuit, and there is Sunday morning racing, none of those churches will be able to open. They simply will not be there. If they are adherents of a church outside the circuit — and many are — but to get to their place of worship they have to travel along the roads of the circuit, they are equally affected. So it is not just about the adherents of the four churches. It is about any churchgoer, anywhere on the route, and his rights.

The fundamental question for this House is: are we happy to trump the rights of churchgoers by the rights of racegoers or are we prepared to find a medium that can accommodate the fundamental rights of the churchgoer and the resident with the desire to have road racing?

Mr McNarry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr McNarry: The Member, as usual, makes a very compelling argument and case to the House. Is there something in his argument that he might want to address in, shall we say, the credibility of the spirit of the implementation of the legislation? That has been a very compelling argument put to the Committee in the presentations that we have heard. It seems to me that although there is an onus of responsibility that rests with the race organisers, there also seems to be a genuine

spirit in addressing the very reasonable requests that the Member represents on behalf of residents.

Mr Allister: I accept, and I think that I have accepted, that organisers that I know are not straining at the leash to organise Sunday racing on the north coast. Whether they do elsewhere, I cannot say. I go back to the point that, unless the legislation brings certainty, there will be pressure to meet compulsion from the sponsor and from the large racing team that says "If we do not get racing this weekend, we will not be here next year".

That is the pressure that manifests itself on the organisers; that is the pressure that chips away at the flexibility, the compassion and the interest in meeting the needs of the local residents; that is the pressure that comes up with the proposition that we must have racing started by 11.00 am, 10.00 am or 12 noon or whatever; and that is the pressure that eats away at the rights of those who are, in consequence, affected.

1.30 pm

I say to the House that it is better by far to bring certainty for everyone's protection, so that everyone knows where they stand. In a week when there might be a need for contingency and flexibility, they will know that there is a window that starts at 1.30 pm and finishes at 6.00 pm and, because there are other rights to be accommodated, racing cannot start at 11.00 am or whatever. That removes the pressure from those sources to start it earlier and gives an adequacy. One would hope that there would be some racing on the Saturday, as well as the opportunity, if required, to complete it. However, if all of Sunday is an open day, the pressure and the temptation will be to keep quite a lot of the racing back as the next day might just be a better day. Whereas, if you confine it to the period that respects the rights of others, in my respectful submission, you will induce a far better rapport with and outcome for residents and everyone else.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr B McCrea: The Member makes a very compelling case about the human rights aspects of the legislation. Given his experience in the matter, is it essential to have a window, as he suggested, between 1.30 pm and 6.00 pm, or would the rights of the individuals be sorted if they could go to church at least at some stage during the day? Do you think that the human rights aspects are such that an individual must be allowed to attend a church of their choosing at a time of their choosing or is the mere provision of it at some time on a Sunday sufficient? What I am really asking is whether the Member feels that, if we were to accept that you cannot start racing until 1.30 pm, we could leave it open-ended without impairing people's human rights?

Mr Allister: Of course, the difficulty is that churches, not unexpectedly, have a pattern. They have a time when they meet. Most churches that I know of on the north coast meet at 11.00 am or 11.30 am, and lots of them meet again at 6.00 pm, 6.30 pm or 7.00 pm. It is hard to imagine that you could realistically bring the time forward from 1.30 pm. You cannot expect religious services to be altered or organised at the drop of a hat. You have to have some respect for their set times.

The racing on a Saturday has to finish by 6.00 pm. That is the law in respect of Saturday. I would have thought that, if that is the law for Saturday, it could equally be the law for Sunday. On those summer evenings, in particular, the north coast is a very busy place. Many people will want to move about and do what they do and not be hemmed in until 8.00 pm, 9.00 pm or 10.00 pm. I would have thought that, just as they are not hemmed in on a Saturday to 8.00 pm, 9.00 pm or 10.00 pm, they should not be hemmed in on a Sunday. I think that 6.00 pm is a reasonable cut-off time. If the amendment finds favour with the House but there are those who wish to refine it at the next stage, it is a matter for them to take that up and persuade the House in that regard.

Fundamentally, I think that we need to have some certainty for all these routes. I suppose that that is my biggest problem with amendment No 3. In other circumstances, and maybe the Speaker will tell us in due course, it is not incompatible with amendment No 2 and maybe both could be made. I am not sure about that; we will hear in due course. My biggest problem with amendment No 3 is that it is so woolly. It states:

"An order may not specify the whole or part of a Sunday as a contingency day unless the Department is satisfied that the terms of the order are such as to minimise as far as reasonably practicable any disruption to the activities of the local community on that day."

What does that mean? Why are its proponents being so mealy-mouthed about what it means? Is it meant to mean all things to all men and end up meaning nothing? Is it meant to be out of deference to churchgoers? Is it meant to be out of deference to someone else? What exactly does it mean to talk about minimising as far as reasonably practicable any disruption to the activities of the local community on that day?

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr Wilson: Wording such as "reasonable" is not unusual in legislation as a test. I will use some examples that the Member has used during his speech. Someone may object to a road race occurring on a Sunday not because the church is on the course, which would clearly be reasonable disruption, but because the route to their church crosses the course at some point. In a situation like that, the decision-maker would have to ask, "Is it reasonable for someone to say that the race cannot go on because they have to cross part of that road to get to church? Could they leave earlier? Could they take another route? Could they stay at someone's house or stay after church if it is on their way home?" Those are the kinds of issues that a consideration of reasonable disruption can be allowed to look at. That is much better than some kind of blanket decision that means that, if there is any objection at all, you do not facilitate racing. Those are the kinds of issues that can be looked at.

Mr Allister: I hear what the Member says, but I still struggle to understand how the Minister, put in that position, would be expected to understand and know what would be reasonably practicable with any disruption. Is the onus on the objector to acquaint the Minister, in the few hours that he has at a weekend, with what the

objections are, or is the Minister entitled to say, "No one has contacted me to object. Therefore, I presume that there is no disruption to be protected against"? It seems to me to be a charter to do whatever you want, whereas what you really need to resolve the tension that will exist over Sunday racing is to apply the certainty that amendment No 2 would bring and, within that, to work propositions such as we have heard.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr B McCrea: I am interested in the point that the Member made about the term "reasonably practicable". If a decision were made, is it possible that there could be a call for a judicial review? If so, on what basis would that review take place? Who makes the decision on "as far as reasonably practicable"? I am also interested in the Member's insight into the use of the words "any disruption". That seems extremely wide in its locus. It seems that this entire piece of legislation is subject to interpretation and would probably be challenged at some stage in the courts.

Mr Allister: The Minister's decision would be judicially reviewable. The problem is that, if the Minister does not make a decision until a Saturday about racing on a Sunday, the opportunity is pretty sparse. The reality is that, even if you got an emergency application, it is unlikely to be heard before Monday and, therefore, the racing would be over. The court would be deciding retrospectively whether the Minister acted lawfully or unlawfully. With regard to the practicalities of affording a remedy, it is more theoretical than actual. It seems to me that that wording is so obtuse that it brings no certainty to anything and puts the Minister in an invidious position where he has all sorts of judgement calls to make, depending upon what he is hearing.

Of course, to date, the ear of the Minister and of officials has been very expertly bent by the vested interests of the road racing fraternity. Even for these amendments, a commentary has been circulated by one of the vested interests, yet the churches involved have not yet been able to meet the race organisers and met the Minister only after he had persuaded the Committee about accelerated passage. So, it seems to me that the poor relations in all this are the residents, particularly those with a churchgoing interest who might be exercised by the matter. It seems to me that their voice is going to be very hard to hear within the terms of this amendment and, in consequence, their interests and the wider interests are far better served by introducing certainty, just as they do in the Isle of Man. It seems to work very well there.

What scares us about introducing a similar element of certainty to the matter? To do so would mean that everyone would know where they stand, and the decision would not be dependent on the whim of whoever the Minister is or anything of that nature. It would be there in statute, in black and white, and everyone would know the rules.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Member for giving way. His amendment raises an issue regarding putting a time on it. This is where the flexibility comes into the whole thing. He acknowledged, rightfully, that it is not just about the North West 200, which most of the debate is around. I acknowledge that as well with regard to the churches. As for the race organisers, my understanding from a discussion on Friday with the churches is that, for the Ulster Grand Prix, for instance, more flexibility and time is

needed because all the road signage needs to be removed as soon as the course is closed and replaced before the roads are reopened. A very short time is left to carry that out. Flexibility in respect of the Department and of amendment No 3 comes in there to allow things that are practicable, regarding the legislation, to be done by the Department, organisers and everybody else.

Mr Allister: I understand what the Member is saying, and I am aware that there are special scheduled provisions relating to the Dundrod circuit in the Road Races (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, for example, so it is not impossible that, in accepting amendment No 2 and in refining it at Further Consideration Stage, there could be some reflection of those particular needs, if those are particular needs.

I suppose I am saying that, at Consideration Stage, we have to decide whether we are going to afford to those most likely to be most affected by this some degree of comfort and certainty. If we are, I suggest that amendment No 2 is the way to go. If the Minister and others wish to refine that in the incoming week, that is the opportunity that they would have, but that would be the benchmark whereby we would start to say, "We need to bring certainty. Here is the window, and here is the window within which everyone knows they have to operate". Quite frankly, under amendment No 3, I do not think anyone would be any the wiser about what is likely to happen or how they are meant to be fixed.

Mr McNarry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

1.45 pm

Mr McNarry: It is good to talk this through in the manner in which we are doing. As a member of the Committee, I am pretty clear in my own mind that those who came before the Committee to give evidence or to make their positions clear did so in a manner that was open to them and to everyone. I think that that is how the Committee system works. However, doubts are being raised now, and Committees sometimes do not have the opportunities to deal with doubts, unless such doubts are presented to them.

I want to ask the Member about the doubts. It seems to me that, if the House passes legislation, it is a question of how that legislation would stand up should someone raise a challenge. The House needs to know as much about the competence of any legislation as it does about the competence of amendments. So, does the Member have information that has not been relayed to the Committee, at any stage so far, that would suggest that, without a shadow of doubt, there will be challenges to this legislation based on the case he is putting forward? That seems to me to be very important.

Mr Allister: I do not know the answer to that, nor do I know who the Committee heard from. I have no idea who the Committee heard from. From what the Member said, it sounds as though it might have heard from the racing interests, but I am unaware of it ever having heard from the church interests. I am unaware of there having been a general invitation to those particular interests to come and make their case to the Committee. The Committee seemed very swiftly to nod to accelerated passage and move on to the matter. These are, perhaps, the sorts of issues that, in a normal Committee Stage, would have

been fully explored but cannot now be explored because of accelerated passage.

Will there be challenges? I have no idea, but I would not be surprised. With many hundreds, if not thousands, of people living on that route, should they feel that their fundamental rights have been infringed in some way, someone somewhere may make a challenge. It is not for me to second-guess or gainsay that, but the challenge to the House is to pass good legislation that affords the certainty and comfort that people are looking for.

Mr McNarry: Thank you for giving way again; it is just on the point of the challenge. If the legislation is passed and is challenged, is the challenge to the Minister on the presumption of a decision that he may or may not take or have the power to take?

Mr Allister: I suppose that it could be all of those. Who knows? If the Bill passes as is, the Attorney General would first have to express a view on its competence, having regard to article 9, and I am sure that he will address that matter independently. Whether someone else may seek the legal route of challenge, and whether they wait until their rights are infringed in some way or they perceive them to have been infringed, who knows? I am saying to the House that, given that you have this difficulty — this tension on these issues — it is better by far to address it in a proven way by which it has been addressed elsewhere and to introduce the certainty that would militate against challenge because everyone knows where they stand.

That is why I think that amendments Nos 1 and 2 are the right way go. Amendment No 3 is very woolly, to put it at its mildest. As for amendment No 4; well, it will be no surprise if I tell the House that, if you looking for expedition, the last place you should repose any authority or power is in OFMDFM. I think that it would be tough enough for one Minister to get a decision, never mind three. So, amendment No 4 bemuses me in that regard.

That is the essence of what I want to say. I am putting to the House what I think is a rational and reasonable proposal. I trust that the House can receive it in that frame of mind and can weigh it, balance it and decide whether there might be merit in applying some certainty for the protection of everyone in that situation so that all know where they stand. They certainly will under amendment No 2, but they will have less clarity under amendment No 3.

Mr Speaker: Order. As we come to Question Time at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House takes it ease until that time. I understand that the next Member to speak in the debate, Mr Spratt, will need more than 10 minutes.

The debate stood suspended.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Education

Pupils: Baseline Assessment

1. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has to introduce baseline assessment for all pupils. (AQO 5130/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The current arrangements allow teachers to use a range of assessment techniques that suit the nature of the work being assessed and the purpose of the assessment, including assessment for baseline purposes. Although not a statutory requirement, it is good practice for transition information to be passed to parents from their preschool settings. CCEA introduced a transition form to assist that, although many settings have developed their own. Many preschool and year 1 teachers also meet in August/September to discuss children's progress.

Teachers are required to assess and report to parents on the cross-curricular skills in the first years of every pupil's primary education. While that does not have to be done with reference to the levels of progression until year 3, year 1 teachers may use CCEA's non-statutory development stages in learning as a baseline tool in conjunction with the information gained from the preschool and parents. The development stages also show the progression into level 1 of the levels of progression. That is intended to provide the first element of a coherent framework within which the progress of an individual pupil and/or a cohort can be monitored.

Teachers are also required to assess and report to parents on pupils' progress in areas of learning and other skills such as thinking skills, personal capabilities etc. That assessment should be carried out in accordance with the school's own assessment policy, giving it the flexibility to suit the needs, interests and abilities of its pupils.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his response. Does the Minister not believe that baseline assessment is essential when a child enters primary 1 to identify what additional support is needed, if any, and to ensure that the child is taught at the most appropriate level?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a cheist. I thank the Member for his question. Best practice is that baseline assessment information should be shared either between the nursery school and the primary school or, at a later stage of the child's life, between the primary school and the post-primary school. I have no plans to legislate to make it essential, but best practice dictates that it should be the case, and many of our schools carry out that work. As I said in my answer to your original question, CCEA provides forms for it to be transferred, and many settings use their own forms to do so. So I think best practice is used in the vast majority of our schools. For

those schools that do not use it, I think it would be in their interest as well as that of the pupils to use it.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his answer, but I am not sure whether it was a yes or a no. Given what the Minister has said about the importance of teachers and the vital role that they play in the assessment process currently in our schools, will the Minister listen to what teachers say, rather than what happened in the past with computer-based assessments (CBA), when the Minister and the Department failed to listen and we had the disastrous situation with CBA? Will he give an assurance that context will also be taken into consideration with regard to the baseline process?

Mr O'Dowd: Computer-based assessment has clearly had its problems with delivery on the ground, but the principle of computer-based assessment has been broadly welcomed by teachers. Of course the Department will continue to listen to teachers, their experiences in the classroom and their professional opinion on moving these matters forward. I believe that the technical problems that existed in computer-based assessment can be resolved. We also have to look at the procurement issues around computer-based assessment and ensure that any system is allowed to bed in and teachers have the opportunity to use it for a significant number of years, to the benefit of the children and the teachers. All those lessons will continue to be learned, and I can assure the Member that I listen to teachers as I progress through policy development.

Mr Cree: I was also listening to the Minister to hear whether it was a yes or no, and I am still not quite sure either. Minister, can you at least give us an indication of a timescale or a likely introduction date for baseline assessment for all pupils?

Mr O'Dowd: It is interesting that Members want a yes or no answer about assessment between nursery and primary school. The Member's party in particular has often said to me in the House, "Leave it up to the professional judgement of teachers". If it has to be statutory, I have to bring legislation before the House. We will have to set out in legislation how that assessment takes place. Is the Member then saying that I should not leave it to the professionalism of teachers? We have to make up our minds on these matters; you cannot have it both ways. Hence, I believe that the current system is capable of delivering the requirements to the benefit of the child. I do not believe that we need legislation at this time. The matter will be kept under review, but I think that, without doubt, the vast majority of our settings have a process that benefits young people and there is no requirement for legislation at this time.

Schools: Attendance

2. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education for an update on his Department's management of school attendance policies. (AQO 5131/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Regular school attendance is crucial in raising standards in education and ensuring that every child has full access to the curriculum and, most importantly, reaches their full potential. The day-to-day management of pupil attendance is, of course, a matter for schools. Every school should have a clear strategy for managing and promoting pupil attendance. They must include a summary and evaluation of this

in their school development plan. The Education and Training Inspectorate monitors this as part of the school inspection process.

My Department has provided guidance to schools in circular 2013/13, entitled "Attendance guidance and absence recording by schools". It came into effect at the beginning of the 2013-14 school year and provides schools with good practice guidance and strategies to manage pupil attendance and includes an attendance policy template.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answer. The Minister will be aware that it has been highlighted that school attendance is a particular challenge at the moment among Protestant males. What resources is his Department putting specifically into dealing with that issue?

Mr O'Dowd: The issue of educational attainment among working-class Protestant males was highlighted particularly through the Purvis report and other evidence. My Department has in place policies that support all sections of our community with educational underattainment, although there is also a responsibility on community leaders, political representatives and those with influence in communities to emphasise the importance and benefits of education. Of course, the Member will be aware that, if you tell a child at the age of 11 that they have failed, the child will automatically think that it is not the education system's fault but their own fault and, therefore, will disengage from education. I suggest that the Member reviews his party's policies on education if he truly wishes to raise educational attainment among Protestant working-class males.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister expand in outlining to the House on what role families and communities, alongside a school, can play in improving school attendance?

Mr O'Dowd: Clearly, a significant responsibility rests with parents, the family and the community circle. For all children, there are simple things, such as regular bedtimes, regular times for getting up in the morning and ensuring that children have adequate time to prepare themselves for school in the morning and nutritional food is available for the child in the morning to assist the child in getting out to school. There is also encouraging the child in the importance and benefits of education and assisting the child to enjoy the educational experience.

I accept that, in a number of cases, parents themselves may well have had a poor educational experience through their fault or the fault of others in the system. However, there is a duty on all parents and guardians to ensure that their children attend school. Any issues that the child faces can be discussed with the school principal, the board of governors and, indeed, education welfare officers, who are there to assist parents and families when a child's attendance drops below a certain level. A number of mechanisms are in place, but family support, as in many other aspects of life, is crucial.

Mr P Ramsey: Given that attendance is not compulsory in preschool settings, what efforts are being made to develop positive attitudes among parents with regard to the attendance of their children?

Mr O'Dowd: Preschool education is not a statutory element of our education system. It has grown since it was introduced in 1997. Given the one-time concern about the number of preschool places available and the competition

among some parents to obtain preschool places, it is only right and proper that, if you obtain a preschool place, your child attends. Considering that that stage of our education system is not a statutory requirement, there would be no point in bringing forward statutory provision on attendance. However, I think that it is a most valuable part of a child's education because it helps them to develop social and communication skills and assists in their preparation for primary school. Therefore, when parents achieve a preschool place, it is vital that their child attends regularly.

Mr Swann: Has the Minister had conversations with any of his ministerial colleagues either across the water or throughout the EU about how they tackle poor school attendance?

Mr O'Dowd: I have not had specific conversations about that with any of those Ministers. However, I have regular conversations about the education system in general, in particular with my Welsh counterpart and, indeed, my counterpart in Dublin, Ruairi Quinn. All aspects of education are covered. We are trying to achieve an education system that is attractive to our young people and delivers results both for the individual and our economy.

Schools: Surplus Places

3. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Education what role he believes integrated education can play in addressing the number of surplus places in the school system. (AQO 5132/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All sectors have a role to play in providing a network of viable and sustainable schools to meet the preferences of parents. Given demographics over the past number of years and the projections going forward, managing the removal of surplus places is a natural consequence of ensuring that we have a system that is capable of effectively meeting the needs of our society in going forward. As there is a finite number of pupils for whom education provision is required, any growth in one sector will inevitably impact on the others. Surplus or unfilled places are defined as the difference between the approved enrolment and the actual enrolment of a school. The overall level of unfilled places will reduce only through an increase in the pupil population, a reduction in a school's approved enrolment number or a reduction in the number of schools.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his response. Given the potential for integrated schools to provide for much more sustainable education in the future, was the Minister disappointed that there was so little consideration of integrated schools in the plans produced by the education and library boards?

Mr O'Dowd: All the post-primary area plans are being sifted by a steering group that includes the integrated sector. I am on record as saying that, where shared education or integrated education opportunities arise, they should be followed by the relevant authorities. I appreciate the Member's support for integrated education — I am not questioning that — but I do not believe that integrated education is the sole answer to surplus places. When you open an integrated school, an Irish-medium school, a maintained school or a controlled school, you take pupils away from one or other of the sectors or a mixture of the other sectors, perhaps the integrated sector, and you are still left with surplus places. Integrated education stands

in its own right and should be promoted and facilitated in its own right, not simply as a way to reduce surplus school places.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister give us his assessment of surplus places in our system and tell us what plans, if any, he has to remedy the situation?

Mr O'Dowd: One of the driving forces behind area planning is the fact that we have significant surplus places in our schools estate. If we are to create a sustainable schools estate into the future, we have to deal with that in a planned way. Over a number of years, we have seen schools closing and being allowed to die on the vine, as it were, because of demographic changes or because confidence in the school, wherever it may be, has changed and the managing authorities have not been responsive to that. I believe that, through area planning, we can take a responsive role much earlier in the process either to secure the sustainability of a school into the future or to take action to close the school if necessary, while protecting the educational outcomes of the young people attending that school. I believe that we can reduce surplus places through area planning and by looking at how we budget and finance schools and how we encourage sharing in the schools estate.

2.15 pm

Mr Byrne: In the absence of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), will the Minister state who should take the lead at a local level in trying to promote a shared educational pathway as a possible solution to addressing the threat to some local primary schools?

Mr O'Dowd: Ideally, the lead should come from parents, pupils, teachers and boards of governors of schools. That should be responded to by the managing authority, whether that be the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) or one of the boards. They should respond positively where there is a demand for a shared education programme.

Mr Agnew: How is the demand for integrated schools ascertained in areas where integrated schools are not available?

Mr O'Dowd: The demand for integrated schools, as with any other school, is measured by parental preferences in responses to school places etc. It is also measured through community projects or programmes of work. In a rural area, an integrated school can be established for 12 pupils and, in an urban area, one can be established for 15 pupils if no other schools are available in the vicinity. So, the process is there and it has been simplified over the years to assist parents in promoting and bringing forward plans for integrated education.

Social Deprivation: Free School Meals

4. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the investigation into alternatives to, or criteria supplementary to, free school meals as an indicator of social deprivation. (AQO 5133/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is not involved in an investigation into alternatives to free school meals as an indicator of social deprivation. My Department takes the view that entitlement to free school meals is an effective

indicator of social disadvantage. Free school meals entitlement has a number of characteristics that make it the most reliable indicator for identifying social deprivation. It relates to the individual pupil, so it is more robust than a spatial measure that assumes that everyone in an area is alike. It is updated yearly, so is current. It is clearly gathered at school level and is available to us as part of the census return. It is highly correlated with multiple deprivation measures and the income deprivation affecting children index.

Where appropriate, the Department utilises spatial methods of deprivation. For example, the multiple deprivation measure and information on those resident in neighbourhood renewal areas are used in a number of its programmes, such as extended schools and Sure Start. The view of the independent panel that conducted the review of the common funding scheme was that free school meals entitlement provides an indication of the relative concentration of potentially disadvantaged pupils in a given school in a way that no other indicator currently does.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for that response. Will he comment on the response from the Children's Law Centre to his proposals to reform the common funding formula? It states that the use of free school meals as a primary indicator to allocate funding fails to capture the needs of all vulnerable children; nor will it address low educational outcomes for some groups of children, particularly children with special educational needs.

Mr O'Dowd: I totally reject its finding. When anyone looks at my record on special educational needs, no one from a fair basis can suggest that I have discriminated against children with special educational needs in any way. No one can bring forward a sound argument that the changes to the common funding formula that I suggested, which make no changes whatsoever to funding for special educational needs, will disadvantage children with special educational needs. I reject its commentary.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. Why is poverty and social disadvantage still a determining factor in our school and education system?

Mr O'Dowd: It is still a factor because we have not taken any actions to robustly correct it. Those who criticise free school meals entitlement and directing more finance towards large groups of children on free school meals and who are socially disadvantaged have ignored that fact for decades. I am amazed when I hear all those people talking about the rights of children, socially disadvantaged children and special educational needs children, because they have ignored that fact for years. It is reported in the all-party Public Accounts Committee report, the independent Sir Bob Salisbury's report and other statistical information that we have that a child on free school meals is half as likely to do well in education as any other child.

I am not ignoring it, and I do not believe that, as a society, we can continue to ignore it. We have to tackle it. The consultation responses on this are currently being analysed. It is worth noting that the majority support the principle of tackling educational underattainment using identification measures. There are certainly differences of opinion about how we should do that. However, if, as a result of the consultation process, we can come together with a formula that tackles all of those issues, I am prepared to accept that formula. However, those who

have ignored this for years cannot now come forward and lecture me on ignoring or infringing on the rights of any child.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answer, although I do not think that the consultation included a question that specifically asked you to come up with your own ideas. Has the Minister investigated the policy of using data from super output areas, rather than individual households, as criteria for assessing eligibility to free school meals? If so, what was the result of that investigation?

Mr O'Dowd: One of the principles of a consultation is, surely, having an alternative. Surely, that is the central principle of a consultation. If you ask in a consultation, "Do you agree with me or not?", that is a ballot, not a consultation. They are different, and there is certainly a duty on all of the political parties and those who strongly condemn me for using free school meals entitlement and tackling this issue to come up with an alternative. As I stated in the House before, I spent the weekend reading the political parties' consultation responses, and no alternative was provided by any of them.

On super output areas, as I said in my original response to Mr Anderson, there is a direct correlation between high concentrations of free school meals entitlement and areas of deprivation. You will not find an area of relative wealth or middle income where you have a high concentration of free school meals entitlement. You will not find an area of social deprivation where you will not find a high level of free school meals. Both of them correlate with each other, because the children, particularly those going to primary schools, travel relatively short distances to school.

We will examine all elements as to how we fund these issues. Members keep avoiding the very important fact that a child in receipt of free school meals has 50% less chance of achieving in education than a child who is not in receipt of free school meals. Someone needs to answer that question for me when they are criticising free school meals entitlement as an indicator of social deprivation. If it is not an indicator of social deprivation, it is an indicator of something. It is an indicator that that child is not succeeding in education, and we need to do something about it.

Mr Rogers: International research, Minister, shows that there is a strong link between educational achievement and the occupation, education and economic status of the children's parents. Do you have any thoughts on including those factors in future measures of education disadvantage?

Mr O'Dowd: I would argue that that is exactly what I am doing. The financial position of the parents states whether a child will receive free school meals. That will mean that the parent is either unemployed or is in a low-income bracket, which probably will mean in a low-skills post. That will also indicate the educational background of the parent. I suggest that using free schools meals entitlement is doing exactly what the international research suggests I should do. It is also carrying out exactly what the Public Accounts Committee, in June of this year, and to which all of the parties in the Chamber signed up, suggested that I should do. Again, Sir Bob Salisbury's report said that I should do that. I did not wake up one morning and decide that it was a good idea to use free school meals entitlement as an indicator of social deprivation. I did not

simply think, "I wonder whether there is any correlation between that and the outcome of a child's education". It is based on sound international and local research.

No one else has come forward with an alternative indicator that measures in the way that free school meals entitlement does. The fact is that some parties in this House do not want to give, and are stridently opposed to giving, more funding to schools with a higher concentration of social deprivation, regardless of how it is measured. That is the simple fact of the matter. As I have stated previously, in 2006, when the direct rule Minister forwarded a very small amount of money towards social deprivation, the DUP objected to it. This is not about what we call the indicator; it is about actually giving more money to schools in areas where there are higher concentrations of social deprivation. That is what the debate is about.

Literacy and Numeracy

5. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Education how his Department has responded to the recent Public Accounts Committee report on improving literacy and numeracy achievement in schools. (AQO 5134/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department's response to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report on improving literacy and numeracy achievement in schools is in the memorandum that the Minister of Finance and Personnel presented to the Assembly on 23 August 2013.

I have accepted all of the 16 recommendations that were outlined in the report, and I have provided a detailed response to each of them in the memorandum.

In particular, the PAC report also stated that the large gap in attainment between pupils who receive free school meals and those who do not cannot continue. As a result, it strongly recommended that DE undertakes a full review of the current common funding scheme to target funding to where it is most needed. That is what I have done.

Since coming to office, I have continued to implement policies to raise standards and to tackle educational underachievement in schools, and to address the gap between pupils who are entitled to free schools meals and those who are not.

Those policies include the school improvement policy, Every School a Good School; the literacy and numeracy strategy, Count, Read: Succeed; the Learning to Learn framework; and the special educational needs (SEN) and inclusion review, to name but a few.

I have also provided funding for a range of additional interventions with a focus on improving standards in literacy and numeracy across all sectors.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Does the Minister agree with the PAC that more must be done to mitigate the effects of poverty?

Mr O'Dowd: I do agree, and when we are aware of the fact that 80% of a child's learning and learning experiences take place outside the classroom, we cannot ignore the family background at home and the social circumstances in which the child might find itself. We have to take that on board.

It is a challenge for some schools, for our education system and for me as Minister. The first paragraph in the Programme for Government clearly states that it will:

"grow the economy and tackle disadvantage."

I intend to do that, and I believe that this policy carries out that function.

How many reports does the Assembly have to receive on this matter time and time again? Even its own report from the Public Accounts Committee, which is one of the most highly respected Committees in the Building, first, tells you that you should review the common funding formula with a view to directing more funds towards social deprivation and free school meals, and, secondly, indicates that children on free school meals have less of a chance in mainstream education. Do I just ignore that because it is an uncomfortable conversation and may cause ripples and consternation, given that it is controversial? I heard an expert say recently that these proposals should be dismissed because they are controversial. We are politicians; we are political leaders. If we were to avoid everything that is controversial, we would achieve nothing in this society. None of the arguments presented thus far has deflected me from the point of view that we have to tackle this issue. How we tackle it is open for discussion, but I am not avoiding tackling the issue.

Mr Dallat: I listened to the Minister very carefully, and I am sure that he will agree that literacy and numeracy are the most emotive issues that we can discuss. Can he tell us, after 15 years of the Assembly and several Public Accounts Committee reports all making the same recommendations, why we still have several thousand children leaving school each year not able to read or write?

Mr O'Dowd: I am glad that the Member has suggested that it is over a 15-year period. I am aware of only one specific PAC report that refers to tackling the issue, which I am doing. However, if you are telling me that the PAC has been recommending this for 15 years, I will tell you why nothing significant has changed. Levels of literacy and numeracy are continuing to rise but not fast enough for my satisfaction, and the gap remains. I will tell you one of the reasons why: we have not been determined enough to do anything about it. We have avoided funding it. We cannot expect schools that are dealing with high levels of social deprivation to carry out that task on the same basis as those that are not dealing with high levels of social deprivation. We do not ask any of our other public services to do it, and it is beyond me why we are asking our school system to do it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is the end of our listed questions. We will now move to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Education and Library Boards: Staff Pay

1. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Education whether there has been any progress on the complete payment of incremental pay to education and library board staff. (AQT 441/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As you are aware, a two-year pay freeze for public sector workers was agreed in the 2010-11 financial year, except for those earning less than £21,000 a year, who would receive an increase of at least £250 in the two years. All the Department's arm's-length bodies (ALBs) paid eligible staff the £250 payment for 2010-

11 and 2011-12. I decided that there would be a further £5 million to cover the costs of the £250 payment to all eligible education staff in the voluntary school sector and the grant-maintained integrated school sector in both the 2010-11 and 2011-12 financial years. Non-teaching staff in those sectors have not yet received the payment for either year. All the necessary approvals as required under the Executive's pay policy are now in place. Schools have been asked to supply details of all eligible staff, and over 90% of schools have responded.

2.30 pm

The agreement for other incremental payments, which usually comes through in April, did not come through until July. I have given all approvals in my Department, but this is a public sector pay issue that has to go through the approvals of the Executive as well. We have taken measures to ensure that, in future years, this will be dealt with much more quickly, but I accept and understand the frustration of those staff who have yet to receive their payments. However, I assure the House and those staff that my Department is doing everything in its power to ensure that that money is paid out as soon as possible.

Mr Lynch: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I accept the Minister's assurance, but can he assure us that no such delays will happen next year?

Mr O'Dowd: We have taken a number of measures around annual pay increases and increments and split them. We have had agreement from DFP to move that forward in the manner in which we are now doing. I believe that that will decrease delays in future years, ensure that we do not run into this problem again and ensure that workers receive in proper time the payments that they are due.

Education Minister: Ontario Trip

2. **Mr Hazzard** asked the Minister of Education for an update on his recent trip to Ontario, Canada. (AQT 442/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I travelled to Canada and America at the start of October. I particularly wanted to visit Ontario, as it has been through a programme of radical change over the past 10 years for tackling educational underachievement across the board, particularly for those from socially deprived backgrounds. The debate and discussions that I had with the Minister, senior officials, trade unionists, teachers and parents on the ground was very enlightening.

The debate that Ontario had 10 years ago is the debate that we are now having about whether to direct more funds towards social deprivation. It directed more funds, and its education gap is closing much more rapidly than ours. Ontario is seeing the education outcomes for all young people in its society, and it proudly boasts that it has one of the leading education systems in the world. It was a very useful and informative visit, and it shows that insular thinking, which we are sometimes guilty of in this part of the world, hinders us making progress on many issues.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. I am fully aware that not all lessons are transferable to this part of the world, but I wonder whether he can outline some of the pertinent examples and lessons that he brought home that we might apply to our own system.

Mr O'Dowd: The most obvious lesson to be learned is that, if you wish to tackle educational underachievement among those from socially deprived backgrounds, you have to fund it. You cannot wish it away, nor can you hope that the same funding system will work for those from more affluent communities and those from less affluent communities. You have to take dedicated action to resolve the issue, and Canada has achieved that.

Canada also gathers mammoth amounts of information about individual pupils. Its school censuses are very detailed about the background of a child, the background of the parents and the ethnicity of a child. It can follow children through their school career by having very detailed data and can put in place targeted systems to assist the child on its journey. I do not think that our society is ready for that just yet, but I believe that the major lesson to be learned is that, if you have the evidence to resolve an issue, you should use that evidence to resolve the issue.

Teacher Training

3. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Education whether he is satisfied that his input to and, arguably, ownership of the Employment and Learning Minister's stage 2 review of teacher training is being fully acknowledged and is comprehensive, given his responsibility for the nature and content of teacher training, including the number trained. (AQT 443/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have no doubt that the Member is only too acutely aware that I have no ownership of the review and that the Minister for Employment and Learning has responsibility for the review that he is carrying out. I can assure the Member that I will make input into that review in the areas where I have responsibility. I have taken part in trying to give surety to our further education colleges. I have set numbers for the next two years for teacher numbers and teacher training, which was not the practice previously. However, this is solely a matter for the Employment and Learning Minister.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. The Employment and Learning Minister said during Oral Answers to Questions in the Chamber on 8 October that, when it comes to teacher training:

"The current situation is not sustainable."

He added that, whether you are talking about the system generally or about St Mary's:

"it is not financially sustainable today". —
[Official Report, Bound Volume 88, p155, col 1].

Are you concerned that the Employment and Learning Minister is rushing his fences and getting ahead of himself when it comes to this review, given your clear responsibilities in respect of teacher training?

Mr O'Dowd: As I rise to my feet, I can read the Member's press release to the 'Andytown News' and other west Belfast newspapers. I am not responsible in any way for the Minister for Employment and Learning's review or how the Minister for Employment and Learning answers questions in the Assembly. I suggest that the Member puts his name into the lottery for the next session of topical questions with the Employment and Learning Minister and asks him those questions then.

Ballymena: Area Planning

4. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Education for an update on area planning in Ballymena. (AQT 444/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I can give you an update on Ballee. Consultation on the development proposal for that school ended today. My officials will receive the information from the board and collate all the information that we have gathered on Ballee. At a future stage, I will make a decision on the future of that school. I do not have the information on the other school in front of me, but I am happy to share that with the Member in written form.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for his answer. I think that he knew where I was going to go in the supplementary. I declare an interest as a governor of two schools in the town of Ballymena. The proposed closure of Ballee is ongoing. Does he not think that it pre-empts area planning if the school is closed before a full area planning scheme can be put in place? Would he also like to comment on the Better Way proposal that was put forward by the governors of Ballee Community High School when we met him twice?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member will appreciate that the consultation is now closed. It would be unfair of me — indeed, I would be in breach of my statutory duties — to give any views on whether or not the development proposal was timely. That will form part of my deliberations before I make any decision on that matter.

I have to say that I was impressed with the views expressed and the plans brought forward by the board of governors. I have had two meetings with representatives of the board of governors. As in many other circumstances that I deal with, I have to make a decision on whether those interventions have taken place in time and whether they will be able to ensure that current and future pupils will be able to achieve excellent education in that facility. Those are the deliberations that I will have to think about in the weeks ahead.

Transport: Home-to-school

5. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Education why the review of transport that he announced this morning is necessary. (AQT 445/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is a considerable number of years since we had a review of transport. The last one dates back to 1996. In the early part of the current mandate, the Assembly voted that I conduct a review of home-to-school transport in all of its elements. Today, I have set forth a review to be undertaken by Sian Thornthwaite, Margaret Martin and Tony McGonagle, who are all highly experienced in the field of education and transport issues. They will report back to me by August 2014.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he outline to the House the terms of reference for the review?

Mr O'Dowd: The terms of reference are quite significant in length, and I do not have them all in front of me. However, the review will look at all aspects of home-to-school transport and the financial viability of our current practice in that. Other areas that have been raised with me recently include transport provision for post-16 pupils, and it is said that choices are maybe limited by that provision. I also want to look at how we support some of the most vulnerable

young people in our society in their special educational needs and at cross-border transport provision. No doubt, the terms of reference will be shared with the Education Committee. If they have not been, they will be. I am also happy to share them with other Members of the Assembly.

Holy Trinity College, Cookstown

6. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposals for a newbuild at Holy Trinity College, Cookstown. (AQT 446/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Holy Trinity was one of the newbuilds that I announced in January 2013. To bring that build to fruition, we require confirmation from CCMS about area planning in that area. We need to know how it proposes to build up enrolment of that school to 1,300 pupils. I believe that CCMS has been engaging with my Department and has provided figures as to how it proposes to make that a reality. That will allow us to make progress. We will then move on to detailed design, procurement etc, which will take a number of years to complete.

Mr McGlone: Mo bhuíochas leat agus leis an Aire. Just following on from what the Minister said, has his Department not agreed pupil capacity with CCMS for the newbuild?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta. It is not a case of me having to agree. I have agreed in principle that I want to see a 1,300-pupil school at Holy Trinity College. CCMS says that it agrees and wants to see a 1,300-pupil school in that area. I believe that — I stand to be corrected; you will appreciate that I do not have all the details in front of me — CCMS is preparing plans as to how that will be achieved in the period ahead. I am not concerned about the matter. Holy Trinity College has the green light; I know that because I gave it to it. That build will take place in the next number of years. It is a core, central school in that constituency and will continue to be so only in a new building.

Cross-border Learning Community

7. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Education for an assurance that CCMS is free to approach either the Donegal vocational education committee or local schools to explore a cross-border learning community for that area, given that, last week, along with MLAs from other political parties, he met the chief executive and deputy chief executive of CCMS to discuss the future of Brollagh and was informed that they have procedural difficulties in approaching schools or managing authorities in the South to explore possible partnerships. (AQT 447/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am not aware of any power that I have to stop them carrying out such exploratory work and engaging with schools across the border. If they require my permission to do so, I assure you that I will give it. I am not aware of a power to stop them. If it is a case of me having to go through protocols and inform Minister Quinn or, indeed, the Department of Education and Science in Dublin, I am more than happy to do so. My main interest in this is to ensure that we have a viable, sustainable educational facility or facilities in that area.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Work that has been done in the local area demonstrates that more

than the required number of 24 subjects can be delivered at GCSE level if there is a partnership with schools in Ballyshannon and Bundoran. However, given the reluctance of CCMS to bring forward or look at this matter, is the Minister inclined to discuss this at some future stage with the Minister of Education in the South, Ruairi Quinn?

Mr O'Dowd: I am happy to raise the matter with Minister Quinn, either at one of our formal meetings or in an informal discussion. I have a meeting with the area planning steering group this week and that might present an opportunity for me to raise the matter, or CCMS may well raise the matter with me at that.

2.45 pm

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Tourist Board: Review

1. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the rationale for the review of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. (AQO 5145/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Arm's-length bodies are reviewed periodically. The review of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and wider tourism structures follows my recent review of the Consumer Council and the independent review of economic policy report in 2009, which reviewed the functions of Invest Northern Ireland. With the success of ni2012 and, indeed, continued success in 2013, now is an opportune time to undertake the review to ensure that we have the optimum structures in place to deliver the tourism targets that are set out in the Programme for Government and the economic strategy.

John Hunter, a retired civil servant, has agreed to undertake the review. The review will also look at the opportunity presented by RPA to maximise the impact of local tourism structures.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for her response. I am glad that the Minister agrees with the Ulster Unionist Party that Northern Ireland is a unique tourist destination. Will the Minister tell us how she plans to address the 9% drop in the number of visitors coming to Northern Ireland for the first time?

Mrs Foster: That may be an Ulster Unionist policy, but it is very clear that that party may be agreeing with me on the fact that Northern Ireland has a unique proposition.

I have looked at the figures for tourists coming to Northern Ireland that came out recently. I was very pleased to see another increase in the number of tourists coming to Northern Ireland, particularly those from GB, which is our biggest market. It is very good to see that the numbers are up for those visitors by 18%. I recognise that there has been a drop in the number of visitors from the Republic of Ireland of some 14%. However, overall, the figures are up by 6% for visitors from outside Northern Ireland. The number of visitor nights spent in Northern Ireland increased by 5% in the first six months of 2013.

Statistics are there, and people can take different stories out of those. However, I am very encouraged by the

headline statistic that the figures are, yet again, going in the right direction.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Does the Minister agree with me that the recent C S Lewis Festival in east Belfast was hugely successful? That was supported by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. That is the sort of event that we should encourage the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to be involved with in future.

Mrs Foster: Absolutely. I commend the Member for the work that he put into the C S Lewis Festival. I was privileged to attend one of the events. I would have liked to have attended more but, unfortunately, I was outside the jurisdiction for most of the festival on a trade mission to Dubai. I was delighted to see the first C S Lewis Festival get off the ground.

Obviously, C S Lewis was one of our literary stars. In the past, he has not received the attention that he deserves. At the event that I was able to attend, I think that I said that I really believe that, like the Beckett Festival in Enniskillen, we can make those literary festivals annual events on the calendar for people to come to areas of Northern Ireland and really get to know about the individuals involved. In parentheses, I was really pleased that, at last, C S Lewis has been honoured with a memorial stone in Westminster Abbey. That was a very fitting thing to happen.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for her responses. Will the Minister provide us with some detail on what discussions she has had with Executive colleagues about the future of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board?

Mrs Foster: I have not had any discussions with Executive colleagues because the review has just begun. As I indicated, John Hunter is undertaking that review, and he will speak to whoever he needs to and come back with his views on the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Where there is a need for change, he will point that out. Where there is no need for change, I am sure that he will point that out as well. Tourism sits within my portfolio. Therefore, I have taken the decision that there needs to be a review.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answers. In her substantive answer, she mentioned the drop in visitors from the South. Would the Minister like to take this opportunity to call on those who are out on the streets engaging in parades and protests to come off the streets? That is having a negative impact on visitor numbers from the rest of Ireland.

Mrs Foster: The Member would do well to read an article by Ivan Little in today's 'Belfast Telegraph', which states that Saturday was a triumph for hope over hype. I think that there was a lot of hype in the lead up to last Saturday. Undoubtedly, there will be some people, even in this Chamber, who may be disappointed that the event passed over peacefully. I have to say that it is disappointing that there are those who try to make political points while the rest of us are interviewed. If the Member wants, I will give way.

Emigration

2. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her strategy to tackle the current high levels of emigration. (AQO 5146/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland economic strategy sets out the Executive's collective approach to growing the local economy and creating prosperity and employment. By growing the economy and creating skilled, high-paying employment opportunities, we will encourage our talented people to remain in Northern Ireland and, hopefully, attract back those who may have emigrated in recent years.

Latest available data shows that the number of employee jobs increased by more than 5,000 in the year to June 2013, with over 3,000 of that increase coming in the last quarter. By the end of September, Invest NI had promoted over 17,200 jobs in the Programme for Government period. That is significantly ahead of schedule with respect to the delivery of our Programme for Government jobs target. Indeed, of the 6,600 jobs promoted through the jobs fund, 3,525 new jobs have already been created.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, arís, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given that thousands of our best educated young people are in the likes of Australia out of economic necessity not choice, and given that many are saying that there are no job opportunities to entice them home, is there any determination on the part of the Minister and her Department to direct graduate job schemes and potential inward investment to those areas of highest emigration and unemployment, including West Tyrone?

Mrs Foster: First, the Member makes a statement that there is nothing to come home to, when he knows that, particularly in his constituency, we have made a number of significant job announcements in the past short time. Terex, Telestack and Frylite have all come forward with jobs, and he should be welcoming those job opportunities and saying that there are job opportunities in his constituency for people to come back to. It is not just about the perception of those young people who leave for whatever reason. Sometimes, they leave for economic reasons, and, other times, they leave to gain experience in different countries, and I think that is a good thing for Northern Ireland, as long as we have the jobs available for them to come back to. We have those jobs available in West Tyrone, and he should be going forward and making sure that those young people know about those job opportunities.

Mr I McCrea: Can the Minister provide a breakdown of the number of people who are leaving Northern Ireland and those who are coming in? Can she give an assessment of the figure that people give off about when they say that nobody is doing anything?

Mrs Foster: Over the past 15 years, the trend has been for net immigration to Northern Ireland, with, on average, around 22,000 people each year coming to settle here. In 2011-12, immigration to Northern Ireland was 23,000, so that is people coming to live in Northern Ireland. Last year, 25,000 people emigrated from Northern Ireland. So, there was a 2,000 net plus for us last year, whereas, over the past 15 years, it has tended to be in and around the fact that there are more people coming into Northern Ireland than leaving Northern Ireland. As you can see, there are quite a lot of people going out of Northern Ireland, but

there are also quite a lot of people coming into Northern Ireland. So, ordinarily, it levels itself out throughout the year.

Mr Eastwood: Are there any specific initiatives to target those people who have left, tell them about all the opportunities that you mentioned and attract them back?

Mrs Foster: One of the ways that we do that now is through the Northern Irish Connections piece. When we go out to the different regions, we always make sure that we touch base with those people who have an interest in Northern Ireland, are from Northern Ireland or generally want to help Northern Ireland to grow. I have been very pleased to make a number of contacts through that Northern Irish Connections piece. A lot of times, it has been with some young people in the different regions, such as South Africa, America or, indeed, Dubai just very recently. We want those people to talk positively about Northern Ireland and the job opportunities that there are here at home, and we want to try to get those people to come home after they have gained experience in a different market, because the experience that they gain can be a real game-changer for us in Northern Ireland when they bring it back to us.

Bankruptcy: Down/Newry and Mourne

3. **Mr Rogers** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many sole traders and limited companies have entered bankruptcy or liquidation in the Down/Newry and Mourne council areas, in the past five years. (AQO 5147/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department does not keep statistics of insolvencies broken down by council areas. The total number of sole traders and limited companies in the South Down constituency that have entered bankruptcy or compulsory liquidation in the past five years is 296. That figure does not include companies that have entered into a creditors' voluntary liquidation or an administration.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for her answer thus far. What steps has the Minister taken to improve access to credit, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses?

Mrs Foster: There is a range of access-to-credit programmes available, from the very small business loans from £1,000 up to £50,000 to the growth loan fund, which has been very successful. It has been rolled out by WhiteRock Capital Partners on our behalf. They have made just under 60 loans across Northern Ireland. I think that Invest Northern Ireland has created six access-to-finance programmes. That is a recognition that the banks have not been working with small and medium-sized businesses in the way in which we would have liked them to. The way in which we have intervened most recently is through the agrifood loan scheme, through which we hope to help those people who want to play an integrated part in our agrifood sector. We can help them to make the initial investment, first, in the poultry sector, to allow them to get the house up so that they can develop for the poultry sector and help to grow the industry. So, we have taken a lot of interventions on access to finance.

South Antrim: Jobs

4. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what potential job creation opportunities have been identified for South Antrim in the past 18 months. (AQO 5148/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the past 18 months, my Department and Invest Northern Ireland have been working with the full range of businesses across the South Antrim constituency to encourage business growth and to increase employment opportunities. In total, Invest Northern Ireland made 447 offers to locally and foreign-owned companies in the constituency between April 2012 and September of this year. Invest NI has provided £9.7 million of assistance, which will contribute to £34.5 million of investment and promote almost 336 new jobs in South Antrim. In addition, over 30 offers of support, worth a total of £4 million, will see £11 million invested in research and development by companies in South Antrim. There have been 119 new business starts in the constituency over the same period, which have created over 100 new jobs, and there are 47 jobs fund projects at various stages of development, with the potential to create over 200 new jobs in total.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for that response and, in doing so, welcome those jobs that have been promoted and those that have been created. Invest NI has a very large land bank in South Antrim, consisting primarily of the Global Point site. What is the intention in respect of that land bank?

Mrs Foster: The Member is right. We hold a lot of land in the South Antrim constituency. In seven locations, we have 394 acres, of which 106 acres remain available to support economic development projects brought forward by qualifying business. He mentions the Global Point business park. Of course, while full planning approval for the business park was achieved in 2008, a number of the planning conditions have resulted in protracted engagement with stakeholders by Invest NI to ensure a satisfactory resolution. I certainly would like to see a resolution to Global Point as soon as possible.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer and congratulate her on the jobs and the work that has gone on. Is there a friendly way of working with Invest NI to make sure that, where it feels it cannot help somebody, people are looking at how else they can be helped to help the businesses that are there, because one or two fall by the way and find that they get a very firm no rather than a yes, maybe.

3.00 pm

Mrs Foster: I am disappointed to hear that. I would hope that, if Invest NI was not able to help a business, particularly a small business, it would signpost it to other areas of help, such as the local Enterprise NI, which has been very helpful to small businesses in my constituency. I am sure that the Member recognises the work that Enterprise NI does right across Northern Ireland. In fact, it runs the regional Start programme for Invest Northern Ireland. However, if the Member has any specific issue, I am quite happy to look at it for him.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that that was a particular constituency question.

Mr G Kelly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answers up to now, and I thank the Chair for warning me of where not to go. However, I want to expand this a little by asking the Minister how she will ensure that people across the North will get fair and equitable employment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think that the question was very particular on this occasion, so we will move on.

Downpatrick: New Hotel

5. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support her Department can provide for a new hotel in Downpatrick. (AQO 5149/11-15)

Mrs Foster: New hotel developments may benefit from capital support from Invest Northern Ireland if the promoter can demonstrate that the project is market driven and capable of attracting visitors from outside Northern Ireland and that it will not displace business from similar projects. New hotel projects offering at least 30 rooms may be considered for support.

Mr Wells: As the Minister may be aware, the former Abbey Lodge Hotel in Downpatrick was demolished six years ago. As a councillor and an MLA, I strongly welcomed the approval of a planning application for a new hotel. Since then, nothing has happened. Will the Minister continue to keep this matter under review to see what can be done? I think that it is a dreadful situation that a town the size of Downpatrick does not have a modern hotel of any description.

Mrs Foster: The Member is right, and, indeed, there were some discussions in 2009 and 2010 between the Invest NI tourism team and those who were seeking to develop a new hotel on the former Abbey Lodge Hotel site. However that did not reach a positive conclusion, and there has been no further contact since December 2010. Of course, if there are new plans, or if they have been revisited, we stand ready to look at those and will, of course, be as helpful as we can in all the circumstances.

Mrs McKevitt: I am sure that the Minister knows how important the tourism sector is to the good people of south Down, particularly as we see it as a good economic recovery opportunity. I welcome the efforts locally for a new hotel in Downpatrick. What has the Minister done to improve the competitiveness of hotels, given that, in the Republic, the VAT rate is only 9%?

Mrs Foster: Yes, indeed they do, and that is one of the big issues for the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation. It is one of its five Ts that the federation talks about now. Of course, VAT is a Westminster issue. I have said to them that I will assist them in any way that I can, because it is very difficult for hotels and accommodation providers and, indeed, for those who provide food and drink. When they are along the border, they are competing with those just across the border who have a very different and attractive VAT rate.

So, we will work with the representative bodies in the tourism sector, along with the Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland, to try to make companies as competitive as we possibly can. That may well be through training to make sure that we have all the appropriate skills so that we can get an edge in that piece of work. However, it is also through the jobs fund, which we have used. The tourism development scheme and the money that is available

from Invest Northern Ireland for hotels is capital money, but we have also used the jobs fund to help hotels across Northern Ireland to take on new staff and to grow. So, the jobs fund is available to the hotel sector as well.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I listened to the Minister's comments about the jobs fund. Does the Minister have specific proposals on how she will activate the opportunity to increase the return to the local economy from the local hotel industry?

Mrs Foster: As I indicated, the jobs fund has been very useful for that. In her own city, £70,000 was offered to City of Derry Hotel Ltd for a very well-thought-out £500,000 expansion.

I have had the pleasure of visiting the expansion that took place there. It is about trying to make us more competitive and using our finances in a way that does not fall foul of European state aid rules. That is always a challenge for us when we look at new ways to help an industry. We will continue to work with the Hotels Federation and, indeed, all the other representative bodies in all the campaigns that they run.

Trade Figures

6. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of figures showing that over 23,000 businesses have ceased trading between 2007 and 2011. (AQO 5150/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Looking at business closures in isolation does not give the full picture. Although over 23,000 businesses ceased trading, almost 24,000 began trading during the same period. When Northern Ireland is compared with the rest of the UK, it has the lowest business death rate of all 12 regions. However, it is an inevitable part of being an outward-looking economy that less competitive businesses will close down. That is why Invest NI focuses its support on local firms that are highly competitive and export-focused.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her response. Given the extent of business closures and the current economic challenges, does she agree that the capacity for economic recovery would be enhanced if we had the necessary tools to grow the economy?

Mrs Foster: That is why we keep pushing for corporation tax powers to come to Northern Ireland. We look forward to a decision by our Prime Minister after the Scottish referendum takes place next year. If we are able to secure corporation tax powers, that will certainly give us a competitive edge, particularly against the Republic of Ireland, which has a low level of corporation tax. If we have that tool in our box, it will make a real difference.

Mr Wilson: The Minister will be aware that a recent report has shown that, apart from difficult trading conditions, many businesses have been caused to cease trading because of the activities of banks, particularly RBS. Will she indicate to the House what steps she intends to take to ensure that any actions of Ulster Bank in putting people into liquidation so that it can seize their assets will be looked at either by the Treasury or the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in their investigations of the scandalous activities of RBS?

Mrs Foster: Clearly, the findings of the independent lending review report on RBS and, indeed, the Tomlinson

report on banks' treatment of businesses are very distressing to those concerned. The key finding from Tomlinson's report — that there are circumstances in which banks unnecessarily engineer a default to move businesses out of local management and into their turnaround divisions, thereby generating revenues through fees, increased margins and devalued assets — is a very serious matter for us here. As I understand it — I stand to be corrected — the Tomlinson report only covered RBS globally, and I would be very interested to see what the situation is with Ulster Bank. I welcome the fact that the bank has appointed a leading firm to look into these matters. The Member can rest assured that the Finance Minister and I will raise the issue with the bank in the very near future. We will also take the matter to the next joint ministerial task force on banking and access to finance, because it is a hugely serious issue. I know that the Member has met — as, indeed, have I — individuals and companies that have made allegations such as those in the Tomlinson report. We need to bottom out those issues and try to deal with what we have been left with. If it is the case that the practice went on in Northern Ireland, it is, as I said on the radio last week, an absolute scandal.

Investment: Targets

7. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of her Department meeting the target for new investment over the next two years. (AQO 5151/11-15)

Mrs Foster: One of the Programme for Government's key commitments is to achieve £1 billion of investment in the economy by March 2015. I am very pleased to say that, despite the uncertain economic conditions, we have achieved over £900 million of investment so far. I expect to exceed the original target substantially by the end of the current Programme for Government period.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for her very encouraging answer. On reflection, does she feel that she underestimated in this instance?

Mrs Foster: I suppose I should have expected that that would be the question. The original Programme for Government target was set at the height of the recession. It took account of the potential negative impact of factors such as the potential changes to regional aid, on which we have been successful. We should not forget that we have been successful in retaining regional aid for Northern Ireland. I believe that the target was the right one at the time, and, indeed, some considered it to be a stretching target when we set it. I am delighted to see that we are so close to meeting it so early on. Be assured that this will not slow down our search for investment in Northern Ireland. Indeed, I want us to exceed the target and exceed it well.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Has the new investment created and stimulated economic recovery, and has it created jobs equally across the North?

Mrs Foster: The £900 million has been invested right across Northern Ireland; it has not just been invested in one part of Northern Ireland. I have had the privilege of attending many events right across Northern Ireland, announcing investment for communities. That will continue to be the case going into next year.

Mr A Maginness: I welcome the Minister's success in bringing inward investment to Northern Ireland. I hope that the £1 billion target will be well exceeded. However, the problem for North Belfast man —

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

Mr A Maginness: I am trying to put it into context. The problem for North Belfast man is that he does not see the benefit of investment in the North Belfast constituency —

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

Mr A Maginness: I ask the Minister this: is there any way of targeting that very welcome investment?

Mrs Foster: We have been through this time and time again. I listen to people from North and West Belfast complaining about jobs and investment going to another part of the city and I ask myself, "How far is it to travel to another part of the city?" I am really bemused by the idea that one part of the city getting investment is, in some way, bad news for another part of the city. It should be good news for the whole of Northern Ireland that we have been able to bring in investment over this past period of time.

There have been great advances right across Northern Ireland in job availability, whether through the jobs fund or through foreign direct investment. Sometimes I hear Members opposite saying that we have not had enough foreign direct investment, but that totally moves away from the fact that a lot of jobs are being created through the jobs fund. A lot of businesses are starting up in their constituencies that need as much assistance from their elected representatives as those that come about through foreign direct investment. We should be pleased and delighted about the jobs that are coming in, wherever they come from and whether they are with locally owned companies or foreign-owned companies.

Exports

8. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the current level of exports, including the actions her Department has taken to grow export levels. (AQO 5152/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Northern Ireland exports in 2012-13 totalled £5.7 billion. I am pleased to report that, in the first six months of this year, exports were up by 3% over the same period in 2012 to £2.98 billion. Invest Northern Ireland provides a range of solutions to assist local manufacturing and services businesses to export. Since April, it has arranged 31 trade missions, with a further 32 planned over the next six months. The 2014-15 visit programme will include around 70 events, a number of which I plan to lead.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That ends the period for listed oral questions. We now move on to topical questions. Miss Michelle McIlveen's name has been withdrawn.

3.15 pm

Energy Prices: Green Taxes

2. **Mr Wilson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what contact she has had with Ministers in England to discuss changes to green taxes that could help to reduce electricity and energy bills. (AQT 452/11-15)

I congratulate the Minister on her efforts to ensure that Northern Ireland was not included in the carbon tax, which probably saved about 15% on energy bills.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his comments. I also thank him for the work that he carried out when he was Minister of Finance and Personnel. The Prime Minister has been very clear that he wants to look again at green taxes. I read in the paper that he was referring to something else green, but I had better not say that word in the House or I might be ruled as unparliamentary. There is a need to look at the issues again in the context of where we find ourselves. We listened carefully to what the Chancellor had to say yesterday about the reduction of bills. As far as I understand it, that just affects Great Britain and does not automatically flow over into Northern Ireland. I wait for his autumn statement to see the detail of all that, and, once that is there, we will of course be in touch with the relevant Ministers.

Mr Wilson: Last week, a report indicated that 42% of people in Northern Ireland live in fuel poverty. Does the Minister agree that one of the factors contributing to that is the policy of relying increasingly on renewable energy? Will she indicate to us, if we are to meet the target of 40% by 2020, what the estimated increase will be in the average energy bill for each household in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: As the Member knows, the targets were set in the Programme for Government, which every Minister signed up to when it came out. They were set at 40% for Northern Ireland. The reason they were set in that way is that we believe that we need a mix of sources of energy. There are reasons for that, one of which is security of supply. We also need to be sustainable in everything that we do, and we need to have good value for money. It is in the context of good value for money, given what we have been through, that it is sensible to look at our strategic energy framework again. Of course, when the Prime Minister and the Minister at DECC have looked at energy prices, we will then have a look at ours to see if there is anything that we can do in response. However, we will have to wait until the autumn statement, which is out on Thursday.

Economic Recovery

3. **Ms McCorley** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she will take to ensure that economic recovery will be fair and equitable, with ordinary families not suffering undue hardship, given that a recent PwC report said that although the economy is heading towards recovery, it is possible that the average household could lose £550 a year because of projected interest rate increases. (AQT 453/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I do not set the interest rates; the Bank of England sets the interest rates, and the governor has been very clear that he will not look at those until the national unemployment rate goes below 7%. The national unemployment rate at present is 7.6%, and our rate is 7.3%. I do, however, welcome the Ernst and Young and PwC reports that came out about two weeks ago, each of which showed that Northern Ireland is going into growth mode again at a faster level than they had first thought. I welcome that, and I hope that Members from right across the House will join us in trying to grow Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Stewart Dickson.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister. Minister, would you agree with me that campaigns such as —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry, I forgot to call Rosie McCorley for her supplementary question.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answer. I refer again to the PwC report and the previous report on fiscal powers. What they tell me is that it is time we secured the necessary tools to grow our economy so that it is fair and equitable and meets the needs of our people. Will the Minister tell me how her Department intends to address the issues raised in both those reports?

Mrs Foster: It is very interesting that, when people talk about getting fiscal powers to the Assembly, it is as if it is some gift that is coming down to us from Westminster. They all cost money. Who will pay for the fiscal powers? I remember that, when we were having the discussion about corporation tax powers, which we very much want to see coming to Northern Ireland, there were elements in society that said that it was too much money and we could not afford to have corporation tax powers given to the Assembly. I do not know what other powers the Member is speaking about, but they come with a price tag and people need to realise that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I now call Stewart Dickson.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: Campaigns

4. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she agrees that campaigns such as Small Business Saturday, Backin' Belfast and others across Northern Ireland are vital to support our high streets, small businesses, industrial estates and, indeed, our village and corner shops. (AQT 454/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I very much welcome Small Business Saturday, which is this Saturday, 7 December. I have been involved in supporting small businesses in my constituency, and I am sure that Members across the House do the same. It is important that we support small businesses to allow them to grow. It has been a difficult time, particularly for retailers, and I hope that they get the support that they need over the Christmas period. Backin' Belfast was a very successful initiative that we undertook early this year. I hope that it has benefited retailers in Belfast, and we look forward to working with small businesses right across Northern Ireland.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister, for your answer. I am sure that you will share my dismay at hearing someone on the radio this morning — a person who is, I understand, about to join Belfast City Council — dismiss the role of the high street and say that high street shopping was dead.

Mrs Foster: I do not accept that in one way. Yes, we have the internet, but I have seen so many retailers embrace the internet in a very clever way to allow people to view and even purchase things on the internet but also to draw them into their shops. I think that it is referred to as “bricks and clicks”. The high street stays important, but retailers have moved with the times. So, I do not accept that view, and I look forward to the Small Business Saturday motion at the end of today's business.

Titanic Belfast

5. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an assessment of Titanic Belfast in its first year of opening and to state whether she has any views on potential targets for the second year of this major tourist attraction. (AQT 455/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Between opening on 31 March 2012 and the end of September this year, Titanic Belfast welcomed almost 1.3 million visitors. That is a tremendous figure. On 5 August this year, the facility welcomed its one millionth visitor, who was from County Kildare. I was delighted that it was an out-of-state visitor who had come to Belfast. I am confident that, in its second year, Titanic Belfast will welcome well over half a million people.

Mr Wells: Obviously, those numbers are extremely encouraging. Is she confident that there was not a novelty value in the first year? There was huge interest as the building initially came on stream. How will we be able to maintain that success in succeeding years?

Mrs Foster: It is important to look at the source of our visitors when you consider novelty value. I have been asked that question before, because it had such a tremendous year in 2012. If we look at the source of markets up to August 2013, we see that 29% of visitors were from the home market of Northern Ireland, 27% were from the Republic of Ireland, 17% were from Great Britain, and 27% were from the rest of the world. That is a good breakdown because it shows that there is growth potential in all those markets. We were not flooded in the first year by local people or people coming from a particular market. They are all strongly performing sectors, and there is scope to sell Titanic Belfast to the rest of the world and get people to come to Belfast.

Invest NI: Targets

6. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what target-setting mechanisms she intends to introduce to measure outcomes in Invest NI, given the recent Public Accounts Committee report ‘Invest NI: A Performance Review’, which identified long-standing issues around setting targets. (AQT 456/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer the Member to the independent review of economic policy of 2009, which clearly said that I should not set subregional targets for Northern Ireland because it would be a disincentive to those who wanted to come and invest here. I refer him to the part of the Public Accounts Committee report that said that selective financial assistance had been used right across Northern Ireland — not in one part of Northern Ireland, but right across Northern Ireland. I would be obliged if he looked at that.

Mr G Kelly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. I thank the Minister for part of her answer. Does she agree that the best way to test Invest NI's performance is to measure outcomes in the form of actual jobs created and how long those will last, as opposed to reporting on investor targets?

Mrs Foster: We should look at output, and, in that respect, we should look at the money given in selective financial assistance and the percentage of that that went outside greater Belfast. I am sure that the Member will be glad to look at those figures.

Harland and Wolff

7. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she sees real job opportunities developing at Harland and Wolff following the arrival of the large oil rig from Brazil and whether she agrees that it is fair to say that the yard is open for business, competitive and skilled-up for work. (AQT 457/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, I noticed the rig as I came over the M3 this morning; it is a very impressive piece of work. As I understand it, Harland and Wolff is to recruit 600 skilled tradesmen to work on the rig, which is the biggest ever oil rig to be refurbished in Belfast. I am told that, of those 600, at least 200 will be from Northern Ireland. There will also be 200 from Scotland and the north-east of England, and the rest will be from Poland and Lithuania, countries that have continued a tradition of shipyard working. So, there will definitely be an economic benefit to Belfast. As I understand it, the jobs are short-term, but they will provide an opportunity for people to become skilled in that area. The renewable energy area will then be able to take those skills and use them in other places.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she see there being further developments at Harland and Wolff for perhaps a wind turbine project, the renewable industry generally and, obviously, for upskilling?

Mrs Foster: DONG Energy is, of course, in Belfast harbour at present in a very large logistics hub. It is doing some very impressive work there in the renewable field, particularly on substations, which then go into the English Channel. So, a lot of work is going on in Belfast harbour. From meeting the Harbour Commissioners recently, I know that they have plans for further expansion in the renewable energy area. We welcome that because there are good skilled job opportunities available in that area. We will work with Harland and Wolff and, indeed, Belfast harbour to ensure that we can support them whenever we can.

Broadband: Rural Areas

8. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she agrees that more could and should be done by her Department to ensure that everyone, not least those people in rural areas, has equal access to quality broadband. (AQT 458/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Yes. That is why, when it comes to broadband, Northern Ireland is the best connected in the whole of the United Kingdom. The Member knows that that is my position, and I am sure that it is his position as well.

Mr McElduff: I acknowledge that there has been significant investment, but does the Minister accept that businesses in rural locations that continue to experience problems with their broadband are effectively being disadvantaged because it affects their competitiveness?

Mrs Foster: Which is why the broadband fund, which is out to tender at present, will, I hope, be operational early next year.

Tourism: Councils

9. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to confirm that, under the review of public administration, and in line with her review of the Tourist Board, there will be an increased council/local approach to tourism. (AQT 459/11-15)

I congratulate the Minister on her work on tourism across the board. Some of the figures that she outlined are very impressive.

Mrs Foster: I very much hope that that is the case. There are nine destinations across Northern Ireland that will compete with each other for visitors and people coming to stay. I hope that councils will take a leadership role in those destination areas and work with the industry more closely than they have done to date.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes Question Time for today. I invite Members to take their ease for a few moments while we change the top Table.

3.30 pm

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker
[Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair)

Executive Committee Business

Road Races (Amendment) Bill: Consideration Stage

Clause 1 (Specification of contingency days in orders under Road Races (Northern Ireland) Order 1986)

Debate resumed on amendment Nos 1 to 4, which amendments were:

No 1: In page 1, line 7, at beginning insert "Subject to paragraph (1BA)."— [Mr Allister.]

No 2: In page 1, line 11, at end insert

"(1BA) A contingency day may not be—

(a) the whole of a Sunday; or

(b) any part of a Sunday beginning before 1.30pm or ending after 6pm."— [Mr Allister.]

No 3: In page 1, line 11, at end insert

"(1BB) An order may not specify the whole or part of a Sunday as a contingency day unless the Department is satisfied that the terms of the order are such as to minimise as far as reasonably practicable any disruption to the activities of the local community on that day."— [Mr Spratt.]

No 4: In page 1, line 20, at end insert

"(1CA) Where a contingency day is a Sunday, a direction under paragraph (1C) requires the approval of the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly."— [Mr Spratt.]

Mr Spratt: I speak from a party perspective rather than as Chair of the Regional Development Committee. I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. I speak to amendment No 3 in my name and that of my two colleagues Mr Easton and Mrs Hale. I will not move amendment No 4 this afternoon.

I will pick up on one or two points that were made by Mr Allister at an earlier stage and put some context around the issue of the weather for two races — the North West 200 in May and the Ulster Grand Prix in August — over the past number of years. I will also put in context the Committee issues. The matter was fairly well discussed in the public domain and in Committee from just after last year's North West 200. Mervyn Whyte, in particular, has been very cooperative in making himself available to the Committee and the Department to answer questions.

The Committee approved the granting of accelerated passage to the Bill. A consultation took place in which there were some 860 participants. It was widely known that the issue was on the radar. A number of people approached the Committee. As Mr Allister said, some of those were from the racing fraternity. As the Member well knows, the consultation process, as with any other, was advertised in the public domain in papers etc. It is up to individuals and groups to make their feelings known through that consultation process to the Department.

Members can read the Hansard report from the day that the Minister came to the Committee. Mr Allister said that the churches came late to the debate. Conversations took place on a number of occasions with churches and other groups in the north-west area. When the amendment came to the Executive, my understanding is that the First Minister indicated that the issue of Sunday racing would need to be considered in greater detail. Amendment No 3 is put forward in that very spirit to allow consultation and discussions to take place between the organisers and the Department about a contingency day happening on a Sunday.

If we look at last year's North West 200, the weather forecast was very accurate from midway through that week. I think Mr Allister accepts that. Basically, they were saying that the Saturday was going to be a day of treacherous weather, which it turned out to be. I think that some of those races would probably have taken place on the Thursday evening, which already has a number of races taking place, or, indeed, possibly on the Friday, if that had been the contingency day that week.

Mr Allister threw one other issue into his contribution. He said that, if, for instance a funeral were taking place, problems would be created for the family if they had already decided that it was taking place on the Sunday and not the Saturday. I do not know about the North West, but I am aware that similar circumstances existed about two years ago at the Ulster Grand Prix. Maybe the Minister can clarify this. Tragically, a family had a bereavement on that course, and the organisers facilitated it, as they normally would facilitate any emergency situation for any of these things.

Mr Dallat: Will the Member give way?

Mr Spratt: I am happy to give way.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Member for mentioning that. Will the Member agree that Roads Service in particular is on record for the outstanding work that it does to ensure that funerals take place on time, even in circumstances that are due to inclement weather? Will the Member accept that, down through the years, funerals have taken place on race days with the agreement of the bereaved families? Finally, does the Member find it a little bit distasteful that bereavement has been introduced into this debate?

Mr Spratt: Yes, I accept what the Member said, and I think that it is somewhat sad that that has been brought into the debate. I feel that, now that it has been brought into it, it deserves to be answered by pointing out the situation that developed at the Ulster Grand Prix. I was going to go on to talk about a sudden illness occurring around the course. I have already declared an interest as someone who attends the North West 200. Where I was staying in the Blackrock area — I am not sure whether it was part of Portrush or Portstewart at that point — ambulances were facilitated on the Thursday evening to get to a seriously ill person in a house. I have to say that I have always found that, over the years, organisers are absolutely brilliant in that way.

With amendment No 3, we are putting some careful balance into the discussions that already take place with the Department on what is reasonable and practicable. Mr Allister acknowledged that maybe some of the timings at the North West 200 would not be compatible with other race meetings. During Mr Allister's contribution, I raised the fact that the Ulster Grand Prix requires Roads

Service, for health and safety reasons, to remove a very substantial amount, if not all, of the road signage furniture that is around that racetrack. The organisers insist that it is removed. I hope the Minister can confirm that. Roads Service facilitates that removal immediately after the course is closed. Indeed, to avoid any unnecessary claims on the Department if there were no signage there, that signage should be immediately put in place prior to the reopening of the stretch of road where the Ulster Grand Prix race takes place. It is important to say those things to set the context for what we are trying to do.

The likelihood of Sunday racing taking place is probably very slim. I had a conversation with Mervyn Whyte last Thursday or Friday, and colleagues raised the issue that it takes some 800 people to be around the North West 200 course on race days. I know that one of the concerns of the organisers of the North West 200 is that not all those people may be available on Sunday because many are obviously churchgoers and will be exercising their right to attend their place of worship, which Mr Allister clearly indicated is a human right, and one that I think has to be agreed with. Our amendment gives flexibility, in that the organisers and the Department would have a conversation and reach agreement in the likelihood of an application for a Sunday contingency day being made, given the very clear and professional way that it appears that weather can be indicated by the Met Office to the organisers of such events.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Spratt: I am happy to give way to the Member.

Mr B McCrea: The point of bringing forward this legislation is that we have had to cancel the races in two out of the past three years, and that puts their future under threat. In those situations, it would have been likely that we would have wanted to have availed ourselves of the Sunday contingency day. I ask the Chair of the Committee if we might consider other issues that might cause a delay. I am sure that he will be aware that there was a bomb scare in the stands caused by unscrupulous and scurrilous people to try to disrupt the event. We are at the mercy of not just the weather but other events. The whole idea is that we are trying to get an acceptable compromise whereby, if you like, the show must go on while respecting the right of those people who want to go to their church or other business. I think that there is at least some likelihood that we need provision for that.

Mr Spratt: That is exactly what the amendment seeks to achieve. It has already been accepted by Mr Allister that a Sunday racing contingency day could be applied for, given that all road closing orders have to go through the Committee by 31 March each year for all of the road closures at various events across the Province. On the point that the Member makes about the bomb scare incident, I ask how you can plan for those incidents. They are wrong, disruptive and have no place in society any more, but it is for the Police Service of Northern Ireland to deal with such things. The organisers have a responsibility for the safety of spectators, competitors and those involved, particularly in the pits area where there is, as you know, a very big concentration of people.

That, thankfully, one-off situation so far was absolutely scandalous and was condemned by all right-thinking people. I know that the Member would condemn that sort of behaviour also. Let us hope that it never happens again.

To go back to the other point that Mr McCrea made, the weather has been predicted accurately. The cancellations have had a serious effect, particularly given that both events — the North West 200 and the Ulster Grand Prix — are basically week-long events, because the Killinchy 150 runs in tandem with the Ulster Grand Prix. That is basically a week-long event as well.

3.45 pm

We have already covered, and I do not intend to rehearse, the value to the economy. That has already been put on the record, and it is not disputed today. Our proposed amendment does not specify a time, because specifying a time — and perhaps the Minister will clarify this in his remarks when he speaks — has a knock-on effect, not just for the North West 200, but for other events that may well take place in other parts of the Province where there may be no issue. I think that that is one of the drawbacks of the particular amendment proposed by Mr Allister.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Spratt: I am happy to give way to the Member.

Mr Allister: I seek to follow the Member carefully. If I understand him correctly in respect of amendment No 3, taking the North West 200 as an example, is he saying that he does not anticipate there being circumstances where there would be racing on a Sunday morning, say before 1.30 pm? If that is what he is saying, then what is to be lost by giving the certainty that amendment No 2 would give, bearing in mind that both amendments are compatible and both could be passed? Or is he saying that he anticipates circumstances at the North West where there could be racing during normal church time?

Mr Spratt: No, I did not say that, and I hope that the Member is not trying to put words in my mouth. What I said was that, with the North West 200, the indications are that, if the circumstances arose where a contingency day was required on the Sunday, the organisers would have clear consultation with the Department on the churchgoing fraternity and indeed any other interests in that area. As the Member rightly pointed out earlier, people put up with quite a bit during that week, but he and they acknowledge the benefit to the community from the race. One other issue that has been raised —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Spratt: I am happy to give way.

Mr Wilson: Although it may be that, on a course where there are four churches, you would not countenance racing before 1.30 pm on a Sunday, the Bill is not about the North West 200. The Bill is about road closures, and therefore to accept what has been proposed in amendment No 2 would apply, not just to the North West 200 route, but to all routes. Is that not the point of having one that allows for a greater degree of flexibility and where discretion can be used where there is no disruption on a particular course or for a particular event?

Mr Spratt: I thank my honourable friend for that intervention. That was the point that I was trying to get over. Maybe he got it over much better than I did. That is it exactly. It is not about the North West 200. In most other cases, particularly in the other area that has been mentioned — I do not think that there is a church on the course of the Ulster Grand Prix, but as Mr Allister —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Spratt: Sorry. Just let me finish this point.

As Mr Allister has already said, it is not just about the churches. It is about the human rights of people who want to attend their place of worship. That is true and that should be accommodated, and I think that that will be accommodated by the Department, and by the Minister, in particular, if such a situation arises. It is right that that should be done to allow people to go to their chosen place of worship, wherever that may be, although perhaps not to the four churches concerned. That is accepted.

Mr B McCrea: I appreciate the Chairman's giving way. Just to be clear: taking the North West to one side, are you saying that, in principle, you have no problem with road racing taking place early on a Sunday morning when other people may wish to go to church? Will you just clarify for me that, in general, you think that road racing on a Sunday morning is acceptable?

Mr Spratt: That is not what I said. Again, I hope that the honourable Member is not trying to put words into my mouth. In my view, I have been very clear in what I said about facilitating those who would attend their place of worship. That is exactly what the organisers of the North West do, for instance. However, this is not just about the North West. It is about the spectrum of other races — they may not be two-wheel events but, in some cases, four-wheel events — that have international status. As the Member will know, a lot of hard work and facilitating goes on in those areas.

I see that he is eager to get onto his feet again. I will give way, very briefly, one more time.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: In case the House misunderstands, I will clarify that Mr Spratt has made it clear that he is speaking in a personal capacity.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker; I appreciate that. I also appreciate the Member's generosity in giving way. I did try to be brief in asking the previous question.

There is a question here. I am absolutely not trying to put words into the Member's mouth. He has made quite clear his reservations about running such races on a Sunday morning, and I think that Hansard will show that. However, I have reached a conclusion: I do not think that it is a good idea to run road races before 1.30 pm on a Sunday. That fits in with the Isle of Man's legislation and with what, I think, would be desired by a significant number of the population of Northern Ireland.

I ask Mr Spratt, given his personal position on the matter, if it would not be advisable to be clear and, for the purposes of removing doubt, put it in statute that it can happen only between 1.30 pm and 6.00 pm on a Sunday. That seems quite clear to me. If there are specific issues that you wish to exempt — because of Dundrod or something else — you could do that by way of amendment at Further Consideration Stage.

Mr Spratt: I hear what the Member says. However, it is not just about Dundrod or the North West. It is about the entire spectrum of road-closing orders that the Department has to deal with before 31 March each year when it goes through the Committee. I understand what the Member is saying about Sunday morning and the time. However,

in my view, the inflexibility of putting a time on it creates the problem. There needs to be consultation, through the Department, with the local community and the race organisers. As far as I am aware, that consultation always takes place. It is very clear that the organisers of events such as the North West 200 want to continue their very good cooperation and liaison with the public.

Mr Ó hOisín: Will the Member give way?

Mr Spratt: I am happy to give way to the Member.

Mr Ó hOisín: Does the Member recognise that a number of events that currently take place on a Sunday, such as hill climbs and rallies, would be adversely affected by this legislation?

Mr Spratt: Yes, that is my understanding. Perhaps the Minister will clarify that in his remarks.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Spratt: I think that I have been quite generous in giving way, but I will give way one more time.

Mr Allister: Surely it is erroneous to suggest that those who apply for Sunday racing under the Road Races (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and get it, such as the organisers of hill climbs, are affected by this legislation at all. This legislation applies only to contingency days. Those are not contingency days. Those are approved days under the 1986 Order, so that is a red herring.

Mr Spratt: I do not think that it is a red herring. Of course, the Member is very good at throwing red herrings into various debates when he gets the opportunity. The bottom line is that the hill climb could be on a Saturday and the contingency day could be on a Sunday. That is my understanding. Setting time limits would create major problems for some events in places where there are no churches. Some events take place in reasonably remote areas. I understand what the Member is trying to do by throwing scare tactics into the debate to suit his own argument. I hope that the Minister will clarify the issue, but when this has been discussed at various stages, my and certainly the Committee's understanding has been that, by setting a time limit, you leave the whole situation totally inflexible.

As for the North West 200, I welcome the fact that, despite the problems of the past couple of years, to which Mr McCrea referred, just this week the organisers of the race have been able to encourage and bring a number of new international teams to it. That shows that teams still want to come to what I understand is the best racetrack in the world. My friend Gordon Dunne, who puts on a crash helmet from time to time — I thought he was going to put it on during the debate the other day — is better able to tell me. As a man of speed, and one who follows speed on a regular basis, he will be able to confirm that the North West 200 is possibly one of the best racetracks in the world. I have heard it described that way.

There is benefit in the flexibility provided for in the amendment standing in my name and that of others. Concerns about flexibility will be addressed because the amendment will allow the Department to continue to decide on that. Local people can be assured by the fact that the amendment is in place and that it is not just going to be just a willy-nilly "Let's have it on a Sunday" thing.

That was already acknowledged by Mr Allister when he commented in the previous debate that:

*"This is not a 'Never on a Sunday' issue". —
[Official Report, Bound Volume 89, p381, col 2].*

Therefore, he already accepts the fact that Sunday could be a contingency day, and his amendments clearly indicate that racing could take place on a Sunday, if the circumstances were to arise.

I hope that the Minister will indicate his acceptance or otherwise of amendment No 3, which stands in my name. I do not put any pressure on him as Chair of the Committee, because I know that the Minister would not take that on board. However, people can be reassured because legislation already provides for Sunday racing. At any point, Sunday racing could be applied for, but that has not been the case. In all probability, if the organisers of any of those events were to go down that route, it would be a very last resort. On leaving the North West 200 on a Saturday evening, I see people already heading for the boats to go elsewhere, as Mr Allister indicated in his remarks.

I do not wish to say very much more, but I commend amendment No 3 to the House when it comes to setting a contingency day.

If the Department is satisfied that all the criteria are met and that everything reasonably practicable is done — reasonably practicable is a term that is used in legislation regularly — it should give reassurance to the churches, to folks from other communities and to the wider public in any of those areas that all other avenues will be exhausted before such a contingency is put in place. I have no doubt that the Minister and representatives of the Department will probably say that about the matter when they come to the Committee.

4.00 pm

I commend the amendments that stand in my name and those of my colleagues to the House. I hope that Members right around the Chamber will accept them in the spirit of giving reasonable flexibility and protection to the community.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Labhraím inniu mar LeasChathaoirleach an Choiste Forbartha Réigiúnaí. I will speak as the Deputy Chair of the Committee for Regional Development.

The Committee and the House have agreed that there should be no Committee Stage. Therefore, the Committee's position on the Road Races (Amendment) Bill remains as it was during the debates in the House last week on accelerated passage and Second Stage. We think that it is a pragmatic approach to a problem that has been experienced throughout the North in recent years, particularly with the North West 200 and Dundrod 150 races.

The Committee has and continues to acknowledge the positive economic impact that road races, whether on two wheels or four, have on investment, tourism and sport. Last week, the Chair of the Committee pointed out that it is estimated that, for every £1 of public money spent, there is a return of £30.21. That is a significant investment, which the Committee welcomes and encourages.

The Bill does not introduce the concept of Sunday racing. As outlined by the Chair, that potential already exists. That is evidenced in the number of rally stages, for example,

that are held on Sundays each year. Yes, it is important that people's personal opinions are heard and respected. The Committee received briefings from organisations that are involved in organising those races. We take comfort from the assurances that we received from the Minister and the race organisers that all efforts will be taken to ensure that there is continued dialogue and that all arrangements are appropriate for residents, churches and businesses in the affected areas.

The Committee for Regional Development continues to support the principle of the Bill. From a party political position — my colleague will speak further on that — we will support amendment No 3.

Mr Dallat: I support amendment No 3 and decline to support the other amendments. I am very conscious that every word that I say might be misinterpreted. If anyone in the House believes that I would do anything to infringe anyone's human rights, they have got it really badly wrong. Furthermore, I am absolutely certain that the organisers of the North West 200, which has dominated this debate, would not do that either. Furthermore, on the notion that they might be tempted — that was the word Mr Allister used — those organisers make life and death decisions; they do not indulge in temptation, irrespective of what it is about.

I am sorry that Mr Allister, who represents that area, could not be an outrider for a very important event. The cynic might say that, given that he has gone around in circles all his life and gone nowhere, he is eminently qualified, but there you have it. I will take my advice from the motorbike fanatics, and I use that term in a positive way. I am glad that we have Gordon Dunne and Sammy Wilson, who has deserted us just at the moment. They are people who understand motorcycle racing, and I would be influenced by those people and by the people whom I mentioned last week.

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Although you can observe the nerve centre of the North West 200 from a sun lounge or reclining seat at your holiday home, that is different from someone sitting on a Yamaha 650 with the throttle full open. Those are the people that we should take advice from.

A couple of weeks ago, we had Remembrance Day services across Northern Ireland all happening at 11.00 am. Was there a complaint from anybody? Did any other Church go out of its way to object? No, it did not, because it is a fact of life. I do not believe that the people in the triangle area would be any less tolerant than other people. If we were to go down the road that Mr Allister wants to go down, the first casualty would be the Circuit of Ireland. Can you imagine the international damage that would be done to an event of that magnitude if the word had to go out that the Circuit of Ireland could not take place in Northern Ireland because of a difficulty around Sunday worship.

Mr Deputy Speaker, it was suggested that the Minister — and he can speak for himself — coerced the Committee. I am sure that the Chairman will agree with me that we thought that we coerced the Minister to exercise common sense in this particular issue. When I first saw the amendments, I was quite miffed and was pleased this morning to learn that amendment No 4 was not to be moved. I said to myself, "My God, what experience do the First Minister and deputy First Minister have in road

“racing?” With your indulgence, a few weeks ago, the First Minister told us that he had a scooter, but he fell off it and it disintegrated. My research tells me that the deputy First Minister has absolutely no experience, unless, of course, he was a dispatch rider in a previous life, but that is out of the way now, thank goodness, and it is an issue that we do not have to worry about.

Mr Allister specified times of 1.30 pm to 6.00 pm. I have a feeling that the races in the North West 200 — if that is what we are talking about — could be completed from 2.00 pm to 5.00 pm, so why disadvantage something that is already OK?

Tourism in the north-west and far beyond it is hinged on a small number of events: the North West 200, the Milk Cup, certain golfing tournaments and a few others. During that time, the owners of hotels, guest houses and bed-and-breakfast accommodation get the additional money that they need to reinvest and put millions of pounds back into their enterprises. I can think of nothing worse than jeopardising the north-west in this way. The impact of it would not be confined to the triangle area. It would impact right across the North, and I include Donegal in that, which benefits enormously from the huge number of international visitors who come here and take advantage of the fact that they want to see beyond just the triangle area.

Enough has been said, and enormous effort has gone in to clarify any notion that might be put about that this is some kind of attack on Sunday observance; far from it. I have confidence that the people whom I represent in that area will, in a Christian way, show tolerance towards the event organisers, who cannot take risks at all. When Mervyn Whyte makes a decision to cancel a race, it is devastating. However, surely he is entitled to the right to have some kind of flexibility to complete the event on a Sunday when the need occurs. Perhaps it will happen in my lifetime or it might never happen, but there is too much at stake to make any kind of petty political advantage out of this. I think that that would be disgraceful; it would not be appreciated by anyone.

In conclusion, I am pleased that the Committee is united on this and that it has shown leadership in ensuring that the quagmire of petty party politics does not contaminate an event that is free from that kind of nonsense and that has been for many, many years. The North West 200 is an international event; it welcomes people from far across the world. There is no issue over the flags that fly at the pits. There is none of that nonsense, because those people are well beyond that. So, I will simply say that, as one Member, I lend my support to the Bill.

Mr Kinahan: I am not on the Regional Development Committee and I am probably one of the worst riders to have ever been on a motorcycle. I am more of a danger to myself than to anyone else. I congratulate the Minister on bringing the Bill forward so that we do not see a repeat of what happened with the weather in two out of the past three years. I congratulate him on bringing forward the contingencies that he is trying to put in place today so that 90,000 people — I think that we have information on that number — do not suffer from the North West 200 being cancelled again. I hope that many other road races gain from the same flexibility that the Bill is trying to put in place.

I think that there is a danger in overcomplicating a matter that should be relatively simple. We should be trying to make sure that we put legislation in place that remains simple, leaves the flexibility and allows everybody to work together to get something that suits everybody. As the Member who just spoke said, I cannot believe that those on the church side are going to be creating too great a fuss, unless something appalling goes wrong. They will work together, and they will come up with a solution.

We as a party will be opposing amendment Nos 1 and 2 and supporting amendment No 3. I think that the onus is on everybody to make sure that everything fits and works. I listened to Mr Allister's comments about human rights and the need to respect them. I think that we fully take all that on board, but we do not need to close all the roads. Surely we can sit down and work out the diversions and work through everything together so that we can come up with a solution that works for everybody.

If we applied the legislation to races that have already taken place, it would be pertinent in 11 races that had to work into a Sunday. The Circuit of Ireland did so seven times, and the Durrus rally — I am sorry; I cannot read my own writing — Easter international rally and Rally Ireland have had to work into a Sunday. In one case, the race had to slip into the morning of the Sunday because of what was happening during the day. Do we really want to stop races being able to happen that early in the morning? If you specify times, you make it more difficult. So, let us make sure that we all keep the intention of trying to get everything to work. I very much appreciate that amendment No 3 is trying to do that.

As a point of interest, in Dundrod, they work with all the churches, and none has found any difficulty with any racing before 1.30 pm. I think that we should keep that in mind. Do we really need such strong regulations as those that amendment Nos 1 and 2 are putting in place?

4.15 pm

When it comes to amendment No 3, I have already said that it does exactly what we want. It helps us get to a point at which everyone is talking to each other and trying to find a way forward. We have to be careful to make sure that we leave that flexibility in place. Were we to tie ourselves to just the afternoon on a Sunday, and the weather then changes or some other event happens, we might find ourselves cancelling for a second time, with everything that goes with that. My plea is that we get the Bill into place with just amendment No 3 being made. We support it and look forward to seeing it work for everybody.

Mr McCarthy: Unlike Mr Kinahan, I am a member of the Regional Development Committee, but have been so only for a short period. I was not fortunate enough to have the pleasure of listening to the Minister, his Department and others who made presentations to the Committee. Therefore, I have little knowledge of the subject at the moment. However, the Alliance Party fully supports and totally acknowledges the right of all people to free passage to and from their place of worship. They also have the right to spend Sunday as they wish.

It is our opinion that the Road Races (Amendment) Bill allows for flexibility on that issue. As such, we support the Bill and reject amendment Nos 1 and 2. I understand that amendment No 3 is to minimise all disruption to the local

community. We can support that, and I am fully behind the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson and other members of the Committee who have spoken. I support amendment No 3 but reject amendment Nos 1 and 2.

Mr Easton: I will speak to amendment No 3. This been a reasonably healthy debate so far and demonstrates a clear understanding by MLAs of the need to create a degree of flexibility in the road closure arrangements in order to try to avoid a recurrence of the abandonment of events in circumstances such as the adverse weather conditions of the Ulster Grand Prix in 2008 and the North West 200 in 2011 and 2013. I believe that, if passed, amendment No 3 allows for the Department to continue to assess the practicalities and workability of each promoter's proposition individually and impose whatever conditions that the Department considers appropriate to ensure that disruption to the local community is kept to a minimum. It would ensure that Sundays are a last resort for racing and that religious freedoms are protected, as are the rights of people.

It is important to re-emphasise that none of the seven road race promoters has ever indicated to us any intent to switch its main race days from a Saturday to a Sunday other than in a contingency situation. Amendment No 3 gives the proper flexibilities and protections for churches and race organisers.

On amendment No 2, we know that, as the law stands, racing can occur on a Sunday, and we want to make that racing on a Sunday is a last resort. The amendments do not protect churches fully, as some churches do hold services on Sunday afternoons, and I do not believe that that has been considered.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Easton: No, I will not give way. Key to the whole Bill are flexibility and common sense. I emphasise the words "flexibility" and "common sense". Amendment No 3 protects the needs of churches and their services, protects the needs of residents and protects the rights of the race organisers to race. That is why I believe that that amendment is the proper and appropriate way forward.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé breá sásta bheith ag labhairt agus ag plé an ábhair thábhachtaigh seo inniu. I am pleased to speak to this stage of the Road Races (Amendment) Bill. In supporting amendment No 3, I also wish to support — as I have in the past — road racing in its various forms across the board. I also particularly support the local residents and businesses in the Portrush/Portstewart/Coleraine triangle.

The purpose of the Bill was to introduce a degree of flexibility that would allow organisers of race meetings to reschedule to another day if, for whatever reason, a cancellation was required. It would not be prudent to introduce severe caveats into the legislation that would unduly continue to restrict that flexibility.

The purpose of a number of the amendments is, on the face of it, to accommodate the good church-attending folk on the North West 200 circuit. However, to introduce a blanket ban or restriction on Sunday racing would be a mistake. If — it is a big "if" and only as a last resort — a Sunday is to be considered, full cognisance of the wishes of local people should and will be taken into account,

including about times. I talked with Mervyn Whyte, the clerk of the course and of the Coleraine Motor Club, as recently as this morning. He assured me that it would be only in the very remotest instance that a Sunday would be considered for racing and that all local wishes would be respected. Indeed, in 2010, during my tenure as mayor of Limavady, Mervyn and his team organised the Shackleton festival of motorsport, which ran on a Sunday, accommodated all local concerned parties, including churches, and was a huge success. Mervyn also told me that, whilst a time restriction might marginally affect the race programme of the North West 200, it would be disastrous for events such as the Circuit of Ireland and other hill climbs and rallies. Thus, the second amendment would not be prudent or wise as it would negatively affect those events.

The fourth amendment, which would have required the signing off on racing by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, was a bit cumbersome and impractical. I welcome its removal. The third amendment, which has been considered by the Regional Development Committee, allows, probably, the most flexibility and, therefore, receives my support. I wish the road racing fraternity every success and uninterrupted racing in 2014. Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mrs Hale: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the amendments to the Road Races (Amendment) Bill. There are four main areas that I believe we should continue to remain focused on when considering the amendments.

The first is tourism. Challenging tourism targets for 2014 have been set in the Programme for Government: to increase visitor numbers to 4.2 million and grow tourism revenue to £676 million by December 2014. The North West 200, the Ulster Grand Prix and the Circuit of Ireland all contribute massively to those targets. The North West 200 attracts over 100,000 spectators each year and ensures that small hotels and B&Bs get a vibrant return on business year on year that becomes a stable part of their annual income. Similar spectator figures are attributed to the Circuit of Ireland each year. In my constituency, the Ulster Grand Prix likewise attracts thousands of spectators each year and places income into many SME businesses annually. Those three events alone can contribute over 10% of the 4.2 million visitors target. It is estimated that the North West 200 alone contributes £7 million to the Northern Ireland economy — £4 million locally. That is equivalent to 150 extra jobs in the service industry.

Secondly, there is sponsorship. I am sure that many in the House know how difficult it is, even for illustrious sporting events, to access key sponsorship. The abandonment of the North West 200 and the Ulster Grand Prix in recent years has made sponsorship deals difficult to find. That can make it tough to attract the best competitors to Northern Ireland. Thirdly, there are the spectators. Spectators' investment, sponsorship and tourism promote Northern Ireland on a worldwide stage in a very positive light. Finally, there is participant safety. The main reason for having a contingency day is to help to make tough decisions easier for those such as Mervyn Whyte. To be faced with juggling sponsorship deals, pressure from spectators and the delivery of a world spectacle against a backdrop of racing safety is no easy task. I believe that the Bill will help to ease some of that burden.

Whilst I acknowledge Mr Allister's amendment, I am concerned that the potential of trying to fit a whole day's racing into a three- or four-hour slot may not always be viable or, indeed, safe for participants, marshals or spectators. It does nothing to help to find a balance between the priorities that I have already mentioned. That is why the DUP wanted to bring an amendment to the House today. Whilst we recognise the rights of racegoers, we are fundamentally pledged to represent and support those who wish to attend their place of worship without any prejudice or unforeseen delay. The DUP amendment ensures that:

"An order may not specify the whole or part of a Sunday as a contingency day unless the Department is satisfied that the terms of the order are such as to minimise as far as reasonably practicable any disruption to the activities of the local community on that day."

I believe in the strongest terms that that will ensure that all Sunday activities in the community will be taken on board by the Department to ensure that the decision will limit any disruption to those attending their place of worship. I am sure that this amendment will work to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland has an equally important part to play when considering any decision that relates to a contingency day. Sunday mornings and evenings are a live issue for the North West 200. This legislation, of course, covers other road races. Indeed, it is fair to say that, in other areas, Sunday worship is not negatively impacted and, therefore, the morning is needless. Amendment Nos 1 and 2 do not cover those.

The people elected us to make accountable decisions. These amendments underpin accountable government and accountable decisions. I support amendment No 3.

Mr Byrne: I take part in this debate largely as a pillion passenger of Mr Dallat, who is in charge of the motorbike. *[Laughter.]* The motion is about dealing with the running of road racing on Sundays, where the organisers need to run a race or sections of a race event on a Sunday in the event of bad weather or other unfortunate circumstances. Sunday racing takes place all over Europe, particularly for motorcycling. The European Grand Prix motorcycle racing series takes place across Europe during the racing season mainly on Sundays. The closure of public roads is the issue here, given the context of the amendments.

We all remember the late Joey Dunlop, who was killed at a Sunday racing event in the summer of 2000 in eastern Europe. Many people from Northern Ireland who are involved in motorcycle racing take part in racing on Sundays across the continent. Amendment No 3 seems sensible and appropriate, given the difficult decisions that sometimes need to be taken because of the size and scale of the North West 200. The organising committee deserves our support, and this amending legislation is needed to bring some certainty to the future running of such a big event. Mr Mervyn Whyte, the chief organiser and clerk of the North West 200, is to be applauded for all his efforts over the years, particularly in recent years, to deal with very difficult circumstances. I support amendment No 3. Let us get this legislation into practice.

Mr B McCrea: There seems to be some misapprehension in the House that those who speak against the legislation are, somehow, against the running of the North West 200,

but nothing could be further from the truth. In my formative days, I grew up in Juniper Hill and watched the races for years going round the place. I also know Mervyn Whyte personally, and I have been at the races when they were cancelled, so I know how disappointing it is when all that hard work goes to waste.

I support the principle of the Bill in trying to make it possible, if something comes up, to run on into the Sunday. I understand all the economic arguments and all the issues around how important it is to Northern Ireland. I confess that I was one of the people who, when I saw the Bill originally, said that it was a simple Bill in principle and that I would support it. However, I pay credit to Mr Allister, speaking from the Back Benches, for pointing out that there are implications for people if we run a race on a Sunday. One of the Members on the opposite Benches mentioned that the First Minister also identified that as a particular issue.

One of the challenges for this legislature is that the legislation that we produce has to be competent. I am sure that the Attorney General will want to look at the legislation at the end of its process. He will need to take into account whether it is human rights-compliant. The argument has been and will be made, and it is a legal point. I listened to the argument put by my colleague Mr Allister. He highlighted the balancing of the rights of individuals to attend church against the interests of rescheduling one of Northern Ireland's most successful sporting events. That is a balance of rights that needs to be considered. We are not doing people any favours if we introduce legislation that will not survive a legal challenge or the Attorney General's scrutiny.

That highlights some of the perils of unnecessarily pushing legislation through by accelerated passage.

4.30 pm

Today's debate has been constructive and good points have been made. I pay tribute to Mr Spratt for acknowledging certain issues. I confess that I had not seen some of those issues coming. That is why good Committee scrutiny is important, because you do come up with things and you wonder, "What if?" I do not know what happens if there is another terrorist attack or if there are multiple fatalities on the track, heaven forbid. Would we cancel it?

Mr Spratt: I thank the Member for giving way. He has acknowledged some of the points that have already been discussed. In the case of multiple fatalities — God forbid; I hope it never happens — I suggest that the event would be totally cancelled and no further racing would take place. That has happened in the past. With all due respect, Mr McCrea, that is another red herring that you are throwing into the debate.

Mr B McCrea: As we have both acknowledged, some of these points have come up. However, it is the very unpredictable nature of what might happen that worries us.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: Of course, if you let me finish this point. It is the very unpredictable nature of what might happen that worries us. What are the contingencies? I was at the North West 200 two years ago when it was not just the bad weather that stopped it, but an oil spill. A combination of

events came together. That is the unexpected that we have to deal with. I give way to Mr Wilson.

Mr Wilson: I know that the Member probably thinks that he is making a very important argument. I do not want to burst his bubble, but if he actually read the legislation, he would see that an event such as he has described could not be catered for by this legislation because the application for the contingency day has to be made 24 hours previously. Unfortunately, if an event happened at the race, that could not be catered for by allowing an extra day because 24 hours' notice would not have been given.

Mr B McCrea: I am grateful for the clarification from Mr Wilson, so often the sage of this House in pointing out where others have got it wrong. I was merely pointing out that there are contingencies we cannot anticipate that we have to deal with. I was struck by the Isle of Man's Road Races Act 1982, which, no doubt, the former Minister will have read. It states:

"The Department shall give such public notice of the provisions of any road race order as it considers appropriate in order to bring the effect of the order to the attention of the public."

I am not sure that the 24 hours, 12 hours — whatever period it is — is not unnecessarily curtailing what would be the appropriate answer. My argument in all of this is about how we find a balance between what we want to achieve, which is a successful tourist event that maximises the opportunity to bring wealth and jobs into our part of the world, and the legitimate rights of people who may want to go to church or engage in some other activity?

There were some who are not here at the moment who tried to say that this was an attack by people who said that you should not go to church. That is not the case, but if you ask people around Portrush, Portstewart and Coleraine, some of them will definitely want to go to church on a Sunday morning or Sunday evening, and they will be severely put upon if they cannot get there, regardless of human rights legislation or anything else. We have some responsibility to consider how we can minimise the effect on those people.

Mr Spratt: Will the Member give way?

Mr I McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: Sorry, I am not sure who was first. I will give way to the Chair first, and then to Mr McCrea.

Mr Spratt: The Member raises the issue of folks going to church. I think that has been well and truly discussed in the debate, but I am sure the Member will acknowledge that there are people of other religions who perhaps worship on a Saturday and who may well want to go to their place of worship on a Saturday, when the entire day is taken up with racing.

Mr B McCrea: If Mr McCrea wishes to —

Mr I McCrea: I am happy for you to respond to that.

Mr B McCrea: So, the issue, as Mr Allister pointed out in a response to another Member, is that this is to do with contingency days — where you get the appropriate authorisation in the appropriate way for a Sunday race that is entirely within the law. My conjecture on this point is that, if you read the Isle of Man Road Races Act 1982 —

Mr Allister obviously took some of his wording from that, which is good practice — you see that it states:

"between the hours of 1.30 p.m. and 6 p.m. in the event of the postponement".

The TT says that that is the most appropriate way. When I started to look at this legislation and go through it, I asked how we would deal with competing rights. I am sympathetic to both points of view. I heard words coming from Members opposite that it would be in only the most extreme of circumstances that people would consider running a road race on the Sunday morning, and also, probably, on the Sunday evening, because as was rightly pointed out, if you stop the road racing at 6.00 pm on a Saturday, you should probably be talking about 6.00 pm on a Sunday. If it is only in extremis, if you are really reluctant to do it, the balance of probability must be that you should legislate with clarity that this will not be allowed to happen. It is entirely possible, from my experience of the North West, that you could run whatever races you needed to run between 1.30 pm and 6.00 pm. That is a sensible compromise. Just because Mr Allister brought it forward does not make it wrong. It is not that he and I are on the same wing, as you know. We may be on the same Bench, but we are not on the same wing of political thought, but he does have a point, and it is not a disgrace or saying anything wrong to acknowledge that.

I know that there are Members who think and care passionately about this. I just happen to think that there is legislation that does what we want it to do; it comes from the Isle of Man and we should look at it.

I am looking forward to hearing from the Minister, because he has been strangely silent on these matters but is sitting there patiently waiting to give us some information.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I am waiting my turn.

Mr B McCrea: He is waiting his turn. Well, that is very good. I read the minute of the ministerial briefing on the issue, and the Minister said, I think, that officials had not been able to engage with the Manx Government in detail at the time but there had been a meeting scheduled for, I think, 23 October, when these matters would be looked at in detail.

I know Mr Kennedy to be a man who cares deeply about church and these matters.

Mr Dallat: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I will in just a minute, Mr Dallat. I know that he cares deeply about these matters, so I am really interested to hear what consultation he has had and what way he approaches these matters. If anybody was going to take care of the competing issues, I can think of no better person, so I really am looking forward to hearing what he has to say on the matter. However, it might have been more reassuring for me had he brought forward the amendments. Although we are on the record of having done so in the past, the danger of accepting accelerated passage is that the unexpected comes up to get you. It would have been better had we had proper community consultation to do the job justice.

Mr Dallat: Although I appreciate Mr McCrea's probable adolescence in the Juniper Hill caravan site with his bucket and spade in the same way that I respect Mr Allister in his

holiday home overlooking this event, surely Mr McCrea would agree that the events on the Isle of Man are not nearly as comprehensive or complex as the events that this Bill attempts to address.

Mr B McCrea: Although I respect Mr Dallat greatly, particularly when he is in the Chair, I have to take a little bit of exception to that point. There is quite a body of evidence about the Isle of Man TT, which takes place over two weeks, that is surely worthy of at least having a look at. If they reached the conclusion that holding a race between 1.30 pm and 6.00 pm on a Sunday is the appropriate way forward, surely that is worth considering.

When Mr Dallat was speaking, he was at pains to ensure that he was not in any way attacking those who wish to go to church, and I accept that. What I am suggesting is that Mr Dallat should look carefully at the existing legislation and at the arguments put forward that this is an acceptable compromise that meets both constituencies halfway. It allows the majority of people who want to go to church on a Sunday morning or Sunday evening to do so, while, at the same time, giving sufficient certainty to the race organisers should there be a need to postpone.

It is not often that it happens in the Chamber, but there are times when people put forward compelling arguments. Mr Allister put forward the argument that there is pressure on event organisers to try to do things to suit the sponsors, the teams and all the other stakeholders. That is not a bad thing; it is just people trying to come together. We, therefore, need to try to give the organisers some certainty about what is going on, and that is why I have some difficulty with amendment No 3. The language might be acceptable if it were being used in a no-day-named motion or some other motion that we were discussing, but we are talking about legislation that will go on the statute book.

The amendment states:

“to minimise as far as reasonably practicable”.

Those are confusing, soft, woolly words that are open to interpretation.

Mr Spratt: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I will give way to you in just a moment, Mr Spratt.

Those words are open to interpretation, and that is not helpful. What we want is clarity and something that removes doubt. We should be saying to people, “These are the rules that everyone can work to with absolute certainty”.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree with me that the words “reasonably practicable” have been used in legislation for many years and will probably be used in legislation for many years to come to allow a degree of flexibility in whatever the particular circumstances may be?

Mr B McCrea: Mr Spratt makes a point. Were this, shall we say, generic legislation for the longer term, one may allow case law or other things to be challenged or people to come forward to say, “This is what the interpretation is”. Frankly, I would prefer it if the Assembly provided clarity and said exactly what it wants.

In response to one of my questions, Mr Allister highlighted the fact that, because of the immediacy of the decision-

making for the event, it is not possible to get normal legal redress because you cannot get some sort of legal opinion before the event. That is why, in this case, I think that we should say what we mean and mean what we say. We should be absolutely clear and build on the appropriate legislation that is extant in the Isle of Man. I do not think that that compromises any of the principles being put forward by Members in the Chamber, and I think that it is a sensible way in which to go forward.

I would like more time to have a proper consultation with the churches and other people who have a point of view on this. As other Members pointed out, this is not just about the churches. The event places a significant imposition on all the citizens who live in the triangle, so we owe it to them to try to do this in the best possible way.

I want to make a point about the contingency day having to be made 24 hours beforehand. The Isle of Man Road Races Act 1982 does not state that it has to be made 24 hours or 12 hours beforehand. It states:

“as it considers appropriate in order to bring the effect of the order to the attention of the public.”

We live in a fast-moving world. We should allow people to make the appropriate decisions.

I see Mr Wilson gesticulating to me. I presume that that is an indication that you would like to say something.

4.45 pm

Mr Wilson: I wish that the Member would stop being schizophrenic in the Chamber and make his mind up. He said that people needed time to seek legal redress. Immediately after that, he said that we should not even be given 24 hours' notice. What does he want: time for people to have legal redress, or no notice at all? If he is going to make an argument, at least let us have some cogency in it.

Mr B McCrea: I am glad that we have decided to have some cogency in the argument, because what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. You have it the wrong way round in this argument as well. I am telling you quite clearly that the amendment that I will be supporting and the amendment that, on reflection, people will say is the right one, is amendment No 2. We will, with clarity, say that Sunday is definitely a contingency day but only between the hours of 1.30 pm and 6.00 pm. That is the period that will be organised in statute. If and when it becomes necessary to do that, you will make an announcement. You will not need to put 24 hours or 12 hours or whatever time in. That may not be possible. It depends on when the event takes place. If you do it this way, you have a piece of coherent, cohesive and sensible legislation. That is what I am arguing for.

We talk about fine words and about moving things forward. Of course everybody is in support of running the North West 200 or any of the other major events as best as is practically possible. You want to do it right for everybody, but there are rights for every citizen in our society that we should not ride roughshod over.

Members raised interesting points. The Dunderod races were brought up. It is entirely possible to be specific in legislation about how you would deal with them. You can amend this at Further Consideration Stage. The legislation as currently presented to us here is not the right

legislation, and it will end up being challenged either by the Attorney General or in the courts. We will have to revisit it. People in our country will say, "You are not being fair to us. I am quite happy to do my bit, but I draw the line at not being able to go to my church or whatever". We need to explain to those people that their views are being taken into consideration and that we will do it in the proper way. I urge Members, even now, to think about this. Mr Allister's amendments are not that far away from what we all want to achieve, but they are the safer legal position. I urge Members to support amendment Nos 1 and 2 and to reject amendment No 3.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity, as a non-member of the Committee but as someone with a keen interest in motorsport, to speak on the Bill today. I believe that flexibility will be key for event organisers under the new Bill. However, flexibility must also work to the benefit of the locals who may be affected by road closures. It is vital that guarantees are put in place to ensure that churchgoers and others are given the assurances that they need and deserve.

I know that many churches around many of the circuits, especially the North West 200, embrace the race festival week and work with the organisers. In fact, a lot of them open their doors and have special services on the Sunday for racegoers and those who are still there. A lot of them charge spectators to use their facilities and for car parking. They also provide refreshments, so they gain some income for their church. It is important that the relationships that are developed are maintained and that clear guidelines are put in place to satisfy the local community's needs and requirements.

Any event that closes public roads does not happen without the cooperation of the local community. That has especially been the case for a lot of rallies recently. Rallies tend to be run in areas of low population density, and they are challenged more and more. They are challenged because people object, and where there are clear objections to any of the events it is unlikely that they will happen. I know of a number of rallies that had to cancel stages after people objected. I am going off the track slightly, but it is relevant to mention cases in which funerals are planned. In such cases, the stage of the rally is cancelled, the organisers move on, and the people who are affected are given the courtesy that they deserve to carry out the funeral with the appropriate respect. The organisers are very switched on to the needs of the community. They are part of the community, and they need cooperation to run any event. That will be the case, and that is key to the future of the North West 200, as it is to any other event. From talking to its organisers, I know that they are fully aware of that.

It is important to put on record that the North West 200 for 2014 is planned for 10 May to 17 May. The main day of racing, all being well, and God willing, will be Saturday 17 May. The plans for next year are to have practice on the Tuesday and the Thursday, with races possibly on the Thursday. Friday will be there as an option. Saturday will be the main day of racing. The plan is still to run the schedule as planned over the previous years. Sunday will be a contingency day, and I think the point has been well made that it is only a contingency day. It will not be there as part of the programme. It will be used only as a last resort. It is important to make clear that the organisers are

very keen not to run the event on a Sunday, unless as a last resort. It is important that we nail that. The clerk of the course, Mervyn Whyte, has said to me personally that it would be the Sunday afternoon before a wheel would turn, if that were to happen. Personally, I would prefer the race —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dunne: No, I will not be giving way.

Personally, I would prefer the race not to run on Sunday, but, at present, the race could run on Sunday. I think that that has been made clear. It could run on Sunday at present, but, of course, that would be subject to road closing orders, which would have to be negotiated. That would probably be difficult.

As we have said, the organisers are planning to meet the churches involved. I understand that they are doing that this week. They have already met the three race chaplains, one of whom I know personally and who is the minister of the Presbyterian church in Portrush. He is a very keen biker named John Kirkpatrick, and I am sure that a number of Members know him. He has been involved in the negotiations.

It is important to us that the organisers act responsibly, and I am confident that they will act responsibly. The point was made in our group earlier today that it is important that the organisers do run the event according to the plan that they have for this year. It is important that they do not leave the decisions to the last minute and think that Sunday will be an easy option. That will not be the case, and it is important that this legislation be used to ensure that Sunday racing is only a contingency and a last resort. As I said, Sunday racing could happen and, of course, would be subject to a road closing order. It is important that we do all in our power to manage such racing, if ever it is to happen. Full negotiations will take place with the churches involved and with all those around the circuit. It is important that those continue. Running races on a Sunday will, as I said, be a last resort.

The difficulty is — this is important — that it takes 800 people to be out on a course to run that race safely. Practically all those people are volunteers. They are not getting paid for what they are doing. If they have been there for most of the week, as most of them will have been, they will be glad to be going home on the Sunday. A lot of rallies that are run here are now run on a Friday and a Saturday. People want to get home on the Sunday, especially if they are travelling back to the mainland, in order to get back to work on the Monday.

I think that the important issue is that the race will not be run on the Sunday, unless as a last resort.

If it does happen, it will be only after clear negotiation with all those involved. The Minister will have the last say on it. He will obviously be consulted about the road closing order, and it will have to be done within 24 hours.

It is important that we do all in our power to support events such as the North West 200 and the Ulster Grand Prix. As has been said, Mervyn Whyte, the clerk of the course, announced last week that he has drawn new names to the North West 200. To bring new names to Northern Ireland at this particular time is a great success. Fair play to him for doing that. He travels the world to bring people to Northern Ireland, and that is what we are about. We should be supporting him in selling this country across the world.

Motorcycle racing is a very competitive sport. It is wheel-to-wheel racing, and they do not give one another an inch on the track — it is a bit like in here, where we do not give one another an inch. However, unlike here, there are clear winners, and we should do all we can to support them.

We must recognise the work of the organisers. They are out there to manage the risk; that is important as well. They have done a lot to try to manage the risk and reduce it for the competitors. In previous years, they would have run races in very wet conditions. When the rain comes down, the risk factor increases remarkably. I must say that the organisers, who are obviously under serious pressure from the teams and sponsors to run the event during wet days, have not done so, and all credit to them for doing that. Safety has come first — not the cost but the real risk, which is to the lives of the competitors. As a keen fan, it is most frustrating to sit all day up at the North West 200 circuit waiting for racing to start, as we did this year. However, I think that the right decision was made.

I hope that the right decision will be made here today and that we go for amendment No 3.

Mr G Robinson: I speak to amendment No 3. As a Member for the area in which the prestigious North West 200 takes place, I have been very aware of the devastating impact that the bad weather has had in recent years with regard to the racing programme and attracting visitors to Northern Ireland, as well as to our own racing fraternity. I appreciate that we are talking about not only the North West 200 but other road closure orders in Northern Ireland.

Regrettably, two out of the past three years have seen one of Northern Ireland's largest sporting events all but cancelled due to the inclement weather. The Road Races (Amendment) Bill is necessary to bring greater scope to organisers. It will ensure greater flexibility in successfully running the races for the organisers and will benefit our tourism industry throughout Northern Ireland.

There is one area of concern that amendment No 3 addresses. Considering that the current legislation does not prohibit Sunday racing, amendment No 3 defines the times during which it can take place and will help to protect churchgoers, residents and others who may be affected.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr G Robinson: No.

The amendment will minimise the times for road racing, particularly on Sundays. I want to see greater flexibility for road racing throughout Northern Ireland, but it must not be at any price. Amendment No 3 acknowledges that. Current legislation needs this clarification to aid all sporting events that need a road closure order.

It is worthy of note that many competitors in local road races leave immediately after racing finishes at events on the Saturday due to racing commitments at circuits in England and, indeed, on the continent. Therefore, Sunday racing would be severely curtailed. I stress that I do see the addition of contingency days as being important, but in the communications that I have received, there is great difficulty with one of the days being a Sunday. I believe that amendment No 3 recognises that concern.

I want to make it clear that I certainly do not advocate Sunday road racing. I believe that amendment No 3 limits that, in comparison with existing legislation. There is also

the fact that racing on Thursday and Friday is the primary aim of the Bill, depending on weather conditions.

I must also pay tribute to the hard-working organisers, such as Mervyn Whyte in my constituency, who I am convinced will do everything that he can to minimise the potential for Sunday road racing.

I support amendment No 3, which I see as workable and equitable.

5.00 pm

Mr Wilson: I felt compelled to speak in this debate for two reasons, the first being that I think that I am the only authentic biker to have the opportunity to say anything about this issue. Other Members have talked about how wonderful the sport is and how much it contributes to the economy, but I actually participate, although I am not a racer. Mind you, a few police constables have taken issue with that when they were giving me points. Secondly, I wanted to take part in the debate because, as I listened to some of the arguments, particularly the illogical arguments put forward by Mr McCrea, I felt that we could not conclude the debate without looking at what the legislation is about and the protections available in the amendment standing in the name of a number of my party colleagues.

I want to make two things clear from the very start. This is not about the introduction of Sunday racing. Mr Dunne made that point clear. This would be an exception and one that would be bound by a lot of qualifications and conditions that the Minister would have the ability to impose on any racing. Secondly, although it would be difficult to get a road closure order, people could apply for a full road race on a Sunday at the moment. However, as Mr Dunne again pointed out, it may be difficult for the Minister to grant permission for that.

Everybody is coming at this with the same purpose. I know that Mr Allister did not suggest it, but I think that he understands that any amendment contrary to the one that he has proposed is not proposed because those of us on this Bench wish to oppose something simply because it is proposed by him. I think that he knows that we are not so immature when it comes to legislation. Mr McCrea suggested that, of course, but then Mr McCrea's arguments were so weak that he had to think of some reason to justify his position. However, this is not about where the amendment comes from and making a contrary amendment. We are all coming from the same place and wanting to achieve the same objective.

The objective is, first, to ensure that, when conditions arise that result in races not being fulfilled and tens of thousands of people who attend those races being disappointed, there will be a way in which we can ensure that the races happen. At the same time, we must understand that, when we close roads, we disrupt the lives of people who live along those roads. Whether it is on a Sunday or any other day, they are disrupted. Regardless of the benefits that road races may bring to a local economy, people will still feel that the normal pattern of their life and things that they want to do have been altered, and they will not like it. We must try to balance those two things.

Mr Allister's amendment takes a very black and white view that the way of protecting is to say that, if someone applies for a road race or to have a contingency where the road race might be held on a Sunday, you have specific

hours in which that cannot happen. Our amendment — the amendment standing in the names of my party colleagues — recognises that this Bill is about more than one race. It is about a whole range of races, where there are lots of different circumstances and where perhaps disruption on a Sunday would not be as significant as disruption on another day of the week. For that reason, the Bill has to reflect the wide variety of circumstances that must be taken into consideration. Hence the difference in the two amendments.

Let me go through some of the concerns that have been expressed. First, there is concern that our amendment does not give people the same protection as Mr Allister's absolutist approach. Let us look at the process. This is more for the education of people like Mr McCrea, who, I think, made his speech and then decided that he should read the Bill, or maybe wrote his speech and did not even read the Bill. The process involves a lot of consultation. When people decide that they want to hold a race, they will know what roads need to be closed and they will make an application. There will be consultation, and they will have to show that they have spoken to people. After all that, the Minister will make an order. The order is made well before — two or three months — the event takes place. At that time, if the organisers apply for a contingency day, those who are affected will know that it is not just Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, or whatever days. The organisers might also have applied for a contingency for other days, including Sunday, and people will be able give their views on that. The Minister will have those views available to him when the order is being made.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: I will, yes.

Mr Allister: The Member lectured Mr McCrea about not reading the Bill, but has the Member read his own amendment? The DUP amendment is Sunday-specific. It does not relate to any other contingency day. There will not be the input, outside of Sunday as a contingency day, that the Member speaks about.

Mr Wilson: There will be in so far as, if there is a contingency day other than Sunday and someone has applied for a Friday, for example, people will be able to give their views about that contingency day at the stage when the application is made. The Minister will still have the ability to take those views into consideration even when the order is being made. If someone makes it quite clear that a Friday is absolutely out of order, I would imagine that the Minister, when the order is being made, could simply say that the order will not include Friday as a contingency day. There is that first step.

There are two parts to this process. First, there is the consultation on the making of the order. Secondly, once the contingency arises, there is the application to the Minister for the contingency day, and the Minister has to make a direction. The Minister's direction will presumably be informed by the information that has been gleaned during the consultation period, so it is wrong to suggest, as Mr McCrea did, that there is no input from the public. There is input at the very start, well ahead of the event.

I come to his point about people who would feel disadvantaged by not having time to apply for a judicial review. They would have time at that stage, of course. If the order granted the contingency day for a Sunday and

people felt that that was so disruptive to them that it should not be included, they have ample time to take the issue to court. The order will be made at least two months before the race takes place. As far as timing, the opportunity for redress and, therefore, human rights compliance are concerned, there is an opportunity, first, for people to be consulted, secondly, to know the shape of the order and, thirdly, for time to challenge the order.

Of course, the difficulty comes where, if they had not challenged it up to that time and the contingency has to be used, there could be a minimum of 24 hours for the Minister to be notified that the day has to be used and for him or her to make the direction on the particular application. However, Mr McCrea is so enthusiastic now that he does not even want 24 hours notice to have to be given. At least, in his convoluted arguments, that was one of the things that arose.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: Yes, and if he wants to correct what he said earlier, I am more than happy to hear his correction. However, what I heard, and what Hansard will record, is that he said that people will not have enough time to appeal a decision and, in his next breath, he asked why we have to have 24 hours notice because something might happen, all of a sudden, and we might just need to change the day of the race.

Mr B McCrea: I just stood up because I had a certain amount of sympathy for Mr Wilson. He is obviously floundering and waffling around the whole thing here. About six times, he has tried to engage me in debate, but I am quite happy that, when we look in Hansard at the different points that he made, we will see that they are indeed contradictory. If you want to have a debate, Mr Wilson — through you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker — I am quite happy to do so, but do not try to do the old blether, the old bluff and the old Sammy thing. Deal with the facts. What we want is certainty. That is the issue. Your amendment does not provide certainty. That is why I oppose it, and that is where you are wrong.

Mr Wilson: Not only can he not read, I do not think that he can even hear. Let me just go through the process again. This is like the slow end of the class. Someone wants to organise a road race. They decide what the route is going to be, and they have to consult the people along that route. They then have to apply for an order to be made. They have to show what consultation has taken place and give quite a lot of detail. If you look at the 1986 Order, you will see that there is a whole page detailing what information they have to give, including indemnities; the suspending of rights of way; prohibiting, regulating and restricting traffic; and details about the way in which they will ensure there are no injuries or damage to property. There is a whole range of stuff that they have to do, which is specified in the 1986 Order. That has to be done a long time in advance. The difference is that they will now be able to apply for contingency days, and we will be certain what days they wish to use as contingency days if necessary, because they have to give that information months in advance. So, there is certainty. There is also certainty about the route that will be used for those times. If an application is made, it is up to the Minister to make a decision about whether that contingency day will be granted and what conditions or directions might be attached to it, informed, of course, by all the information that has been gathered.

The question is this: if it is a Sunday, do we say that the contingency day can only be used from 1.30 pm to 6.00 pm? That may be applicable in the case of the North West 200. I suspect that, if there are four churches along the route, no Minister will give a direction that races should be held while those four churches are holding services, either in the morning or the evening. I imagine that the Minister would be well aware of the objections because, at the original consultation on the order, he would have been told that. I imagine that the race organisers, to try to get support for the race, would have given certain assurances to the people who might be affected that they would not seek to race at those times anyway.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. I followed his train of thought and argument precisely. He said that he suspects that a Minister would not give leave if races were to occur at a time when church services were to be held along the route. Does the Member agree that we need to hear very specifically from the Minister that that is not a possibility and that it simply will not occur?

Mr Wilson: I cannot speak for the Minister, but I think that it would be a very foolish Minister who would say that, if there are churches along the route and there are services, those services cannot be held. The Minister can answer for himself. What I am saying is that, given the process that has been laid down in the Order, there is ample opportunity, first, for the race organisers to discuss the issue with those who are affected; secondly, for the race organisers to put a case to the Minister and to make the arguments for the contingency days; and, thirdly, for the Minister to know what the issues are.

5.15 pm

Mr McCallister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: I will give way in a moment or two.

There is ample opportunity for all those arguments to be heard. Of course, if our amendment were made, the Minister would have to show that, having been aware of all that information, having heard what arose in the consultation and, perhaps, even having had direct representation from those affected, he had taken all reasonable and practical steps to avoid any disruption to the community. So, there will be an instruction in the legislation for him to pay attention to what he has heard. That does the two things that I believe the House wants: it gives the flexibility, but it also gives the protection. That is why I believe that amendment No 3, which is in the name of my colleagues, is superior to amendment No 2, which simply takes the same situation and applies it, regardless of the circumstances that might prevail.

Somebody raised the issue about what would happen if there was something on a Sunday afternoon. That is very important. Amendment No 2 does not cover that, because there is no requirement for the Minister to take steps to ensure that every reasonable and practical step has been taken to avoid community disruption for events that occur between the hours of 1.30 pm and 6.00 pm. To that extent, the coverage and the protection that are given in amendment No 3 are even wider than those included in amendment No 2. I promised to give way to Mr — Mr McCallister.

Mr McCallister: Mr Wilson is even struggling with the names of his colleagues. He has put an awful lot of trust

in the Minister. His party leader heaped lavish praise on Mr Kennedy at the party conference, perhaps more praise than he heaped on Mr Wilson in recent times. However, to almost coin the First Minister's phrase, you could end up with a different Minister on a different day deciding something different. That is why you should put it in the Bill.

Mr Wilson: I am not. Mr Kennedy is my friend and colleague — *[Interruption.]* I am not going to say anything detrimental about him. Other Members would happily say detrimental things about my friend. However, although he is my friend and my colleague, I am not putting my trust in him — *[Interruption.]* It has to be for the very argument that the Member has made: that the legislation provides a safeguard. I have tried to outline the safeguards. From the very day that someone decides that there will be a race, through the consultation, the making of the Order, the making of the application for the contingency day and the Minister's direction for the contingency day, the legislation will determine the information that has to be given, the consultation that has to be undertaken and the considerations that have to be made. It does not matter who the Minister is. That is the important thing.

Much as it might be well placed in this particular case, I am not throwing my faith on the Minister. I said that I would give way to Mr Allister.

Mr Allister: Thank you very much. The Member pointed out that amendment No 2 does not give any protection for the afternoon, whereas amendment No 3 would. Does the answer not therefore lie in having the best of both worlds? We could have amendment No 2, which gives certainty for preventing racing during church times, and we could also have amendment No 3, which gives such protection as arises under it to the rest of the day. Can we not have the best of both worlds with amendment Nos 2 and 3?

Mr Wilson: We would not have the best of both worlds. The one thing that the Member did not mention in his intervention is that, although we want certainty, we also want flexibility. There will be occasions and certain races when you might not need to put a restriction of 7.00 am to 1.30 pm or after 6.00 pm, but if you put the restriction in the legislation, when the contingency day is asked for, the Minister will have to say, "There are no objections to you having a contingency day on a Sunday. There are no objections to you using the morning or the evening, but, unfortunately, the legislation says that I cannot give it to you". That is where the inflexibility creeps in. Hence, the reason for saying that it should be left open while making sure that the objections that individuals might have, quite rightly, and which I would support, about certain hours on a Sunday have to be given due consideration by the Minister.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: Yes.

Mr Allister: The Member refers to inflexibility. It does not seem to be a problem in the Isle of Man, where these exact provisions apply. Can the Member think of any established road race route where there are not churchgoers? The issue is not whether there are churches on the route; it is whether there are churchgoers and their rights. Can the Member think of a single route of any race where there are not churchgoers?

Mr Wilson: First of all, not having a knowledge of all the racecourses or of the detail along those courses, I cannot

give an answer to that. However, the one thing that I can say is that we are not talking just about road races here; we are talking about the Circuit of Ireland, for example. There are occasions when the Circuit of Ireland uses roads very early in the morning. Indeed, I can remember when I was very young going and watching some of the early stages of the Circuit of Ireland along roads, and they took place very early in the morning. So, I will throw the question back to the Member: take us through all the road race routes and tell us where the churches are along them. I would guess that his knowledge on that is as encyclopaedic as mine.

Mr Ó hOisín: I thank the Member for giving way. It raises a very interesting point, in that the rationale for amendment No 2 is that it does not clash with people who are attending their church services, be they on a Sunday morning or evening. However, as it stands, and particularly in the case of the North West, a number of places of worship in the triangle area have their services on the Saturday evening at 6.00 pm, and they are being inconvenienced. Is there room for a challenge there if amendment No 2 were adopted?

Mr Wilson: I imagine that there would be if amendment No 2 were adopted. Do not forget that, hopefully, this will happen once in a blue moon. We cannot be absolutely sure, but it is not going to be a yearly occurrence. However, my colleagues and I aim to ensure that, where people are impacted by a road race and where it does occur, there is the ability for a judgement to be made about whether the race should be run on that day and what restrictions and hours should be placed on the race on that particular day. To me, it is much better to leave that to be judged by the circumstances that pertain in each of the particular localities where the race has been applied for.

I have one last point that I want to make, and that concerns the pressure from the sponsors. Mr Allister and Mr McCrea raised this point. Do not forget that, in applying this “reasonable” test and doing what is practically the best thing to minimise disruption, the Minister will have the ability to ascertain why an applicant wishes to have races held at a particular time. I imagine that the argument that the sponsors would be very happy to have it held at a certain time, even though, in the Minister’s view, that maximises disruption to the community, would not be a compelling argument to be made. Therefore, I think that amendment No 3 covers those kinds of issues and allows the Minister to make judgements on that basis.

I think that there is unanimity of feeling that it is best to keep amendment No 4 off the table and leave this to the Minister for Regional Development. Regardless of whether that is on the basis of the knowledge that the First and deputy First Minister have of road racing, the speed with which the Department works, or whatever other arguments Members wish to employ, let us not make the situation cumbersome. The important thing is this: let us make sure that we have got legislation that considers all the issues that need to be considered and can then be applied reasonably by the Minister to give the ability to run events, and that, at the same time, gives the adequate protections that those who are affected by the disruption from such events might wish to have.

Mr Kennedy: At the outset, I thank all those who have contributed to this very lively but interesting debate on the important issue of providing greater flexibility for road races in Northern Ireland. I want to impress on all

Members the fact that they must not lose sight of the reasons that the Bill was introduced and why it was granted accelerated passage. It is a Bill to provide greater flexibility, pure and simple. Some people have sought to complicate that. However, that is the intention, and that is the reason that we are seeking to progress the Bill.

Members may recall that during my closing speech at Second Stage, I referred to the wide discretion that the Road Races (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 afforded my Department. I also urged Members to be cautious about the effect of any proposed amendments that would restrict that discretion or, indeed, impose an inability to address any local situation through applying a perceived one-size-fits-all solution. Again, I ask Members to bear that in mind.

At the outset, it is right and proper that I make Members aware that it is the view of the legislative draftsman who drafted the Bill and of the first legislative counsel that the proposed amendments are unnecessary owing to the provisions in the 1986 Order. Furthermore, they advised that amendment No 4 would not work in practice. I very much welcome the indications from Mr Spratt initially, and from Mr Wilson latterly, that that amendment is not being moved.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

I intend to address each amendment in turn. Mr Allister’s amendment Nos 1 and 2 on the Marshalled List should be taken together. I note and welcome Mr Allister’s softening of approach from his former total opposition to the possibility of contingency day road races being held on Sunday to his acknowledgement that they could take place on Sunday afternoons.

I am aware of concern among road race promoters over those amendments. The issues identified reflect my concerns. They would impose a single solution across all events regarding timing, and that would not be appropriate. Promoters point out that it is unlikely that all the churches on, or in the vicinity of, all road race courses on which promoters may seek to invoke a Sunday contingency would hold services at the same time. Consequently, it may be better to permit road racing earlier at some locations. My Department has already received confirmation about one established race that, in the event of a contingency day proposal, the preference is for an earlier start — at 1.00 pm — because that would suit better with the morning service times for a local church.

5.30 pm

Mr Allister’s proposed amendments raise other practical and operational concerns. They limit the entire time available to close the road, clear it of traffic and complete the immediate pre-race course preparations — referred to earlier by, I think, Mr Spratt — most of which cannot be started until the road is closed and then to complete the race programme and reopen the roads to the public within four and a half hours. This timescale would be, in some areas, challenging for race organisers.

Members should also be aware that, in the interests of safety, many locations would require the removal of my Department’s normal road signage immediately after the road closure has commenced, and that it would have to be reinstated prior to the roads being reopened.

I earlier highlighted the fact that the road racing legislation does not just deal with motorcycle races on roads. That seems to be a crucial factor that some Members have missed, particularly Mr McCrea. It provides for all motor races on roads, including car rallies, hill climbs and karting events. My attention has been drawn to the fact that car rallies, particularly, and hill climbs have a history of early morning starts. If any of the organisers wished to avail themselves of a Sunday contingency, a better option for them and for churchgoers might be to get some of the stages or the timed runs completed in early morning, before churchgoing times. Many of those events also take place in fairly remote areas, where the impact on residents and general public is often minimal. I believe, as does the sport, that the proposed amendment would prevent such early starts, although that might not be the option of least inconvenience to the general public.

I turn to the issue of amendment No 3, which was proposed by Mr Spratt and others. The aim of that amendment reflects what already takes place in practice by virtue of the powers that my Department already possesses under the Road Races (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. In many ways, it is, therefore, a purely cosmetic amendment. However, I have listened to the voices from all parts of the House — with, I think, the exception of the Back Bench containing Mr Allister and his new-found adherent Mr McCrea. I am inclined, then, to endorse amendment No 3.

It is worth saying that before any road closing order is made, my Department must satisfy itself that various arrangements and safeguards are in place. Under article 3 of the 1986 Order, my Department may issue a road closing order to close roads:

“for or in connection with motor races during the whole or any part of any days so specified”

— in the order. That enables my Department to include:

“such provisions as the Department considers appropriate for securing the proper conduct of the motor race and for purposes incidental thereto.”

So there is considerable scope in the current legislation to afford the protections that are, in my view, so sought and so necessary.

The Department uses this wide discretion to ensure that appropriate insurance is in place; to acquire an event plan, including safety matters that have been addressed; to consider and authorise traffic management arrangements and the provision of alternative routes; and to ensure that PSNI and local residents have been properly consulted and that appropriate notice is given to the public. Those powers are in the 1986 Order. We are not changing that as a result of the Bill that is before the House. We are simply trying to create a little flexibility.

These powers enable my Department to treat each application as it should be, which is as a unique application with a unique set of circumstances, rather than enforcing a common set of requirements that do not meet the needs of organisers, competitors or, indeed, spectators.

I have already indicated that amendment No 4, which is not to be moved, had been assessed by the legislative counsel as one that would not work in practice. I believe

that that is proper advice, and I welcome the fact that it will not be moved.

The Bill proposes that where a race promoter seeks to use a Sunday as a contingency day to salvage their otherwise cancelled race, they must make application to my Department not later than 24 hours before either the beginning of the contingency day or the specified race day — whichever is the earlier. The effect of this is that where a race promoter seeks to move a Saturday race to a Sunday, they must make application to the Department by midnight on the Thursday night. In those circumstances, a race promoter might, rightly, expect to receive an early response on the Friday to enable their management team to swing into operation. That is why the Bill provides for that process to be carried out electronically. Of course, an official from my Department would be on standby to make the appropriate arrangements.

Again, I have to say that the suggestion — I know that that suggestion is now off the table — that the First and deputy First Minister would give approval would not work for purely practical reasons. My understanding is that both Ministers are now in Japan having travelled there on a 14-hour flight. It seems that the east of this world is the place to be. The Prime Minister is in China. The First Minister and deputy First Minister are in Japan, where, indeed, I understand, the Taoiseach is as well. We are back here.

I also have to say that, in road racing legislation going back over some 100 years here, the approval of a Prime Minister, First Minister or deputy First Minister has never been required in respect of a motor race being held on a public road.

Finally, I draw Members' attention to the situation of a race promoter making an application to hold a motor race on public roads on a Sunday. That is a race in which the promoter is not seeking to use a Sunday as a contingency day. The consideration of that application and its approval or non-approval would rest with my Department. I reiterate my earlier point that my Department would rely on its existing wide discretion and the powers that it has under the 1986 Order to consider the application. Under those powers, it would already be obliged to satisfy itself that an order would minimise, as far as reasonably practicable, any disruption to the local community on that day. It would also ensure that disruption in respect of churchgoers would be kept to a minimum and that appropriate notice is given to the general public.

Given the position that has been outlined, it should be possible for this important Bill to pass Consideration Stage without amendment. I realise that Members raised a number of issues. Because accelerated passage has been used, it is important that I address those comments.

The debate was, of course, opened by Mr Allister. Again, I remind Mr Allister and others that the Road Races (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 places no restriction on the hours by which racing on roads may finish. I think that he was under the impression that everything had to be wrapped up by 6.00 pm. That is not the case. It is entirely dependent on the application that is brought forward by whoever is sponsoring the race. The times at which roads may be closed are dictated by the road closing order that is specific to each event.

Generally speaking, when the Department is satisfied with what has been proposed and requested by race

organisers, it will grant the relevant road closing order. Some races may finish by 6.00 pm on a Saturday, but that is because the promoter sought to bring racing to a conclusion by that time or because, taking into account local concerns, the Department placed such a restriction on the order.

However, other road closing orders, for example for car rallies, may go well beyond the 6.00 pm time that was mentioned by Mr Allister and may continue into the early hours of the next day, even when the next day is a Sunday. Therefore, if a late-night rally stage were timetabled for Friday until the early hours of Saturday, say 1.00 am, which has happened in recent years, but was moved to a Saturday/Sunday contingency, that would, effectively, be prevented by Mr Allister's amendments.

Mr Allister made a point about the Isle of Man, but there are important differences. Members will be aware that the Isle of Man TT races span two weeks. Section 1 of the Isle of Man's Road Races Act 1982 enables racing to take place on the intervening Sunday between the hours of 1.30 pm and 6.00 pm. That enables races that are postponed the previous week to take place on that afternoon, but it does not apply to other races that are held on the island. It is a provision for a single race, unlike that which is contained in Mr Allister's amendment.

Mr Allister proposed that Members accept his amendments now and perhaps seek to amend them at Further Consideration Stage. I am not inclined to do that, because even Mr Allister has accepted that there are flaws in his amendments. It would be wrong to accept an amendment on the basis of what it might become. It is playing politics to seek to persuade others to accept an amendment that, it is conceded, might need amending itself. I say that with respect to the Member who made that proposal.

There is a need for a meaningful discussion and for reasonable arrangements to be put in place in the event of a Sunday contingency. That is important, and it has been raised by various Members throughout the debate. I am grateful that it has been raised and for the opportunity to provide clarity. Article 3(2) of the 1986 order provides that my Department shall not make a road closing order unless it receives and grants an application by 31 March annually. This Bill does not propose to change that. A road closing order specific to that event must then be made. However, once the promoters have had their applications for race events granted — I remind Members that they must be granted by 31 March — my officials will require them immediately to look at how a contingency day might impact on the local population, including schools, businesses and, of course, where appropriate, churchgoers. Before a road closing order would be made to facilitate the event, which would normally be three to four weeks before the event, evidence would be required by my officials to ensure that meaningful discussions had taken place, that reasonable arrangements had been effected and that the likely inconvenience is kept to an absolute minimum. I have to say that it is scare-mongering to suggest that any decision on a contingency day is taken on hearing arguments between a weather forecast and a day definitively sought in race week. Members, I hope, will listen to that clear assertion.

Mr Spratt informed the House about the public consultation that is carried out. Indeed, he raised instances where circumstances had dictated events and when race organisers had been sympathetic and worked to facilitate

events such as funerals or emergency matters that were brought to their attention.

I think it was Mr McCrea who envisaged a real catastrophe occurring. It is impossible to legislate for that. When issues happen on the day, even bomb scares — unfortunately there are sick people out there who have sought to disrupt road races in the past — it is very difficult to legislate for that, and no sensible attempt could be made to do it, least of all through this legislation.

5.45 pm

Mr Spratt made the point that the economic benefits to the north-west and to Northern Ireland generally are important and should be facilitated. Mr Seán Lynch, with his party, is adopting a pragmatic approach to the change. He saw the economic benefit and said that his party would support amendment No 3. Mr Dallat supported amendment No 3 as well and, very properly, raised the potential damage that the other amendments might do to an event such as the Circuit of Ireland. He clearly understood the impact that such amendments would have and confirmed how important it was to the economic life of the north-west region.

Mr Kinahan summed matters up very well, in that he said that we want simple legislation that is easily understood. That is what we are seeking to do. His was a very good contribution, in that he understood the need for more flexibility and a sensible, common-sense approach that any Minister will seek to apply to those circumstances.

Mr McCarthy made a short contribution. He fully supported the Bill and the need for flexibility.

Mr Easton supported amendment No 3 and sought common sense and flexibility.

Mr Ó hOisín welcomed the increased flexibility and acknowledged that organisers are sensitive to all those things, whether it is the organisers of the North West 200 or of the other road races that take place.

Mrs Hale, the sole female contributor, welcomed the Bill, the aspects of tourism and facilitating spectators, participants and organisers. Her support is noted.

Mr Byrne is Mr Dallat's pillion passenger, but nevertheless he gave support to the Bill.

We come to Mr McCrea's contribution. He started by telling us that, years ago, he had been at the races. If that was years ago, it was not today. He was not near the races today, I am afraid. He complained about accelerated passage and lauded his Back-Bench colleague, Mr Allister, for the speech that he heard him deliver. I am sorry that he does not appear to have contributed to the debate last week, when accelerated passage and the reasons for it were debated and it was supported by the House. I hope that he has listened closely to the drawbacks in amendment Nos 1 and 2 proposed by Mr Allister and that he will seriously reflect on those before he gives his support so blindly or so willingly. However, that would perhaps be unreasonable to expect.

Mr Dunne encouraged and exhorted us to work well and for the organisers and everyone to work together. That is entirely sensible. Cooperation is indeed required for the local population, however they are affected, and for the organisers. He saw the contingency day as a last resort. That is the consistent view of race organisers who I spoke

to. Mr Robinson, as a Member from East Londonderry, gave support to the proposed changes.

We finally came to Mr Sammy Wilson, he of motorbike and penalty points fame and who, perhaps, sees himself as the most authentic biker in the House — I have to be careful how that is read.

The sole purpose of the Bill is to provide greater flexibility. It is not anything more sinister and is not intended to be. The onus will be to ensure minimum disruption should anything happen. Some Members thought that it was a matter of simply trusting me, but I have to be realistic: some day there may be a pharaoh in Egypt who knoweth not Joseph. It is incumbent on whoever is Minister for Regional Development to take account of and listen closely to any concerns. I have no doubt that, even before that stage, race organisers will be aware of their responsibilities, too. This is not a leap of faith in any sense, but it has the capacity to give greater flexibility. That is the main purpose of the Bill.

I hope that the Bill can now move forward and pass through expeditiously but will also carry the maximum amount of broad support as possible. I am pleased to be taking this legislation through the House. It is important that it progresses in its most workable format, and I ask all to support the Bill and make this legislation a success for road racing, spectators, residents, retailers, churchgoers, schools and for any other interest groups.

Mr Allister: When, in any debate, a Minister, in particular, resorts to playing the man rather than the ball, as he did with Mr McCrea, it is usually a pretty clear indication of a sense of losing the argument.

In this debate, the House has to face an issue. We heard many words, platitudes, that which is suitable for press releases, telling us about deep concern for the rights and interests of churchgoers. We will see how that manifests itself in a vote. This House has a clear path laid before it in amendment No 2, whereby it can put those words into action and demonstrate that it does have a deep-seated, abiding concern for the rights of churchgoers to exercise their freedom of religion on a Sunday. The choice is clear, because amendment No 2 builds a hedge around churchgoing times and protects them. Amendment No 3 is all things to all men, whatever you want it to be. It cannot even bring itself to mention the specific rights of churchgoers.

I am familiar with Members in the House, and I have often heard them talk about —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr Wilson: Maybe I missed it, but could the Member tell me where the specific rights of churchgoers are mentioned in his amendment?

Mr Allister: By simple deduction that if you are preventing racing before 1.30 pm and after 6 pm, and if you had listened to my speech introducing the amendment, it would be beyond doubt that the prime protective is for churchgoers. That is what it is.

I was going to say that I am familiar with some Members who, in former times, would have told us that Sunday is special. Yet, today, from the DUP Benches, we had a contributor, Mrs Hale, tell us that you could not support

the 1.30 pm to 6.00 pm proposal because it would not be possible to fit a whole day's racing into an afternoon. It seems now that there is not very much of Sunday that is special to some. Indeed, we have heard nothing in this debate from some to whom it is supposed to be special. A telling, stony silence. Mr Campbell gave us the benefit of an intervention. He is the MP for the area that is most affected, and his intervention to Mr Wilson was about his hope that the Minister would give an assurance that nothing would happen during church service times. It was rather appropriately pointed out to him that, if that is the attitude and the ambition, it should be put in the Bill. That is the interest.

Mr Campbell: 3.00 pm.

Mr Allister: Sorry, 3.00 pm? I would have thought that the Member would know his constituency better than I know it, but none of the four churches has a 3.00 pm service. I took the trouble to check the times of the church services, and none of them has an afternoon service at that time of the year.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Wilson: Before the Member gets too sanctimonious about Sunday being special, does his amendment imply that Sunday is not special between the hours of 1.30 pm and 6.00 pm?

Mr Allister: No, it does not. My amendment implies that there is no appetite in the House to protect Sunday, and it therefore reflects the desire to protect it as much as it can be by building the protections around church times. I stress to the House that this amendment is about protecting the rights — yes, the rights — of churchgoers. Some in this debate —

Mr I McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr I McCrea: The Member was attacking my colleague Mr Campbell for not knowing the times of other churches' services. Will the Member give his view on the impact on churchgoers living along the course if they were looking to go to a 3.00 pm service, which my colleague referred to, at any church other than the four churches that are affected?

Mr Allister: I obviously carried out enquiries about that, and as far as I could ascertain from those I met, there are not any afternoon services at that time of the year. If the Member is so concerned about protecting churchgoers, he will be voting for amendment No 2. If that is his concern, this is his opportunity to do something to protect churchgoers.

I heard it said in this debate that my amendment is too north-west centric and too centred on all those concerns. Yes, that probably was the catalyst for the amendment, just as what happened weather-wise with the North West 200 was the catalyst for the Bill. However, I respectfully suggest that there are churchgoers on all the circuits, and they are as entitled to the protection as the churchgoers of the north-west. There might be a greater concentration because of the greater urban setting of the North West 200, where hundreds, if not thousands, of people live on the route. However, if there are churchgoers on other routes, such as Dundrod etc, the fact that there is not a place of worship on that route is neither here nor there. It is about protecting their rights. Have we really reached

the point in this Province where we cannot protect churchgoers' rights?

Tomorrow in the House of Commons, the Democratic Unionist Party has an Opposition day debate on the persecution of Christians. That is very good, but let us also think about the approach that would say to Christians in this community that their rights to worship on a Sunday can be and may have to be trumped by the rights of racegoers on those various circuits. If that is not the attitude, vote for that which would protect them. That is the challenge in the debate.

6.00 pm

Some pretty nonsensical things were said by the Sinn Féin Member for East Londonderry. He told us that this would affect existing races that run on a Sunday. It would not. It could not. Their organisers apply under the 1986 order for permission to race on a Sunday as their primary day, and they get it. They will not be using Sundays as contingency days. They will not be affected. Mr Dallat told us that the first casualty of this would be the Circuit of Ireland. It will not. If the Circuit of Ireland races on a Sunday, it is because it applies to race in the early hours, or whatever, of a Sunday under the 1986 order. It is not relying on contingency days either. So much scare tactics have been used in the debate. *[Laughter.]* Folk to my left laugh about scare tactics.

Mr Campbell: Because you use them often enough.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: If you are a churchgoer on the North West 200 circuit — a constituent of Mr Campbell's — who religiously goes to church, where is the scare tactic in saying that, without an amendment that says that the specified hours shall exclude churchgoing hours, you cannot be guaranteed the right to go to church? People talk about guarantees. Mr Dunne told us that it was vital that we guarantee the rights of churchgoers. Mr Dunne has his opportunity to guarantee those rights by supporting amendment No 2, or are they just words?

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. Surely there is no greater scare tactic than what is being propagated by the Member now. He is ignoring the fact that churchgoers will have to be consulted by the race organisers. That consultation will have to be outlined clearly when the application for the road closure order is made. The Minister will know what the churchgoers have said. If our amendment is accepted, the Minister will have to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the views of churchgoers are heeded and that there is no disruption to the community. It is the Member who is engaging in scare tactics because he is ignoring all the protections that there are in current legislation and in the amendment.

Mr Allister: If the desire is to give that protection, why are we running away from the means of guaranteeing it and doing it? Why are we hiding from, ducking, diving and running away from an amendment that would do that in favour of an amendment that could mean anything to anyone? Why is that? The Member said that the organisers will have to consult with the churches. I hope that it is better consultation than was carried out with the churches before the organisers came to Ministers looking for the change in the law. There was not a single consultation with the affected churches on the north-west coast by the

organisers. I hope that it is a better consultation than that, and so it should be.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr Kennedy: The Member will know that the consultation that my Department engaged in was a Province-wide consultation because it is Province-wide legislation. It is not peculiar to the North West 200. That is a fundamental flaw in the arguments that the Member has put forward.

Mr Allister: I appreciate that it is Province-wide legislation. The point that I was making in answer to Mr Wilson was that I hope that the consultation that the organisers will carry out will be a better consultation than the one that they conducted with the churches. They came looking for legislative change without ever having spoken to the churches. That is the point that I was making. As for the Minister's consultation, yes, he consulted with whatever church headquarters are in the consultation list, but no one contacted the four churches that are actually on the North West 200 route. No one told them about it until this MLA told them about it. Coleraine —

Mr Spratt: What did you tell them?

Mr Allister: I told them exactly what the proposal was. I gave them a copy of it. If Mr Spratt wants to intervene to suggest something else, let him come on. I told them exactly —

Mr Spratt: Well, the issue is that you were a johnny-come-lately to the whole thing, because the thing has been discussed from the last North West 200 in May. You came to the situation late and you went to the churches, and none of us knows what exactly you said to the churches about what exactly was being applied for. Maybe you will explain that to the House now.

Mr Allister: You say that I am a johnny-come-lately.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us have remarks through the Chair.

Mr Allister: Mr Speaker, I am a johnny-come-lately, it seems, to this issue. Once the public consultation was published, I became aware of it. I also became aware through my contacts with some of those churches that they were not aware of it, so I acquainted them with it. I showed them the consultation, and I invited them to respond if that was their wish. I organised for them to come and speak with the Minister. Did I do wrong? Does Mr Spratt object to that? Does he think that I should not have done that because I am some sort of johnny-come-lately to this issue? Things were going swimmingly, and then I came along and dared to tell the churches. Is that what he is saying to this House? If he is, I have no apology to make whatsoever in that regard.

Then we are told that we can leave all this to the Minister. Maybe we can. Could we have left it to the previous Minister? That is the question that I would like some in this House to ponder.

Mr Campbell: Or a direct rule Minister?

Mr Allister: Or a direct rule Minister. Could we have left it to the last Minister who held the post? Is that for the House? Or would you rather have laid down in legislation the certainty so that everyone — churchgoer, non-churchgoer, race organiser, race spectator and race

participant — knows that, if there is to be Sunday racing, there will be stipulated hours, as there are in the Isle of Man? If it is good enough for the Isle of Man, what is wrong with it for Northern Ireland?

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. He is waxing lyrical on his amendments. I take him back to a phrase that he used on a different subject matter in this House a couple of months ago, which he then lived to regret. In a different context, he used the phrase that an issue was “marginally preferable”, if he can remember using that phrase. He then had to regret saying it. Is he saying that his amendment is marginally preferable to ours?

Mr Allister: I know that the Member thinks that he can be very obtuse and very smart. I must say that, more often than not, it passes over my head. That largely passes over my head as well. I am very clear. This is the Member of Parliament for East Londonderry who has had nothing to say in this House in two days of debate about this issue. This is the Member of Parliament who I —

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us have remarks through the Chair. Let us not have a debate across the Chamber.

Mr Allister: This is the Member of Parliament for East Londonderry who has had nothing to say on these issues. His constituents do not know where he stands on these matters because he has not made a speech about it in this House. They will know today by how he votes in this House where he stands, and they can draw their own conclusions.

I want to comment on one or two other contributions.

The Minister lauded Mr Kinahan’s contribution; I see he has just left. His contribution contained the marvellous observation that if we were going to Sunday racing and there were church problems, we do not need to close all the roads; we could have diversions. Think about it; we are going to race the North West 200 circuit, which they have practised on, but somehow we are going to have to avoid going round Church Corner. Is that the depth of thought that has gone into how we address this issue? It really beggars belief.

Then, Mr George Robinson, the only unionist Member from East Londonderry to speak, though he would not participate in debate because he would not take any interventions, told us that amendment No 3 defines the times when racing can take place. I think he must have been reading amendment No 2; it is amendment No 2 that does that, not amendment No 3.

I say to Members that there is a template, a precedent, in the Isle of Man provisions. They work there, they give mutual respect to all interests and protect the rights of churchgoers. What would be the shame and what would be lost by drawing on that experience?

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member concede that the Isle of Man legislation impacts simply on one race? It does not seek to interfere with the operation of other races on the island.

Mr Allister: It impacts specifically; however, it does so on a magnitude in which one race virtually encompasses all roads on the island. By way of a parallel, it would be like

closing down Northern Ireland per se. The Isle of Man does this on a very defined basis, and it is good template.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Will he agree that the model that the Isle of Man has created also gives much better flexibility as to when you would trigger the need for a contingency day?

Mr Allister: Yes, but that is beyond the ambit of any amendment that anyone has tabled in the House. As things stand, that is not something to be addressed in this Bill, from what I can see.

I say to the House that we have an opportunity to reconcile our concerns about churchgoers and the rights of the North West 200 and others to complete their racing cycle. The answer lies, perhaps, in a combination of amendment Nos 2 and 3. Mr Speaker, I think according to the Business Office, you will tell us that both amendments can be made. The House has the luxury of being able to set protective parameters protecting the periods before 1.30 pm and after 6.00 pm, so that no one can be in any doubt, and bring the certainty we need for everyone. No one will then be under undue pressure from road race teams, sponsors or anyone else to race earlier on those days, because the law will say, as it does on the Isle of Man, that 1.30 pm is the time limit. For the rest of the day, amendment No 3 gives such protection as it brings. You can have the best of both worlds.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr Givan: Does the Member accept that amendment No 3 will give protection for the scenario that Members outlined for churches that engage in Gospel missions and have meetings at 3.00 pm on special occasions? If he is satisfied that it will give protection in those circumstances, surely it is applicable to any 24-hour period on a Sunday?

Mr Allister: If the Member listened, he would have heard that I was careful to use the words “such protection as it can give”. I am not persuaded that its protection is foolproof by any manner or means. I think that it is a bit of all things to all men, which one Minister could interpret as being one thing and another Minister could interpret as being another. However, such protection as it gives, if it gives any, can be available for the rest of the day and you can have the guarantee that it puts churchgoers’ rights for the rest of the day beyond doubt. That, I think, is a reasonable compromise in these circumstances. On that basis, I commend amendment Nos 1 and 2 to the House.

6.15 pm

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 3; Noes 77.

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Allister and Mr McCallister.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland,

Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Kinahan.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment No 2 proposed: In page 1, line 11, at end insert

“(1BA) A contingency day may not be—

(a) the whole of a Sunday; or

(b) any part of a Sunday beginning before 1.30pm or ending after 6pm.”— [Mr Allister.]

Mr Speaker: I have been advised by the party Whips that, in accordance with Standing Orders 27(1)(a) and 27(1)(b), there is agreement that we can dispense with the three minutes and move straight to the Division.

Question put, That amendment No 2 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 3; Noes 77.

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Allister and Mr McCallister.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Kinahan.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment No 3 made:

In page 1, line 11, at end insert

“(1BB) An order may not specify the whole or part of a Sunday as a contingency day unless the Department is satisfied that the terms of the order are such as to minimise as far as reasonably practicable any disruption to the activities of the local community on that day.”— [Mr Spratt.]

Amendment No 4 not moved.

Clause 1, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Road Races (Amendment) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

6.45 pm

Assembly Business

Extension of Sitting

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

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 2 December 2013 be extended to no later than 10.00 pm. — [Mr Dickson.]

Private Members' Business

Day Services: Equal Lives

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

Mr Dunne: I beg to move

That this Assembly endorses the Bamford review Equal Lives report and the expectations it places across all Departments; supports the Northern Ireland Executive's Bamford action plan 2012-15, including the action to "enhance provision of person-centred day opportunities (including employment provision) for people with a learning disability that facilitate integration into the community"; recognises that, while day centre provision will always be required, more must be done to promote choice and independence for individuals living with learning disabilities, including development of employment opportunities, access to culture, arts and leisure, transport and education opportunities; demands full and meaningful involvement of service users, carers and other stakeholders in the development of new services; calls for improved access for people with learning disabilities to high-quality, individualised services through supported living, supported employment, productive daytime opportunities, educational, social and leisure activities; encourages benchmarking of day services/day opportunities in order to drive improvements, ensure consistency of quality and equity of access; and urges the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and Executive colleagues, to work cross-departmentally alongside voluntary/community organisations and statutory agencies to put in place a network of services that deliver enhanced opportunities for those with learning disabilities.

I welcome the opportunity to propose the motion as a member of the Health Committee. It is a timely motion on an important issue that today affects so many across Northern Ireland. It is imperative that we do all that we can to help to deliver enhanced opportunities for those with learning disabilities and further develop social inclusion. I am sure that everyone in the House knows someone, either through their family or close friends, who has a learning disability. Therefore, we should all be familiar with the very real challenges faced by people with this disability. Real challenges can exist in employment, education, housing and generally trying to live as normal a life as possible. We all recognise the valuable role that people with a learning disability can have and how happy a life they can lead.

Often, the role of caring for and supporting those with a learning disability is with family members. However, unfortunately, not everyone will have a suitable family structure in place to support them. Therefore, it is vital that services are in place to provide an acceptable level of

care and support. The level of support must be consistent across all the trusts. In the Health Committee, we have seen clearly that there are inconsistencies in the level of care among the trusts. That is something that needs to be addressed, and the gaps in the different trusts must be closed. I know that the Minister, Edwin Poots, has taken an active interest in developing services right across Northern Ireland for those with learning disabilities. I commend him for taking the lead on this important issue. I know that he will continue to pursue what is best for those who need help and care.

Having visited the Strickland's Care Village in Bangor in my constituency with the Minister recently, I have seen for myself, as did some of my other colleagues, the excellent facility and support that is in place for local people. Having spoken with a number of the residents, I know that they really value the limited employment that they can avail themselves of. We met one man who helps out, one day a week, in a local gift shop in the town. Although it is not a major job, the value of his small role is priceless to that individual. Employment remains one of the main challenges.

All the indications are that there will be increased numbers of people with learning disability in the next 10 years in Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is essential that services are given the funding that they deserve and that support is in place to meet any longer-term rises in numbers.

The Bamford review sets out its theme and vision of improving community-based services for those with learning disability. In that vision, it is essential that the right networks exist to support patients, with carers and families at the core. However, as with any issues, funding is, unfortunately, limited, and challenges remain to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of these services. The Executive and Departments must work collectively and cross-departmentally to deliver the best possible choices. The motion has a clear theme running through it, which is to promote choice and independence for those with a learning disability. If more choice and independence are encouraged, more people will feel part of society, integrate and make a positive contribution.

The Patient and Client Council's 'My Day, My Way' document sets out clearly the genuine views and concerns of those with a learning disability. The report highlights a general level of satisfaction by those who have a varied programme during their average week. They had many positive things to say about their day-care services, as well as their day opportunities. However, genuine and real concerns were flagged up in the report. Some people felt that there was an information gap in opportunities and services. Others felt that employment opportunities were very limited. All those concerns must be addressed with a person-centred approach in mind.

I commend the work of many local charities, such as Mencap, Praxis Care and Bryson, and many more that do a sterling job to support and advance the needs of those with learning disabilities. It is also important to pay tribute to the many volunteers across the country who are involved in support work and help make a real difference daily. I know that, in North Down, just last week, the Beechfield Respite Unit in Conlig, which is supported by Praxis Care, was successful in the People's Millions fund competition and has been awarded funding to develop a much needed play facility for young people with a learning

disability. Having visited the facility recently, I appreciate fully what that means to them and the young people involved. That type of funding is a lifeline and a boost to everyone involved. It has brought great joy to the local community.

I am pleased that the motion is being discussed, and I look forward to hearing other Members' contributions. I am happy to commend the motion to the House.

Mr McKinney: I beg to move the following amendment: At end insert

“; and ensure that the necessary financial arrangements are put in place in order to facilitate the 2012-2015 Bamford action plan.”

The SDLP commends the Executive's commitment to the Bamford review, which is clearly evident in the creation of both the 2009-2011 and the current 2012-15 Bamford action plans. The sentiments expressed by the work of the review, specifically in the Equal Lives report, have given clear indication to the House that it must strive to create appropriate legislative structures in order to meaningfully enhance mental health and learning disability provision. It is increasingly evident that, for people with a learning disability and their families, day opportunities and alternatives to traditional day-care provision are crucial. It is for that reason that the SDLP supports the establishment of new care models that provide more choice for individuals with a learning disability. Importantly, however, it should not be about cost-cutting.

The SDLP believes that choice can be facilitated through practical realisation of the five core values that are addressed in the Equal Lives report: social inclusion, citizenship, empowerment, working together and individual support. It is clear that, if those values are to be protected and promoted, all work moving forward must encompass considerable joint contribution from Departments — in other words, joined-up government. The SDLP recognises that much good work was achieved in that way through the implementation of the original Bamford action plan. We support the call for continued cross-departmental effort in the motion.

The SDLP also supports the need to work closely with voluntary and community organisations. It will be necessary to consult all stakeholders in order to improve the level of care for those with a learning disability, as also expressed in the motion. That said, however, the SDLP is extremely concerned about the role that budgetary restrictions may play in the implementation of the current Bamford action plan. Back in 2009, when the first action plan was embarked upon, the total amount of additional funding that was anticipated by the Department over three years for learning disability and mental health was £44 million. Specifically, the total amount of projected additional funding for learning disability alone was £17 million. Due to the comprehensive spending review, the actual amount of additional funding that was allocated in 2009 was just shy of £30 million, of which £12.4 million was for learning disability. It is the admission of the 2012-15 action plan itself that the £14.5 million reduction in additional funding had “some effect” on the health and social care sector's ability to deliver on actions in the earlier action plan.

The SDLP accepts that, overall, learning disability expenditure has increased each year, but we are not at the end of expenditure cuts, and they will play a pivotal role in shaping learning disability care, including daytime opportunities towards 2015.

The only additional funding that has been earmarked for mental health and learning disability over the Budget period is £9.2 million, comprising £2.8 million for mental health and £6.4 million for learning disability. That, effectively, means that just over half the additional funding that was set for 2009-2011 — crucially, that is two years — will be available for 2011-15, which is four years.

During the Health and Social Care Board meeting on a regional learning disability day opportunities model in September, it was stated that, during the three-year period, the five health and social care trusts will have a combined total of just under 500 individuals coming through transition from education who will need a learning disability day service. Based on the Northern Ireland current average care cost of £72 a day, suggesting that each individual will have approximately five days a week, the potential cost by 2015 will be an additional £8.4 million. I am sorry for going through all those figures, Mr Speaker, but I think it is important, given the nature of the amendment.

That projection alone exceeds the amount of additional funding that has been earmarked for learning disability by £2 million. So, the question becomes one of whether the significant financial challenge that lies ahead puts a question mark over the effective realisation of the Bamford action plan up to 2015. That is why the SDLP is urging Executive colleagues to put in place financial arrangements in order to ensure that the outlined financial mismatching will not hamper ongoing development and contradict the wishes of those who are most affected by a learning disability.

The SDLP believes that this amendment is fitting, given the substantial concern that has been expressed surrounding financial restrictions and the Bamford action plan. The SDLP recognises and supports the unique role that the Bamford monitoring group has played since its inception. The group was established by the Health Minister and comprises people with mental health needs, people with learning disabilities, families, carers and representatives of the Patient and Client Council.

The purpose of the group is to clearly communicate the views and experiences of those who are most affected by mental health issues and learning disabilities on changes that are being made in line with the Bamford review. In its response to the Health Department's draft budget for 2011-15, it noted the following, which is worth putting on the record:

"The Bamford Monitoring Group is very concerned that the shortfall in resources under the draft budget"

for the Health Department

"will have significant implications for service delivery and that the proposed allocation will be insufficient to maintain existing service levels ... It is unacceptable to reduce funding further".

The group also stated:

"It is also important to highlight concern that spending plans have been developed individually by each Government department."

It goes on to state:

"This loses sight of the ethos under which the Bamford Review and its recommendations ... were made."

The Equal Lives report has become a seminal document of instruction on learning disability day opportunities.

Objective 12 of the report is:

"To promote ... joint working across sectors and settings in order to ensure that the quality of life of people with a learning disability is improved and that the Equal Lives values and objectives are achieved."

Recommendation 74 of that objective outlines that ring-fenced funding should continue and that the possibility of extending that to other Departments should be explored. The SDLP believes that our amendment expresses the same sentiments that were outlined in that objective of the Equal Lives report.

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

The fiscal demands of the Bamford action plan will need to be managed by many Departments, including those responsible for health, transport, education and culture, arts and leisure. Unless arrangements are put in place between each, with the Bamford action plan in mind, there is a significant danger that the progress that has been made from 2009 onwards will be halted.

The SDLP notes the worrying inclusion in the 2011-15 action plan of a disclaimer of a sort, which outlines:

"New actions or initiatives will require further financial analysis and their implementation will be subject to resource availability and prioritisation within the respective organisation(s)."

The actions in the Bamford plan are crucial for reforming healthcare in this particular area. Each action has been included because it is of importance and relevance. How do we distinguish which of these is more important than the other? Do we distinguish importance based on cost? The SDLP is fully aware of the financial restrictions that have been imposed on all Departments. However, if the action plan is to be successful, it seems clear that identifiable financial arrangements must be drafted and must remain in place.

Also worryingly, other departmental contributions are not effectively measured. Those contributions have been historically difficult to calculate. Could the plan benefit if those financial additions were clearly defined and guaranteed?

7.00 pm

In summary, the SDLP supports today's motion endorsing the 'Equal Lives' report, recognises the need for more to be done, calls for improved access to high-quality service and urges cross-departmental responses to the aforementioned needs, but we wish to ensure that effective financial arrangements will remain in place until 2015. The need for day opportunities expressed by stakeholders

after the first Bamford plan will only be satisfied if there is sustained financial backing. That financial aid will enable a large number of targets to be met, and, consequently, the level of day opportunities for individuals with a learning disability will increase.

The Bamford plan of 2012 is significantly less well funded than its predecessor but equally important. It needs to be given a substantive chance to continue the improvements that have been made in that area since the Executive adopted the Bamford review in 2007. We commend the fact that the Health and Social Care Board is currently carrying out a consultation on a regional day opportunities model for adults with a learning disability. However, the consultation will only last for three weeks, and we believe that there should be an extension to that. We do not believe that that short consultation is good enough. Those involved need to know that sufficient resourcing will underpin those services going forward. I commend the amendment.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion and the amendment. It is our view that we need to go much further than simply providing day opportunities. The objective for us all and for people with learning disabilities should be full social inclusion, as people's lives do not stop at 4.00 pm in the afternoon. We must therefore implement a person-centred planning process that takes account of the individual's life seven days a week, morning, afternoon and evening, including the weekends.

Provision for people with learning disabilities should adopt a two-strand approach, in our view. One is to empower people with learning disabilities through giving them skills and increasing levels of self confidence to enable them to be more independent and to participate more fully in their community. The second element is to empower the community to be proactive in the process of integration and inclusion. A key point, therefore, must be the commitment to funding, otherwise it is only aspirational.

The local commissioning groups also need to focus more on the Bamford approach. People with learning disabilities are a diverse group and vary widely in their abilities, and that affects the kind of support that each person needs. Local, recent Assembly research has shown us that there are approximately 25,000 people in the North with learning disabilities. That is without any centralised data. There are direct links between learning disabilities and health inequalities. Reports in England have shown that 37% of deaths there could have been avoided.

The terms "mild", "moderate" and "severe" or "profound" learning disabilities appear to suggest distinct categories for learning disability, but, in reality, those do not adequately describe the range of impairments or disabilities that that group may have. For example, someone with autism who has a learning disability may have significant social difficulties and appear to have moderate learning difficulties, yet they may be able to look after their own personal care and everyday needs quite independently.

Learning disabilities are one of the most common forms of disability and affect up to 1.5 million in England alone. Some 2.6% of the population in England have a primary special educational need associated with learning disabilities. As we have heard previously, that is likely to be a significant underestimation. People with learning disabilities are indeed living longer. In the 1930s, their

average life expectancy was estimated to be less than 20 years of age. Mean life expectancy is now estimated to be 74, 67 and 58 for those with mild, moderate and severe learning disabilities respectively. As stated previously, the number of adults with learning disabilities is predicted to increase by 14% between 2001 and 2021, resulting in more than a million people with learning disabilities.

The North of Ireland survey of activity limitation and disability indicated that, in 2006 and 2007, 18% of people living in private households had some degree of disability. The prevalence rate is 21% for adults and 6% for children. That is a significant proportion of the population who live their everyday lives experiencing significant disadvantage, leaving them at much greater risk than others of poverty and social exclusion. In general, the results of that and other surveys show that, in most indicators of social and economic well-being, such as the labour market, income and educational attainment, people with disabilities continue to lose out and to be among the most disadvantaged groups.

Poverty may be the result of many factors, such as an individual's position in the labour market. However, research has shown that being in or gaining employment is always the best route out of poverty. That route is not always accessible or available to people with learning disabilities, who are among those of working age likely to be economically inactive.

The vision of the Bamford review is based on valuing people who have learning disabilities, recognising their rights to full citizenship, equality of opportunity and self-determination. Principles of autonomy, inclusion, partnership working and individual-centred service provision are central to any disability policy.

I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Beggs: I, too, support the motion and the amendment. I think that it is important that we support the amendment, because without the necessary funding, it would be difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, to deliver what is desired, given the increasing number of those who have learning difficulties.

The Bamford review highlighted a range of important factors affecting those with learning difficulties and how we should try to include them socially in mainstream services, regard them as citizens, value them, empower them, involve them in their own decision-making and work together as a community with a variety of organisations to individually support those who need that little bit of extra care so that they can progress.

The Bamford action plan, which is referred to in the motion, talks about action to:

"Enhance provision of person-centred day opportunities (including employment provision)".

That is important, because when people contribute or feel that they are contributing, they can get great value from that. I have spoken to a number of individuals with learning difficulties who talk about going to work and getting a great deal of respect for their involvement in the facility where they are contributing. That has to be encouraged and promoted.

The motion also refers to the importance of independence and promoting choice. It refers to:

“access to culture, arts and leisure, transport and education opportunities”.

It also refers to supported learning and living. Those are valuable elements, and we must try to progress each of them.

It is important to recognise that a wide spectrum of our citizens have learning difficulties and that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. I support the view that Mencap expressed that we need to provide a variety of services. There is concern that modernisation of day services could be driven by a desire to save money and that changes to day services should not be used to disguise cuts in support. There should be involvement with people who use the services so that there is increasing choice and so that any changes go forward with their support. Anyone with a learning difficulty should have access to meaningful daytime activities, education, leisure and sport, because those are important to their lives.

There needs to be further investment. In my constituency of East Antrim, a recent refurbishment of Hawthorne day centre was a great improvement. Unfortunately, shortly after that refurbishment, Portakabins recently arrived on site, because, for some reason, the capacity that was needed was not thought of during that build. Already inadequate Portakabins are being put to use. Individuals with learning difficulties are required to cross a small road to access a bathroom, and there are also inadequate furnishings. Therefore, there needs to be increased investment, communication and planning to deal with the ongoing needs there. There also needs to be increased person-centred opportunities.

Respite care is important for individuals and their families. I learned of one family in my constituency who were told in a letter that their respite care was to be cut in half. No personal family assessment was carried out to see what effect that would have on them. Such cuts could cause particular difficulties for families that are already under stress and for parents who may have their own health problems.

We have, however, seen positive developments. We on the Health Committee have seen the George Sloane Centre in Ballymena, which has been modernised. Alongside it is another facility for those with moderate learning difficulties that is in great need of investment and modernisation. We also saw the Base in Ballymena, which is a drop-in day centre to which members can travel independently, and that seems to be working well. Again, in my constituency, Alternative Angles, Acceptable Enterprises and other social economies are greatly valued in the community, making mops, providing support for companies and preparing aircraft for Bombardier.

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

Mr Beggs: Those who work there feel valued, contribute to the local community and have great self-esteem because of the work that they carry out.

Mr McCarthy: Like others, I am very grateful to be able to contribute to this very important debate, especially because the issues under consideration are of such critical importance to our fellow citizens with learning disabilities and their wider families. Those issues have always been the Cinderella of the health service, and we must put an end to that from today onwards.

I speak from experience, as I have a daughter with special needs. I know how vital it is to have the right service and support from a very early age and, in particular, how the transition from the relative security and certainty of the special education setting can be an uncertain and even difficult experience. I pay particular tribute to the parents who are steadfast in their commitment to their children and who often express deep fears about the future arrangements for their young people. We should also recognise the vital role that is played by the community and voluntary sector in the delivery of services and in an advocacy role.

It is the role of government and, indeed, wider society to ensure effective social inclusion and empowerment of persons with learning disabilities. At the same time, it is vital that people with a learning disability and their carers be involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of all changes to day services. People with learning disabilities should be offered a full range of meaningful activities, including general education opportunities, leisure and sport, and access to more formal education and training and to sustained employment. A wide number of interventions across a range of Departments will be required to ensure that that vision becomes a reality and remains as such.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety must continue to be regarded as the core delivery partner. Moving away from the institutional setting to supporting people with a learning disability in a community setting must not become an opportunity for the Department to save money. Rather, it must be an opportunity to reinvest in a more progressive and effective set of services for the benefit of those who need them. In that regard, it is vital that the Department retain its current level of financial commitment and, indeed, consider how to increase that.

We note that a consultation on regional day opportunities for adults with a learning disability is being conducted by the Health and Social Care Board. There are also significant roles for a number of Departments other than DHSSPS. OFMDFM has a clear coordinating role, given its overarching responsibilities for disability issues. The Department for Regional Development has an important contribution to make in helping to facilitate transport. I know that my colleague the Minister for Employment for Learning is already doing much more in that area and is looking to see how his Department's involvement might be further increased. That surely must be welcomed.

7.15 pm

Careers advisers already work in schools with students with learning difficulties and their families to plan for transitions. That work is to be re-examined as part of the forthcoming review of careers policy and programmes. It is encouraging to see the significant increase in the level of enrolments from persons with disabilities in further education over recent years. The additional support fund plays an important enabling role in that regard. I welcome the 33% increase in the fund that was announced earlier this year. The Minister for Employment and Learning has also conducted an audit of further education provision for those with learning difficulties to better ensure that there is a more even distribution of provision across Northern Ireland.

There are concerns about general provision in and around day centres, including the provision of meaningful activities. Access to education is one aspect of that. I understand that Ministers are now exploring the issue, and I welcome that. The Department for Employment and Learning also provides a range of dedicated employment services under the auspices of the disability employment service, including Work Connect and Access to Work. Again, I welcome the Department's reviewing those further.

Finally, the current and future European social funds in Northern Ireland offer financial support to a number of —

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

Mr McCarthy: — projects aimed at advancing social inclusion. The full implementation of Bamford and Equal Lives is paramount and urgent. The days of parents having to fight —

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

Mr McCarthy: — every inch of the way for services are over. Equal Lives means equal rights for everyone now.

Ms Brown: I also support the motion, and I commend it to the House.

We are some years on from when the Bamford review was published. It highlighted major inequalities when it came to those with mental health and learning disabilities. While much has been achieved, issues remain. Since Bamford, much has changed with regard to the economy. That has impacted on how much the Northern Ireland Executive can spend annually. Nevertheless, that does not inhibit our ability to deliver for the individual at the heart of Bamford. It is less about money and more about a can-do attitude.

While the health and social care aspect of the Bamford recommendations is central to helping those with learning disabilities, the requirement for changes to be adopted across government remains. That is especially true when it comes to matters of employment and training, education, transport provision and access to the arts. We must continue to advance the cause of those with learning disabilities in line with Bamford. The focus is on helping individuals to lead independent lives; to live, work and enjoy life as they please and see fit. I say let the individual choose and let the system support them, rather than us choosing for them.

For far too long, we have seen the system dictate what those with a learning disability could or could not do. While day care provision remains necessary, it is vital that we support people in many other ways. That is why it is vital that we continue to see other Departments making strides to improve the lives of those impacted by Bamford. By doing that, we can see a much better focus on those who are affected when it comes to day care provision.

Transforming Your Care is in line with Bamford's vision, placing the individual at the centre of service provision and taking a more independent view of the patient by offering choice along with the necessary support. We need to see other Departments playing their part in assisting those with a learning disability. When it comes to employment and training, can the Department for Employment and Learning play a part in assisting those with a learning disability to achieve new skills and personal goals? Can the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure facilitate the choices of those who wish to enter the world of sport or

the arts? Furthermore, can the Department for Regional Development do anything more to encourage and help those affected by a learning disability to make use of public transport?

All those things can help those individuals to live independent lives. It is important that the Departments are reminded that they have obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The most relevant articles for day services are article 19, which is living in and being part of the community; article 20, which is transport and getting about; article 24, which is the right to education; and article 26, which is support to be independent.

This is, therefore, an emphasis on other Departments working closely with the Health Department to ensure that people with a learning disability have every opportunity available to them in being able to lead an independent life. I support the motion, and I have no objection whatsoever to the amendment.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also support the motion and the amendment. People with learning disabilities are really only looking for what they are entitled to, which is the right to equal treatment. Since I became a Member of the Assembly in 2007, I have heard an awful lot about Bamford, whether on supported housing, mental health or learning disability, and it is good that, eventually, something may start to be done. It will not be out of time.

The core values of Bamford are worth repeating and are still very relevant. There is the whole issue around social inclusion. People with learning disabilities should be able to access mainstream services. There is the whole issue around citizenship in that people with learning disabilities should have equal treatment as citizens. There is the issue around empowerment; they should be able to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Working together, there should be communication and cooperation with families and carers who perform such a special and necessary role. There should be support for individual needs and help to allow people to be independent. Work needs to continue across health and social care and the education sector to ensure support, and children should be encouraged to develop to their full potential.

With the advent of Transforming Your Care (TYC), we see that there are many parallels with Bamford. There is the whole issue around early intervention and health promotion and a focus to shift to community care. There is the promotion of recovery practices; the personalisation of care; resettlement; involvement of service users and carers; advocacy; the provision of clear information; and respite provision. TYC does reflect the Bamford vision. Both are committed to delivery of the best outcomes, but they must not remain aspirational. The contributions made by families and carers have to be recognised, and support provision for carers is essential.

Mencap has sent some information that I think is useful. It talks about key issues. There needs to be a person-centred approach with no cuts in support. Changes should only come about with the full involvement of users. I know that I am repeating stuff that was said earlier, but all people with a learning disability should have access to meaningful daytime activities, education, leisure, sports and all other

local facilities. More funding needs to be provided, and I think that the amendment covers that.

People with learning disabilities should have opportunities and choice and control over what they spend their time doing. Day services need to be discussed collectively. I heard Mencap's director on the radio this morning making the point that day services need to be discussed collectively with no distinction made between day opportunities and day centres. It is important that decisions are being made in a transparent person-centred process and that people have real choices and mechanisms if they are not satisfied with what is offered.

Mr McKinney mentioned the consultation on regional learning disability day opportunities and said that an extension was required to that consultation process. I certainly agree. Earlier today, I had contact with a local group of parent carers, representing 27 families in my constituency. It is an award-winning voluntary group for young adults with learning disabilities in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area. It is struggling to provide services for learning-disabled family members. Those people were not alerted, either individually or as a group, that a consultation was taking place that would affect the future lives of their children, other than a statutory press notice about a public meeting, of which many people were unaware. The group did get a copy of the consultation document and decided to complete it. There was no background information attached to the document. To complete it required a level of knowledge and understanding of Bamford. The group tried to access a copy of the Bamford report and was told that it was in the local library. It was not, so it had difficulties with that. It felt that the questionnaire was unfit for purpose. Some questions ask for views and then seek a yes/no response.

There is also reference in the document to adults with learning disabilities making independent choices and decisions. The group would point out that none of its service users had been consulted about this document or were even aware that consultation was being conducted. They contacted trust service providers, which had no plans to engage with users in the exercise. They are asking whether service users have a choice in this. They went on to say that some of the questions were aspirational and outlined a set of guiding principles —

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

Mr Brady: — and it would be difficult to disagree with them. The point that they and I are making is that, at the moment, the consultation is not fit for purpose.

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

Mr Brady: I ask the Minister to consider, in consultation with the Health and Social Care Board, an extension of the consultation to give those people the opportunity to make their point.

Mr Gardiner: I welcome the motion and the amendment because of the forward thinking that they demonstrate. I congratulate those who tabled the motion.

The model of a far broader range of day service provision outlined in the motion, and the vision of integrating people with a learning disability more and more into a pattern of normal life is good, where possible, and is to be commended. I believe that the framers of the motion may well be knocking at the open door of the Health

Department, with the only proviso being the availability of finance.

Turning to the level of day care provision in Northern Ireland, the most recent figures I have available suggest that there are more people attending day centres in Northern Ireland compared with Scotland and England. There are 23.5 people per 10,000 in Northern Ireland attending day centres, compared with 15.1 in Scotland and just 12 in England. A Department of Health paper speculates that the discrepancy in numbers may be explained by the existence of other forms of provision or, indeed, no provision at all. Perhaps the Minister could enlighten us on that, because the answer will tell us whether we are ahead or behind provision elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Departmental figures also tell us that the median number of people that a day centre registers was 44, but that covered an actual range of between two and 170 people. The same study also told us that the median age of attendees was 40, with an age range of between 16 and 87. Each centre had, on average, eight people with severe challenging behaviours, six people with profound disabilities, three wheelchair users, one person with autism and one with dementia. In addition, 25% of centres had at least one person who was technologically dependent. I mention that because it is important to establish the profile of users of day centres so that we might produce the best individual programme for each of them.

There will clearly be restrictions on what you can do, depending on the extent of a disability. The 20% or so with severe or challenging behaviours might be hard to place in a normal workday situation, as would the 15% or so with profound disabilities. That leaves us with what I calculate as about 60% who might benefit from a more diverse experience than the current day centre solution provides.

In conclusion, I wish the motion well, and I think it opens up an important subject. I hope that many of our residents who have to use these services get them to the best of their ability.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank the Member and colleagues for tabling the motion. I very much welcome it and the debate, not just in my role as Health Minister, but as chair of the inter-ministerial group on the Bamford review. The motion chimes with our current direction of travel towards ensuring that progress continues towards a key goal of the 2005 Bamford review 'Equal Lives' report, namely that people with a learning disability have every opportunity to live a full life.

People with a learning disability should be active participants in their local communities. They should be involved in key decisions about their life with as full as possible access to education, employment, personal relationships, leisure, community and sports opportunities with individual support available where required. Today, people with learning disabilities and their families quite rightly have much greater expectations for their future. They fully expect all Departments to work together and ensure that their agencies also do so to honour their commitments on Bamford.

7.30 pm

As a follow-up to the first Bamford action plan for mental health and learning disability 2009-2011, the Northern Ireland Executive earlier this year approved a second action plan for 2012-15, which specifically includes an action to enhance a provision of person-centred day opportunities, including employment provision for people with a learning disability, that will facilitate their integration into the community. I am pleased to say that progress is being made towards achieving many of the original Bamford recommendations, but, as we noted in previous debates in this Chamber, progress has not been made at a sufficient pace for many of those directly involved.

What might the day opportunities model look like? Any new arrangements should be designed around the needs and wishes of the individual, but someone could spend, say, their Monday at college; their Tuesday and Friday at a clubhouse or drop-in centre learning, socialising, keeping fit or doing voluntary work; their Wednesday and Saturday at work in a shop, enterprise or on a farm; and their Thursday and Sunday as days off. That was just by way of example.

In the past decade, a considerable number of projects, schemes and social enterprises have commenced or been expanded, including opportunities to work in print shops, garden centres, coffee shops, recycling schemes, second-hand clothes shops, picture framing or furniture restoring, to name but a few. There are also theatre and performance groups, trips to the cinema, plays, concerts and other events, use of the local library, sports and activity clubs, riding for the disabled and a wide range of community and voluntary work.

I recently challenged my ministerial colleagues to look at what is being provided in their offices to create opportunities for people with learning disabilities. I know that my local council employs people with learning disabilities who have a key role to play in the services that are provided. I look around many large government offices and wonder why there are no people with learning disabilities employed within them. I challenge my Department and all other Departments to address that issue and see how they can play their part in ensuring equal opportunities and job opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

We have had many initiatives, and many of them have received funding and support from government, statutory agencies, European funds and councils. Often at their heart, however, have been imaginative and enthusiastic charities and self-help organisations and individuals. I acknowledge and welcome the significant role of other Departments and their agencies in providing and facilitating day opportunities, for example, on transitions planning and advice; culture and leisure activities, including sport and other physical activity; and supporting people initiatives, which not only help learning disabled to live as independently as possible, but encourage and facilitate access to a range of day services, benefits advice, travel concessions, transport schemes and support to utilise public transport.

Further education colleges offer a wide range of vocational courses and qualifications, both integrated and discrete, in colleges and other settings, including day centres. Careers advice and guidance, apprenticeships and employment support and specialist advice are also available. It is recognised, however, that a regional and cross-sectoral

approach is required to build on the changes and developments that have taken place in recent years to ensure that the momentum is maintained in reconfiguring day service provision and broadening the range of opportunities for adults with learning disabilities. The new model, which is now being consulted on, is part of that.

The key to this is the commitment contained in the model to have full and meaningful engagement with service users, their families, carers and other stakeholders. The day opportunities paper issued by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and available in easy-read form contains proposals and recommendations for change. I emphasise that responses will be listened to and taken into account.

The reconfiguration of day services and expansion of opportunities for supported placements across a wide range of sectors, including further education, training, employment, community and voluntary involvement, sport and leisure, and addressing the need for appropriate transport provision are key parts of the Bamford vision for fuller lives and the aim of ensuring inclusion and greater involvement in society.

The first stage, as identified in this document, is the strategic development of, and consultation on, the regional model for day opportunities and the benchmarking of current service provision at local level against that model. That will be followed by each trust developing local proposals for change within the framework of the agreed model. Those will be consulted on locally.

The inter-ministerial group on mental health and learning disability, which monitors implementation of Bamford, met on 21 November. The subjects of post-19 transitions and day opportunities for people with a learning disability were on the agenda. I am pleased to report that individual Ministers and their representatives renewed their support for joint working across Departments and agencies to deliver improved services and support in both of these areas. Officials will meet to carry this forward.

I know that existing users of day and adult resource and training centres, and their families and carers, have concerns about any changes to existing services. All of the people directly affected must be fully involved in whatever is proposed and eventually decided on.

I believe that there will always be a place for day centres and the services and support that they provide to people with complex needs. However, again in keeping with the Bamford recommendations, day or adult resource centres need to be fit for purpose, modern and better integrated into their local community. Equally, I do not want there to be people left in day centres who miss out on opportunities to participate in a wider range of varied and interesting activities, involving both new developments and experiences coming to them and the opportunity to go out into their local communities.

I have said in the House before that the learning disabled community is a key and integral part of our community. They are our children, our people and our community. They need to be engaged in the same activities as the rest of the community where possible. It is imperative that people with learning disabilities have access to high quality, individualised day care services throughout their lives. The proposals are aimed at improving the range and quality of day opportunities that are available, the scope for real choice and the means to access the services.

I support the motion, and I will work with my ministerial colleagues to achieve its aims. My officials will work with those of other Departments and their agencies, and with voluntary and community organisations and the private sector, to enhance day opportunities for those with learning disabilities.

I will deal with a few of the issues raised. I thank Gordon Dunne, who covered many areas, for proposing the motion to the House in the way that he did. Fearghal McKinney proposed the amendment. I respond to that by saying that the 2012-15 action plan acknowledges the considerable challenges of the restriction on public sector funding. A key element of the day opportunities proposal that is being consulted on is maximising the funding available; minimising duplications; simplifying pathways through joint working and sharing of resources between Departments; and getting the fullest possible input from all agencies, the third sector, voluntary organisations etc.

Roy Beggs raised a number of issues. I stress that this day opportunities model is not proposed with the intention of implementing cuts. The current model is not a sustainable model for the future. We want to improve the day opportunities to increase respite and short-break provision, as a greater range and amount of alternative care gives carers a break, whether it is in the form of employment, training, leisure, sport or other activities.

Kieran McCarthy raised a number of issues. I welcome the positive role of his colleague, Minister Farry, and his contribution to the work that we are doing together and the joined-up government that is taking place between the Department of Health and DEL.

The Committee Chair, Maeve McLaughlin, raised a number of issues and mentioned health inequality. It has always been my aim to ensure that people with a learning disability have access to all areas of healthcare, including prevention services and screening. The direct enhanced services in primary care are providing that through general practitioners and health facilitators in our community.

In response to Mr Brady's contribution, I can say that the consultation document is available in easy-read format, and the HSCB has organised local consultation meetings across Northern Ireland. This is also the first regional model in which there will be consultations at trust level.

I trust that that deals with many of the questions that were raised. We are moving into a different period, and I think that it would be constructive for us to identify the issues and to look to expand opportunities in the services. Although we recognise that it is a different circumstance, there will be the need for day centres, and they will be retained. However, we will be looking for a wide range of other opportunities and activities for people with learning disabilities. I believe that that fits very neatly with what Bamford outlined, and I think that it is the right thing to do for people with a learning disability.

Mr Rogers: I, too, commend the work of the Bamford review and the Executive for deciding to commit to the principles of the review, most specifically in the 'Equal Lives' report of 2005. That report outlined the need to provide more daytime opportunities that lie outside the traditional care setting to individuals with a learning disability. However, new care models need to be developed to bring forward the level of care for those with learning disabilities. They can be achieved by adhering to the five

core principles of the 'Equal Lives' report, which we heard about today: social inclusion, citizenship, empowerment, working together and individual support. There must be a cross-departmental effort to facilitate new opportunities for those with a learning disability, whether it is in transport, learning, education, employment or health mediums.

However, although the motion endorses the current Bamford action plan and the work of the Bamford review as a whole, there are worrying financial inconsistencies that must be addressed if progress is to be achieved. The comprehensive spending review of health has already had a detrimental effect on services. As noted in the Bamford action plan 2009-2011, the work of the Bamford review has already suffered from that.

The amendment that we tabled calling for financial arrangements to be put in place is significant. Executive colleagues must work together to ensure that financial mismatching will not scupper any of the points in the Bamford action plan.

The Bamford monitoring group was set up in 2009, and its role is to scrutinise Departments in line with the Bamford review. It comprises key stakeholders in learning disability: individuals with learning disabilities, their families, carers and members of the patient/client group. The monitoring group expressed grave concerns that the draft budget of the Health Department 2011-15 made no specific mention of the Bamford plan. It believes that, unless ample funding is provided, the Bamford plan will be jeopardised.

Furthermore, it has been very difficult historically to distinguish the amounts of money that other Departments have given to learning disability services. There is no guarantee that any other Department must give any amount unless a financial plan is unearthed. That, too, is very worrying.

I will now refer to a few of the contributors. The proposer of the motion, Gordon Dunne, highlighted the real challenge of living with a disability, as well as the valuable contribution that they make to society. Services need to be matched by the level of funding. My colleague Mr McKinney rightly noted the worrying inclusion in the 2012-15 plan of a disclaimer of sorts. It reads as follows:

"New actions or initiatives will require further financial analysis and their implementation will be subject to resource availability and prioritisation within the respective organisation(s)."

Ms McLaughlin rightly pointed out that people's lives do not stop at 4.00 pm. They need help 24/7. She talked about the empowerment of the individual and community, but that is going nowhere without the appropriate funding.

Mr Beggs said that there was no one-size-fits-all solution. He emphasised the need for appropriate funding to back up the recommendations. Changes to day care services should not be used as a disguise to cut those services.

Mr McCarthy spoke from family experience. A wide range of interventions will be needed to make this work. The Department must retain its current financial commitment, and OFMDFM has an overall coordinating role.

He talked about the clear link between the Department of Health, the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning.

7.45 pm

Ms Brown pointed out that we are in a different place economically but that that should not inhibit us in helping those with learning disabilities. She said that all Departments have a key role to play in helping those people live more independent lives.

Mr Brady pointed out that people only want what they are entitled to. He emphasised a point that sometimes gets lost in this debate: the role of the carer. We so underestimate that at times. He also said that Mencap highlighted the need for more funding.

Mr Gardiner also focused on funding concerns. He spoke in detail about the uniqueness of various centres.

Minister Poots welcomed the debate in his dual role. He said that people with learning disabilities should be active and get the support that they deserve. He also said that progress has not been as good as it should be. He made the telling point that these are our children and young people and that they need the same chance as everybody else.

The SDLP supports the motion, which endorses the Equal Lives report and the current Bamford action plan. It recognises the need for more to be done to promote choice and independence for individuals with a learning disability. It also calls for improved access to high-quality services and employment for people with a learning disability and urges a cross-departmental response.

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

Mr Rogers: Although a lot of good work has been achieved, that may not continue, owing to financial contributions. Finally, I support the call from Mr McKinney and Mr Brady for an extension to the consultation process.

Mr Wells: Last Wednesday, the Health Committee went to Carrickfergus, where we had an opportunity to meet the carers of those with learning disabilities and, indeed, clients of the service. I found that very instructional, if that is a proper English word. Three themes or concerns that carers and those with learning difficulties have been raised at that event. The first was about what happens at age 19. There seems to be a general view that there is fairly good provision for education and training of young people with learning disabilities from school age to 18. However, there is great concern about what can be provided in that field at age 19. The second theme — a recurring theme — was what will happen when carers are no longer able to look after their loved one. The third theme was respite. How often does the word "respite" come up in various debates in the Assembly? Respite is very much the Cinderella of care in Northern Ireland.

In his introduction, Gordon Dunne mentioned the 2005 Bamford review. It is very unfortunate that, having produced that seminal work, Mr Bamford did not live to see its outworkings in their entirety. We all owe a debt of gratitude to that monumental piece of work, which has brought the debate on those with learning disabilities to the fore. Gordon — sorry, the honourable Member for North Down Mr Dunne — made the point that there has to be a consistent and equal level of support across trusts. He mentioned the work that is carried out in Strickland's in North Down but raised the issue, as many did, that funding is limited. He said that we should promote choice and independence and quoted the Patient and Client Council publication 'My Day, My Way'. He also said that there was

much more need for employment opportunities. Like many other Members who spoke, he raised the importance of the work of the voluntary sector. Indeed, if it were not for the work of organisations such as Mencap, Praxis and the Bryson Charitable Group, I shudder to think how far on services for those with learning disabilities in Northern Ireland would be.

Fearghal McKinney moved an amendment that was accepted by all sides. He praised the Executive's commitment to the Bamford review and action plan. However, he then called for much more joined-up government, which was a recurring theme for many of the Members who spoke. I think that it was useful that Mr McKinney was able to quote, at length, the various finance and funding statistics. Clearly, there is a problem, in that at the minute there are certainly not sufficient means to implement the Bamford recommendations properly. He also mentioned that, every year, 500 young people transfer from education to other forms of training and employment at age 19. He also mentioned the Equal Lives report and said that all Departments should work together.

One thing is absolutely clear: we will not be able to deliver on Bamford if various Departments adopt the view that they are in a silo, only do what they should have to do and do not branch out into the work of other Departments. We need a coherent policy right across the Executive if we are going to deal with this issue, and I am glad that so many Members raised that important point.

Mr McKinney mentioned the need for much more in the way of day opportunities. Ms McLaughlin, who is the Chair of the Committee, said that we should go for full social inclusion, and I think that we all agree with her on that. She also said that we should have person-centred plans and empower clients with the necessary education and skills, and also empower communities to interact with people with learning disabilities. I thought that summed it up very well. She was the only person to mention the fact that we are dealing with the lives of 25,000 people in Northern Ireland. It is important that we understand the scale of what we have to achieve for so many of our community. Ms McLaughlin was also the only person to mention the very poor health outcomes that are consistently reported for those with a learning disability. They are far more likely to need to go to the GP, to A&E and for further treatment, but there is a good side to that point as well. Those with learning disabilities are living longer, and that is an indication that we are beginning to tackle those health inequalities. In the 1950s and 1960s, sadly, there was not much of a problem with older people with learning disabilities, because many of them did not live long enough to reach a ripe old age of retirement. I am glad to see that progress is being made and people are living much longer. I was interested in Mr Gardiner's quote that someone in one of the day centres was 82. That is good news to hear, but of course that means that there are more demands on the various Departments to look after those people.

Roy Beggs once again mentioned that you cannot deliver without funding. He supported a person-centred approach to day opportunities and said that we need further investment, and he raised the issue, once again, of respite care.

Kieran McCarthy always makes a very helpful interjection at the Health Committee on this issue, and he said that he based that on his personal experience. The benefit of having a local Assembly is that there are those who have

been at the coalface — as, of course, has the Minister — on this issue, and therefore can quote from direct experience on the ground, as it were. He said that parents should be totally involved in the planning for their loved ones. I do not think that anyone can disagree with that. He also said that a cross-cutting approach should not be used as an opportunity by the Department of Health to cut its own expenditure. I am glad that the Minister addressed that issue, and he gave us some reassurance on that. He raised the importance of DRD. In my constituency, I had a case in Kilkeel of a young gentleman who had a learning disability. He wanted to go to a camera club in Newry to learn photography, but the problem was that he could not get transport to Newry to achieve that. Mr McCarthy also praised the work of Stephen Farry, the Employment and Learning Minister. I suppose that I am not surprised, but, to be fair to Mr Farry, he has made important strides on that issue. So I do not think that it was a case of getting a note from the Minister as to what he should say.

The Member for South Antrim Pam Brown made a point that encapsulates all of what has happened today: much achieved, but much remains to be done. I think that we can agree with that. We need to have changes right across government. We want to encourage those with learning disabilities to live independent lives.

The other day, Mr McCallister and I had the pleasure of going to the Saint Patrick centre in Downpatrick to see those with learning disabilities working away, achieving so much with the catering for that very busy visitor centre. I sat and chatted to a couple of the service users, and it was amazing how much that meant to them. They could get on a bus in the morning, enjoy a very good day's work and go back to their homes, where they are cared for. That was combined, as the Minister said, with some element of training and further education. The best way forward is a mix of provision for those with learning disabilities.

Mickey Brady was useful in that he listed the principles of Bamford. He was the only person, surprisingly, until the Minister, to mention Transforming Your Care, which is absolutely crucial in this debate about care for those with learning disabilities. He said that there should be no distinction made between day opportunities and day centres. He also raised an interesting point about the lack of consultation for families in his area. It is important that that issue was raised.

Sam Gardiner always makes some very interesting comments in these debates. He gave us some very useful statistics, and he asked a question, which I do not know was really answered: why does there seem to be a higher prevalence of attendance at day centres in Northern Ireland than the rest of the United Kingdom? A little bit of research should be done to sort that out because it is interesting. Are we too dependent on that option in Northern Ireland? Our figures are considerably higher than in England and Wales. He said that the median age of those attending day centres was 40, which, again, indicates that many of these folk are living much longer, healthier lives, and that the range was, remarkably, from 16 to 87. He also said that the numbers attending ranged from two to 140. I shudder to think how we can justify having a centre where we provide for only two, and I am also worried that we have a centre providing for such a large number as 140.

The Minister challenged all parties and members of the Executive to work together on this. I think that that emphasises the Minister's view that every Minister in Northern Ireland should be a minister of health, because it is such an all-encompassing service. He challenged the Departments to play their part and emphasised the need for a more varied week for those with a learning disability. He drew attention to the second action plan for 2012-15.

I think that this has been a very useful debate. Every now and then, it is good to focus on particular provision within the health sector, because this is not a very glamorous subject. You will not get a certain BBC broadcaster, between 9.00 am and 10.30 am on weekday mornings, shouting from the rooftops about the achievements, or otherwise, of what we provide for those with learning disabilities. It is not glamorous; it does not attract media attention. However, it is very, very important for the 25,000 people in Northern Ireland who attend day centres or special education. It is equally important to, perhaps, three or four times that number —

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

Mr Wells: — the number of carers who cherish and look after these people. I think that we should pay tribute to those individuals who are doing so much to make the lives of those with learning disabilities so much more fulfilled in Northern Ireland.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the Bamford review Equal Lives report and the expectations it places across all Departments; supports the Northern Ireland Executive's Bamford action plan 2012-15, including the action to "enhance provision of person-centred day opportunities (including employment provision) for people with a learning disability that facilitate integration into the community"; recognises that, while day centre provision will always be required, more must be done to promote choice and independence for individuals living with learning disabilities, including development of employment opportunities, access to culture, arts and leisure, transport and education opportunities; demands full and meaningful involvement of service users, carers and other stakeholders in the development of new services; calls for improved access for people with learning disabilities to high-quality, individualised services through supported living, supported employment, productive daytime opportunities, educational, social and leisure activities; encourages benchmarking of day services/day opportunities in order to drive improvements, ensure consistency of quality and equity of access; and urges the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and Executive colleagues, to work cross-departmentally alongside voluntary/community organisations and statutory agencies to put in place a network of services that deliver enhanced opportunities for those with learning disabilities; and ensure that the necessary financial arrangements are put in place in order to facilitate the 2012-15 Bamford action plan.

Small Business Saturday

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

Mrs Cochrane: I beg to move

That this Assembly supports the forthcoming Small Business Saturday on 7 December 2013; and urges the local community to make a special effort to support local traders on that day.

I am pleased to be able to move the motion this evening with the support of all parties. The performance of our small business sector is crucial to the performance of the Northern Ireland economy as a whole. Therefore, we must do all that we can to support small businesses. In particular, town centres are battling against the changing nature of retail and consumerism in Northern Ireland, the pressure of which is becoming unbearable for many small businesses and retailers who are struggling to keep their doors open. One of the biggest challenges is online retailing, which has quadrupled over the past six years and which continues to rise. Our businesses and independent retailers, therefore, need to adapt to that trend. More importantly, they need to ensure that a trip to the high street is a positive, broader experience.

A number of weeks ago, I brought a motion to the House calling for an overarching strategy for town centres, high streets and urban villages. That was very much focused on what government could and should be doing for our small business sector. Today's motion is about an initiative that the businesses themselves will take forward, but which we and the community should be supporting.

What is Small Business Saturday? It started in 2010 as an American shopping promotion held on the first Saturday after Thanksgiving as a way to get local businesses involved in the shopping frenzy, acting as a counterpart to Black Friday and Cyber Monday. It was the brainchild of the small business division of American Express and was developed to influence shoppers to allocate some of their holiday spend at their local shops and service-orientated businesses. The US campaign has been widely publicised, using social media, with its Facebook page achieving 3.2 million likes and the Twitter hashtags #smallbusinessaturday and #smallbizaturday garnering significant attention, notably from President Barack Obama who tweeted, "Today, support small businesses in your community by shopping at your favorite local stores".

Obviously, the figures for the weekend past are not in yet, but it was estimated that consumers spent \$5.5 billion at small businesses during last year's US Small Business Saturday. Over half a million small businesses participated in the event, which attracted 100 million consumers. The National Federation of Independent Businesses reported that 67% of American consumers had planned to shop small.

8.00 pm

Additionally, it has been cited as the most important shopping day of the season for 36% of independent retailers in the US. It is that success that has brought the initiative across the Atlantic. In recent years, we have a multitude of shop local campaigns to encourage

communities to support independent retailers, pubs, restaurants and other small traders. Many of those campaigns have had various degrees of success, but we need new thinking about how we refresh and move such schemes forward to support traders.

This Saturday 7 December is UK Small Business Saturday. It is supported by the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA), the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), Pubs of Ulster, the Ulster Chemists' Association and a host of town-based Chambers of Commerce and traders' groups. It has been championed in the UK by Chuka Umunna, the Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, and it is supported by the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, Vince Cable and the Minister of State for Skills and Enterprise, Matthew Hancock. I, along with the Minister for Regional Development, the Minister for Social Development, the Finance Minister, the Minister of Justice and a number of other elected representatives took part in the launch of the campaign in Belfast and Comber last Friday.

I firmly believe that it is our role as politicians to support small businesses in our constituencies, and I am sure that we all want to see Small Business Saturday raise the profile of small enterprises all over Northern Ireland. We know that the vast majority of businesses in Northern are small and that they provide most of our private sector jobs. However, small firms do not have the public profile and marketing budgets of large corporations, and they are unable to match the deeply discounted offers of the major retailers. Small Business Saturday is, therefore, an excellent way to celebrate the sector and support traders in showcasing their products and services by reminding people that shopping locally offers the convenience of a closer commute, no fighting in the store with other shoppers and shorter queues at the checkout.

However, this is not just a shop local campaign. It is about highlighting the huge contribution that all our small businesses make to the Northern Ireland economy. The initiative has the potential to give exposure not just to small retailers but to hair salons, restaurants, travel agents, coffee shops, day spas etc. In fact, I heard somewhere that it is about supporting the butcher, the baker and the local dressmaker. Small Business Saturday can help to get the word out that these businesses are there. Even if people do not buy on Saturday, business owners in the US have noticed that they see people throughout the year when they begin to put their money where their house is.

The success of this Saturday will be very much down to the businesses themselves. The Executive have been doing much to support the sector, but I repeatedly tell local business representatives not always to wait for support from government. They are the ones in business and they also need to help themselves to be successful. We should be encouraging businesses to think creatively about how they can take advantage of increased footfall on the day. Many small businesses are already heavily involved in the community. A good example of that is in my East Belfast constituency, where local businesses have focused on each other's strengths to help them to prosper together and create a community spirit. The Ballyhackamore Business Association, which is made up made up of retailers, salons, cafes, restaurants, travel agents etc, has organised a family fun day this Saturday to coincide with

Small Business Saturday. Its members are making full use of the opportunity to showcase their businesses and to build a sense of community. We may recognise that small businesses are the backbone of our economy, but the Ballyhackamore traders know that their customers are the heart of it.

Supporting local business is so important because business owners are the ones who reinvest that money back into the community and create jobs. That was summed up in a Facebook post by business owner Jason Shankey last Saturday, in which he said:

"A big thank you to our customers and to the people of Belfast for supporting their city today. When you frequent a local salon business, you aren't helping a CEO possibly buy a third holiday home. You're helping a stylist's little girl get dance lessons, a receptionist's little boy get his team jersey, a colourist's mum her mortgage, a barber dad put food on the table, or a junior just starting out with petrol money. Customers are shareholders, and they're people small business owners strive to make happy. Thank you for supporting us."

I could not have said it better myself.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the current economic climate has had a devastating effect on many of our small businesses across the UK and Ireland. Here in Northern Ireland, the impact of the reduction in consumer spending has been further compounded by the recent increase in security incidents and unhelpfully timed protests and parades, including the blatant defiance of Parades Commission determinations. We have a range of small businesses with boundless potential, and all of them need support. I trust that others will join me this evening in urging consumers to make a special effort to support as many small businesses as possible this Saturday 7 December and give them a much-needed boost this Christmas and into the new year.

Mr Ross: The proposer laid out pretty well what Small Business Saturday is all about and why it is important that we support it. She talked about the difficulties that many traders face at present as consumer trends change. Of course, today is Cyber Monday, when it is estimated that some £450 million will be spent in the UK economy through 7.7 million transactions online. Of course, it shows that there will be challenges for small businesses in Northern Ireland. The point was made by the proposer and during oral questions to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment earlier that that is a challenge for small businesses and, often, they get support from government to ensure that they have a solid online presence and that they use every avenue possible.

The proposer also talked about the genesis of Small Business Saturday having emanated from the United States. Of course, there are those who would be quite cynical about the whole Small Business Saturday approach. They believe that it is nothing more than a PR stunt. I ask those people to look at the impact that it has had in the United States, where small businesses say that some \$5.5 billion was put into them on Small Business Saturday last year. That is something that we should certainly take cognisance of. Indeed, as the proposer said, some 36% of small businesses in the US are saying that it is the most important day of the year. If we can replicate some of that success, it will be a positive development for

small businesses here in the UK. There can definitely be tangible benefits for small companies.

In the UK, we know that there are close to five million small companies. In Northern Ireland, almost 60% of companies are in the SME sector. That is why, in Northern Ireland, it is particularly important that we support small business. Not only is it a day for people in local towns, villages and cities to go out, buy locally and shop on their local high streets, but it is one to shine a spotlight on the work that small businesses do. It is a day on which we can certainly recognise and appreciate the work that is done, particularly by those who have taken a risk and established their own businesses and have often put in their own money to develop successful ideas. That is something that we should definitely celebrate and encourage even further. What we want to see in Northern Ireland are more entrepreneurs taking a risk to set up their own businesses and, ultimately, growing those businesses. That is very important.

It is not just about retail. It is an important message to put out there that Small Business Saturday is not just about the retail sector, but about trying to encourage other people to start their own businesses, provide employment and make a contribution to the Northern Ireland economy.

There are a number of examples of small businesses that are succeeding in the economy. It is important that we help to build that confidence for people to grow their businesses. We need to encourage them to take on an additional member of staff. Indeed, I know that, this afternoon, the all-party group on SMEs had a photo shoot for a proposal to try to encourage small businesses to take on an additional member of staff over the next three or four years. That could make a big difference.

We also need to encourage small businesses to take a step towards exporting for the first time. I know that there are a number of different schemes through which government is providing support to small businesses to help them to do that. A good example is the Going Dutch programme. I had the opportunity to go to Holland in February this year, and I saw many small businesses from Northern Ireland with very humble beginnings that were, for the first time, taking that step to go and export into mainland Europe. It is incredibly important that we give them the support and confidence to do that because that is how we will grow our economy.

We also have to support small businesses to get work more locally. Not long ago, I was at a meet-the-buyer event, which I know that other Members in the House attended, in the Ramada Hotel. That event supplied small businesses in Northern Ireland with practical support and advice on how they could bid for public procurement contracts. That is something that is very much about confidence because when many small companies that have not got the experience of doing it get that support and level of confidence, it encourages them to go for those public procurement contracts. That is important as well.

Earlier, I mentioned the importance of entrepreneurship and encouraging people to start businesses.

Again, only last week, the Seedcorn awards event took place in Dublin, at which many local companies were celebrated for taking the gamble of starting up by themselves and being very successful in doing so.

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

Mr Ross: The Executive have supported small businesses in a number of areas. However, they still need to take action on reforming employment law to ensure that we give confidence to small businesses and encourage them to take on additional staff. That will be of benefit to the whole economy.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas le moltóirí an rúin, nó tá sé iontach tábhachtach agus cuidiúil. I thank the proposer of the motion, which is very important, topical and helpful at this time. I support the motion at a time when the First and deputy First Minister are off on yet another trip around the world; I believe that they are in Japan this week.

It is important that this Assembly makes a point of endorsing the forthcoming Small Business Saturday on 7 December. We should also take the opportunity to support local small businesses and urge the public to make a special effort to support local traders in their communities on that day as well as throughout the rest of the year.

Small businesses form the backbone of the Northern Irish economy. Over 98% of VAT or PAYE-registered businesses here employ fewer than 50 people and over 89% of such businesses have fewer than 10 employees. Just under half — some 47% — of all businesses here have a turnover of less than £100,000, and that is a higher percentage than in the rest of the UK. Although the largest proportion of all businesses are in Belfast, the highest number of businesses with a turnover below £50,000 is in Fermanagh. Through the continued success of small, local, independent businesses we can build sustainable economic growth for the benefit of the whole of our society.

The Small Business Saturday campaign follows the successful model that was introduced in the US in 2010. Already, as Mr Ross mentioned, it has become a \$5.5 billion phenomenon in the United States. Were it to be as successful here, we might have to consider introducing our own Thanksgiving Day at some point. However, at a time when our town centres across the North are struggling and when more and more shops are lying empty rather than hosting thriving local retailers, it is absolutely vital that we highlight the significant contribution that those local retailers make to our daily lives.

I would also point out that the destruction caused by some politically motivated protests in our town centres, along with those lunatics who try to drive bombs in and carry on that tradition, has not helped the many local traders who are trying to keep their businesses viable.

Small Business Saturday is a grass roots campaign with no sponsors, partners or donors and no budget. It is being delivered by volunteers and by organisations giving of their time and expertise for free. It is dependent on the public hearing the message and acting on it. The message that we want to send out is that we should celebrate the contribution that small, independent businesses make to our local economy and that we should buy from them. They are the backbone of our economy and have a huge role to play in the vitality and regeneration of those local communities.

According to a recent Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) report, for every £1 spent with a small or medium-

sized business 63p was respent in the local area compared with 40p in every £1 spent with a larger business. Small Business Saturday matters because those small, local, independent businesses matter to us all. Without the support of the public, the goods and services that those businesses supply to local communities may no longer be available across the North. For that reason, I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Mrs Overend: I take particular pleasure in supporting the motion and Small Business Saturday. It is very important to support our local businesses at this vital time of the year for consumer spending. Many shops make one third of their annual revenue in the run-up to Christmas, but greater numbers of people are turning away from the high street, as other Members have said. More importantly, they are turning away from local shops to buy goods, especially at Christmas. That is down to the continuing sophistication of the internet and shops' ability to sell goods online, a greater choice online and a growing internet-savvy population.

8.15 pm

Eight in 10 households in Northern Ireland have access to the internet, with that figure increasing by 7% year on year to equal the UK average. In the UK, from May 2012 to 2013, the amount that was spent online increased by 10.3%. The Centre for Retail Research expects the share of online retail to rise to 21.5% by 2018.

The Westminster Government commissioned the Portas review in 2011 to look into the future of the high street. In that review, Mary Portas found that less than half of our spending is on the high street, and that figure is falling. She pointed out that a fall in footfall in an area weakens nearby stores' performance, leading to the surrounding area getting weaker and increasing the likelihood of further closures, which, in turn, reduces footfall in the area. That vicious circle is taking hold in some of our towns already.

Notwithstanding the recommendations of the Portas review and the subsequent independently produced Grimsey report into the vanishing high street, a great deal can be done to help the high street and our local businesses by simply getting more people to visit our local town centres to do their shopping there.

It is appropriate that Small Business Saturday takes place at this vital time for retailers, but it should be part of a wider plan to highlight the wealth of choice that our high street has to offer. Indeed, I should say that mid-Ulster has a range of small businesses to cater for consumers' every need and requirement. It is important that those small businesses are promoted at this time of the year, as well as throughout the year. Small Business Saturday should help to influence shoppers' habits now, which will hopefully endure into the future.

The Ulster Unionist Party consistently champions the cause of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and recognises the valuable role that they play at the core of our economy. In our party conference in October, which was the first party conference of the year, we debated Small Business Saturday and confirmed our support for the idea. Indeed, it is the responsibility of all our Executive Ministers to play their part. Our Regional Development Minister plays his part to support small businesses in a couple of ways. He scrapped the proposed car park charges when he came into office, and, most recently, he

announced car parking prices of £1 for five hours across many towns in Northern Ireland. That enables shoppers to shop local for longer and at a cheaper rate in our local towns right across Northern Ireland.

I will be honest and say that, when we talked about Small Business Saturday, I questioned how consumers' behaviour really would change, especially when I heard that large businesses are also participating in Small Business Saturday. I thought that, if everyone was coming on board, consumers would surely just continue to shop as they normally do. I came to the conclusion that I could support Small Business Saturday when I thought about how local SMEs in my constituency were dealing with it. In fact, I was in Cloughbane Farm Shop about a month ago, and I came home loaded with my various pounds of meat and pork products, as well as a delicious Cloughbane Farm Shop chicken and ham pie. I was in Sainsbury's on Saturday for a basket of goods, and I found a Cloughbane Farm Shop chicken and ham pie in Sainsbury's. I thought, "That is how we change consumers' behaviour". You consider supporting local businesses, no matter where you are. So, I am delighted that everyone is supporting Small Business Saturday in their own unique way.

To conclude, although it is the Executive's responsibility to create an environment for small and medium-sized enterprises to grow and flourish, the success of Small Business Saturday will be measured by the success of changing consumer behaviour. I will conclude with my support for Small Business Saturday and say that I commend the motion.

Mr Dunne: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion, and I commend the person who tabled it. I think that it is essential, in this time of economic difficulty for so many small businesses across our town centres, that we do all that we can to support and encourage economic activity for our local small businesses.

Our small businesses are the backbone of our economy and are key to the future of our town centres. Not only do they provide so many jobs but they stimulate and sustain our town centres. There is no doubt that independent traders have been the lifeblood of our communities for many years, especially during the darkest years of the Troubles, when out-of-town shopping centres did not exist. It would be a tragedy to see independent traders disappear altogether. People must be encouraged to shop locally, and not just at Christmas but throughout the year.

I am glad that North Down Borough Council supported the DUP motion with a Small Business Saturday initiative. We have an exciting programme lined up for this Saturday to stimulate business in Bangor town centre. Poor planning has had implications for our town centres. Many planning decisions made on out-of-town shopping centres have had a major effect.

Bangor is a typical example of a place where there has been major investment in shopping centres outside the town. That has had a significant effect, with low footfall, little spend and the closure of many shops and units, as all Members have seen across the Province. Therefore, it is important that we look at alternative forms of shopping for places such as Bangor. I commend the work of DSD and the public realm schemes planned for our towns of Bangor and Holywood. Work is to start within months, and other

projects have taken place about the Province. That is to be welcomed. The work that has been done has gone some way to regenerating town centres. More must be done, however. We must do all that we can to support small retailers.

Other initiatives include the recent reduction in car parking charges by the Minister for Regional Development, which is positive, and the small business rate relief scheme from Sammy Wilson, the former Finance Minister, was very positive. I am sure that that strikes a positive note for all us elected representatives.

We should commend the work of the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA). We all know Glyn Roberts and see him at our different party conferences. I do not know how many hats or rosettes that man wears, but he has been forthright in delivering and positive in his work in helping to regenerate town centres.

Holywood is an example of a town that has turned the corner. It is a small town that has had major knock-on effects from shopping centres. Tesco at Knocknagoney and Sainsbury's at the Holywood Exchange are huge supermarkets close to the town centre. As a result, we saw the closure of butchers, greengrocers and florists. In recent years, however, Holywood has turned a corner. The town has a sense of community and the loyalty of its people, who feel ownership. As a result, we saw a new butcher's shop open recently, a greengrocer's revamped and other shops move into the town.

One thing that we do have is about 14 places where you can get coffee. It seems to be the coffee centre of north Down. A Whip has just appeared who is fond of visiting coffee shops in Holywood. I am just commending them, Mr Whip. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Weir: You do not need to declare an interest, anyway.

Mr Dunne: Holywood is an example of a town centre that has fought back. There is a future for our town centres but it is important that the public support them. And our Whip is not bad after all.

Mr McKinney: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. The SDLP believes that, for a modern economy to thrive, it is important that we not only attract foreign investment and support those bigger corporations coming in here but have small, independent businesses to stimulate growth and achieve fiscal sustainability in Northern Ireland.

Can I, too, be a bit indulgent, Mr Deputy Speaker, and say that in my constituency of South Belfast the vitality of small retail businesses is ever-present in areas such as the Lisburn Road, Botanic and the Ormeau Road and in smaller urban centres such as Finaghy? Let me take the last one as an example. The Finaghy Business Association is making great strides in interlinking local trade and the local community. For example, on Friday night, the Christmas lights were turned on for the first time, and, over two days, the streets were crowded with people, all of whom were encouraged to avail themselves of the great local shops and services. Small Business Saturday may prove instrumental in fostering the same community confidence in local retailers.

We believe that the initiative can only be helpful for small businesses. The US experience and its multi-billion-dollar rewards bear testimony to that. Here, though, the small business sector undoubtedly deserves substantial

attention, as nearly 98% of all registered enterprises have fewer than 50 employees. In fact, the population of microbusinesses — that is those with fewer than 10 employees — makes up nearly 90% of all registered enterprises. The House must ask itself what can be put in place to allow the small business sector here to thrive.

This Saturday's celebration of local enterprise is, no doubt, an excellent initiative, and the SDLP hopes that it will ignite a growth in sales. Nevertheless, more must be done over this mandate to help SMEs. For devolution to work, we must ask what more can government do. We cannot ignore the magnitude of the problem. The fact remains that Northern Ireland has the worst shop vacancy rate in the UK, with nearly one in four shops being empty. That is not only the worst in the UK, but twice the national average. If you think that is bad, consider that, in hard figures, it represents the closure of nearly 3,000 businesses.

I reflect, too, on Mr Dunne's contribution on the effect of out-of-town developments. The FSB has turned its attention to that. Its survey has revealed that seven out of 10 small firms think that, moving forward, parking is the priority for independent shops. Broadening it out, could another answer lie with procurement processes? Given the huge spend, could local authorities approach this in a way that allows small or local businesses greater access to the procurement process?

NIIRTA points to the fact that three separate Departments are in charge of town centre regeneration. Is that appropriate? It is abundantly clear that we need to establish a strategy implementation group to promote a joined-up governmental response. That may be one way to provide legislative structures that benefit town centre-based small businesses.

A large percentage of our small businesses fall into the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors. Those enterprises make up nearly 25% of our registered businesses, compared with 6.5% in the rest of the UK. That places us in a unique position whereby we must strive to promote rural business as well as urban trade, and that could have a consequent upturn for rural villages and towns.

Many single decisions made here and elsewhere about the closure of key services such as banks, post offices, GP surgeries and schools lead potentially to a collective result: the death of a village or town. And I have not even got to the rates issue yet. So, the initiative must be supported. We must do more, and, ultimately, that must be about agreeing that we will do everything that we can to help to build a real economy here. I support the motion.

Mr McCallister: Like my colleagues said, who would be against the motion? Of course we are all supportive of it. It has been useful to hear some of the ideas. I hope the Minister will work on and push for those, and continue to work with Executive colleagues in doing so.

I just want to touch on some of Mr McKinney's points. As a representative of a large rural constituency, I know what effect taking out one or two banks has on a small town such as Rathfriland. It has a huge effect on the numbers that you bring into the trade, and the feeling about the town. Even just having vacant property in the town — the look of it — has a huge impact, and that is very important in rural areas. I am sure the Minister will also be familiar with this, representing a large rural constituency as well. It has a huge impact on how a town functions when you

collectively put all of those services together. You can very quickly, over a cycle, with different things falling out of a town, create almost a ghost town or village. If we allow that to happen, we will live to regret it. It is very important that we use initiatives such as Small Business Saturday to support the businesses in those towns.

8.30 pm

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Certainly.

Mr Ross: I will play devil's advocate on this issue, because a lot of Members have talked about large shopping centres and the banks. Does the Member agree that much of this is individually driven? People are doing more banking online, so the banks are going to adapt to that; we are obviously going to see that change. Likewise, many of us will shop in the big shopping centres. Many of our constituents will be glad that they can go to their Asda, Sainsbury's or Tesco because they get a better deal. We have to encourage businesses to adapt to those changing consumer practices rather than simply hiding our heads in the sand and trying to forget that those changes are happening.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an additional minute.

Mr McCallister: Thank you. That was a useful intervention. I agree with parts of it. It is about how individuals shop. The banking one is probably slightly different because it is primarily cost-driven; they tend to look at a figure and, in Rathfriland's case, decide that customers can go to Banbridge or Newry. Decisions are quite specific when they should be providing some of those services locally.

I accept your main point about the way in which we all react. I accept that we all have questions to ask ourselves about our behaviour, such as when was the last time we went into a bank or used banking facilities. I am pretty good at shopping locally when it comes to a butcher's shop, in particular, but we all have to look at how we do it. How easy do we make it? Car parking is vital. Minister Kennedy's decision on car parking is very welcome.

Other things have been mentioned, such as looking at exports and the question of how small businesses tap into online services. How do we give them the know-how and the skills to meet those challenges head on and get any opportunities out of those challenges? We have to look at that. In small businesses, some of the bureaucracy around public procurement almost puts people off even thinking about it. It has been a constant drive for us to change that and improve how we do it. Mr Ross mentioned employment law. It can be difficult and problematic. How easy can we make that happen for people? That should be looked at.

We have to look at people who are fair-weather friends in the debate. Small businesses are great when we are debating them, but we are also out supporting flag protests and things such as that. People cannot continue to speak with a forked tongue on this issue by saying that small businesses and retail are hugely important to their town and city centres, but that they also want to have party colleagues or members on protest. That disrupts, and it causes problems. It drives down trade, because the customer is being literally frightened away. We cannot continue in the House to be fair-weather friends to small business only when it suits us. We are all united in the

House at least against possible dissident republican disruption —

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

Mr McCallister: — and the cause of that, but we should not shy away from showing real leadership when it comes to protests. We should stand up and say that the damage that those are doing to the local economy is enormous.

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

Mr McCallister: They need to stop.

Mr Lyttle: I am delighted to support the motion on Small Business Saturday. I thank my Alliance Party colleague Judith Cochrane for her proposal today. I also thank my Alliance Party colleague Councillor Andrew Webb at Belfast City Council, who is proposing a similar motion there to give our full support to Small Business Saturday. As many Members have done, it is important to recognise the work of FSB and NIIRTA in mobilising the campaign.

It is an important opportunity to celebrate and support the contribution of small businesses across our local economy and community. However, we do, of course, recognise that it is only one day and that there are many long-term issues that we have to work as an Assembly and an Executive to address, such as access to finance, an important rate review programme, skills development and, of course, encouraging exports.

As many other Members have mentioned, we have to do all that we can to show leadership in standing strong and united against politically motivated disruption and terrorism and, indeed, to show leadership against sectarian demarcation of areas that need diversity if they are to thrive as business zones. I know that those are issues that various Ministers, including the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, who is here, are working on. I also welcome the cross-party all-party group on SMEs, which is chaired by my colleague Judith Cochrane MLA. Indeed, a number of all-party groups, such as the all-party group on postal issues, of which I am chair, are trying to make sure that those core services that we need to build stable town centres remain in place.

It is important that we encourage small businesses to get on board with this campaign. Whether they are local family businesses, restaurants or craft stores, I think that everyone can get involved with this campaign. Indeed, there is still time to download a guide to the day and a digital marketing pack on the website, smallbusinessaturdayuk.com. Indeed, I encourage businesses to make use of social media to share their plans and ideas for the day.

I think that 7 December represents a chance for us to celebrate the key contribution of SMEs. I want to take this opportunity to recognise small businesses in my constituency of East Belfast. There are some excellent traders' associations representing Belmont Road and Ballyhackamore. There is the Castlereagh Business Association and associations representing Holywood Arches and the Newtownards Road. The Belmont Road website is belmontroadbelfast.co.uk. Ballyhackamore Business Association has an excellent Facebook page, and Castlereagh Business Association's website is cbani.co.uk. Holywood Arches and Newtownards Road are two other key areas where businesses have come together to

promote everything that is good about small business in those areas.

We have heard it said that small businesses are the backbone of our economy. They also make a huge contribution to the life of our community. Along with my colleague Judith Cochrane, I welcome the Christmas festival that is now an annual fixture in the Belmont Road and Ballyhackamore communities. The festival links local community associations such as Wandsworth Community Association, school choirs and, indeed, local churches to hold Christmas markets in the area. That is a really good example of how SMEs and local communities can work together to showcase business in an area, bring communities together and build the kind of community spirit and ownership needed to help them to survive and thrive in challenging circumstances.

It is, of course, important, however, that we tackle the challenges that we have heard mentioned today and to make sure that our small and medium-sized enterprises have long-term and sustainable solutions to some of the key issues that they face. I hope that the Assembly and the Executive redouble their efforts to create that platform for them.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I welcome the opportunity to respond to the motion. It could have been any one of a number of Ministers who stood here to respond to the motion on Small Business Saturday, but I was more than happy to respond, because it is a very important initiative. I want to make the point, as I think I should, that, in my role as Enterprise Minister, I do, of course, support all sizes of business, regardless of where they are situated. However, I welcome the Small Business Saturday initiative. It is a timely and invaluable opportunity for small businesses to raise their profile and encourage their local communities to come out and support them at a key time in the Christmas shopping calendar. We have heard a lot about Black Friday and Cyber Monday but, for those of us who are more traditional and who actually go into a bank instead of banking online, it is important that we still encourage people to come out into our town centres.

As we heard, the Small Business Saturday initiative is based on an established US model that has been operating for a number of years. In the US, it is not politician-led or government-led, nor should it be. It should be led by the small businesses themselves; they must be in the lead. It works best when everyone gets behind the local shops and supports them; not just small businesses but big businesses, local communities, government and business organisations. We should not try to make it a them-and-us situation between big business and small business. I hope that some bigger stores will support the fact that small businesses need to have their time to move forward as well.

It goes without saying, now more than ever, that we should be supporting our retail sector at a time when there is potential for disruption to trade over the coming weeks in the run up to Christmas. In economic terms, we have undoubtedly had a turbulent period. However, there are now signs that the local economic conditions are improving, and I am particularly pleased that our local jobs market has continued to improve throughout 2013 and that the number of people claiming unemployment benefit has now fallen for nine consecutive months, as we all know.

I do, however, recognise that we have some distance to go and, in the second quarter of this year, output in construction and services continued to fall while the production sector remained flat. More recent information from external business surveys suggests that there have been improvements across all sectors, and I very much welcome that and hope that it will provide some encouragement and give a confidence boost to all our consumers.

We all know that the vast majority of businesses in Northern Ireland are small, account for almost three fifths of the jobs in our economy and make over half of all business turnover, which is greater than similar proportions elsewhere in the United Kingdom. They are, therefore, very much at the heart of our economy and of our recovery as well. We need to continue to upscale our small businesses where possible and try to help them with growth opportunities and ensure that, if there are markets for them outside Northern Ireland, we can equip them to go into those markets. Although the scope of Small Business Saturday might be looked on by some as being retail alone, it is not, of course, just retail; it is across all small businesses, and we would do well to remember that.

As I said, excluding OFMDFM, at least four other Departments — DSD, DRD, the Department of the Environment and DFP— have policy responsibilities that impinge on the retail sector. Of course, those remain the responsibilities of the Ministers concerned. However, we have a coherent and joined-up approach, and I think it is in everyone's interests that we do have that approach.

I was very pleased that the retail sector could speak to us at our subgroup on economic challenges recently. I felt that it was important that we had that engagement. We asked them to come along, and the Town Centre Alliance came and told us about all the challenges that it was facing. We invited the Minister for Social Development to the meeting also so that he could talk about some of the issues that he is putting forward in the high street task force report.

For our part, DETI is dealing with a business red tape initiative at present. It is a review that will consider a number of key strategic areas, particularly around how regulations are implemented. They have a disproportionate impact on small businesses across Northern Ireland, and I hope that, when the consultation is ongoing, a lot of our small businesses will give evidence. I know that it is time issue for a lot of them in that they do not have the time, but I hope that they will take the time on this occasion to let us know how we are impacting on them.

I agree with Judith Cochrane that a trip to the high street must be a positive experience. We need to work with high street retailers so that we can help them in this modern era to entice people to come to the high street, because we are stakeholders in their business. That is important. Something that I enjoy when I go to local shops is the fact that it is a bit like the bar in 'Cheers' where "everybody knows your name". It is nice to go into a shop and be acknowledged and have that local touch. I feel that that is very important.

8.45 pm

I was reading today about the Ballymena chamber of commerce. I miss the Member for Strangford, who is now in another place, who used to entertain us with his Ulster

Scots. The Ballymena chamber of commerce released a press release today that I think sums it up. It says, and forgive me if my Ulster Scots is not too good:

"If ye dinnae support them, they'll no be here when you're lookin for them".

I think that that is Ulster Scots. What it is really saying is that, if you do not support small businesses, they will not be here in the future. It is important that we support all our small businesses across Northern Ireland, whether in tangible ways by going in and shopping ourselves; through a more representative fashion, where we can help them with particular issues that come to the fore; or through our ministerial remits, where we can intervene in small business rates. Indeed, the Regional Development Minister has made a timely intervention in the run-up to Christmas, and Invest NI is doing some work through its Boosting Business campaign. All of that is very important.

I support the Small Business Saturday initiative and look forward to being out and about in Fermanagh, as I am sure the person who will make the winding-up speech on the motion will be, on Saturday. Perhaps he will even take me for a cup of coffee. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. If the Minister wants to join me between the hours of 11.00 am and 3.00 pm for an anti-fracking meeting in the Railway Hotel on Saturday, she is more than welcome. I will certainly buy her a cup of coffee.

Mrs Foster: Is there coffee?

Mr Flanagan: I will certainly buy you a coffee between 11.00 am and 3.00 pm in the Railway Hotel on Saturday. I am flustered at the proposal of a date with the Minister. I have never been lost for words in my life. *[Laughter.]* Alistair Ross spoke about the perception that he may be cynical. I may be cynical as well, but my first reaction to this is that it is a PR stunt. However, there is nothing wrong with a PR stunt. Not everything has to cost money to promote. If the business community has a good way of promoting its sector, particularly micro, small and medium-sized businesses, and if that method of promotion costs nothing, why should they not do it, and why should we not roll in behind it and support it? All too often, when people seek a meeting with an Executive Minister, a Committee, an MLA, a councillor or the chief executive of a council, they want something that cannot be done. They are looking for something that cannot be paid for. All the business community wants from us is our support, both as elected representatives and as potential shoppers. All we are being asked to do is to support a worthwhile initiative. Thankfully, nobody has dissented from that, which made for a poor debate but was not much of a surprise.

The quality of the debate was interesting, but it cannot really be called a debate when everybody agrees. Perhaps John McCallister was convinced by somebody's point earlier on. I am not sure, but perhaps John is against small businesses.

Mr McCallister: No, I am not against them.

Mr Flanagan: Given the way that your speech was going, I thought that you were against small businesses. It is good to see that you have come on track and that NI21 firmly supports small businesses.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the Member to make his remarks through the Chair.

Mr Flanagan: I apologise, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

The importance of the micro, small and medium-sized firms to our local economy cannot be understated. In providing jobs, generating wealth and prosperity for our people, and providing services to the wider population, they are of huge significance. It is important to highlight the existing supports that are on offer from the Executive to micro, small and medium-sized firms, particularly through changes to the non-domestic rating system, but also through indirect changes that have been made, including temporary parking changes. Work is being done by the Executive, and it is important that we reflect that as well.

We must, however, acknowledge the ever-changing nature of how consumers carry out their business. I am certainly one of those who has changed. I do not enjoy shopping. It is not a pastime that I enjoy. Perhaps I am not the only man in this Chamber who does not enjoy it. I would far rather shop online, but I would far rather have the opportunity to buy from a local retailer online. Some retailers in all our constituencies are online, and many people have plugged them. I am sure that the Minister is aware, for example, of the excellent website for Home, Field and Stream in Enniskillen, where it, as a fairly specialised retailer, sells things for angling and outdoor activities, not only to the people of Fermanagh but right around the world. There is a whole range of other things that you can buy online while supporting local retailers. I think that much more support and advice need to be given to small retailers to help them to get online.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will happily, Alastair, yes.

Mr Ross: Does the Member agree that one of the greatest dangers and threats to local retailers is their not adapting to those changes in consumer environments and not getting themselves online? Would he encourage those small retailers to seek out support to make sure that they are online and have a positive and strong presence there?

Mr Flanagan: I certainly would. A number of retailers have taken the first step by getting on to Twitter or Facebook, which are generally free, and some of them use those sites very well. However, retailers such as Home, Field and Stream and Shuphoric, which are on Church Street and Townhall Street in Enniskillen, if you are looking for them online, have excellent websites. Shuphoric was recently highly commended with an award for the level of its online commerce. E-commerce was the term that was doing the rounds at the advent of the internet. The term has changed, and it is no longer called e-commerce. However, the opportunities are huge. Those retailers use their overheads and their existing staff to send out goods and services to potential customers around the world. I think that that makes sense.

I am interested to see how the Department of Enterprise and Invest NI could offer further support to those sectors. We always hear that Invest NI cannot, or does not, help retail stores directly. That is fine, as that is the policy. However, something could be done, such as a promotional campaign, free advice or widening the Logon.ni service, to get more retailers online, because that is where the opportunity is.

Before I was around, when the car came about, there was a huge change in how people bought things. People shopped in their nearest shop for convenience, but then the car came and everything changed. Everything has changed again with the internet. You can buy something in China on eBay as handily as you can from going to your local shop. That is often people's first port of call when they go to buy something. So, retailers need to embrace that opportunity, but I think that we all have a job of work to do to convince them of the benefits of doing so.

Mrs Foster: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: Yes.

Mrs Foster: The Boosting Business campaign allows retailers to avail themselves of technological expertise from Invest NI. I know that it has helped a number of retailers to get online so that they can export their goods outside Northern Ireland. I just wanted to put on the record that that is available.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Minister for that. I commend her and her team for the work of Boosting Business. It is a very good initiative that helps non-Invest NI client businesses to access advice and services to help them to grow and sustain their businesses. It is a very challenging time out there.

Small Business Saturday is about more than just shopping locally, and it is more than just a one-day fad. Its whole purpose is to serve as a reminder to all of us, and to consumers, of the importance of small business. It gives us all an incentive to visit a small business and to find out what it is actually like. An awful lot of people might not actually visit a small business any more. An awful lot of people do all their shopping in a single supermarket store and do not go anywhere else. We need to encourage people to visit their local retailer and to get things done with a small business to see what they think. The recent horse meat scandal demonstrated very well for most people the benefits of shopping locally, as you can trace where your food comes from.

It is also about the level of service that you get. The Minister spoke about going into a shop and people knowing her first name. I do not think that that is exclusive to Fermanagh. If you go into any business in the North, you will find that they will know who the Minister is. I think that most businesses that saw her coming would definitely be there to greet her. They might think that they are going to get a grant, and they will run out to greet her. The Minister does not need to be under any illusion, but I know what she means. Everybody feels that, when they go into their local shop, a very hearty welcome is put before them. You do not get that with a large, faceless corporation at times, but you certainly get it in your local store.

Returning to the motion — I think that you might be interested in that, a LeasCheann Comhairle — the main beneficiaries of Small Business Saturday will, of course, be the retail sector. However, it is much wider than that. Other Members have listed the sectors that will benefit from it.

We have all talked for nearly an hour — it will probably be a full hour by the time that I finish — about how much support we want to give to small businesses. I will just throw out there the whole issue of corporation tax. Is reduction of corporation tax the number one demand of

small businesses? In the meantime, what further steps can we take to help small businesses that will not cost the Executive huge sums of money and that might not actually cost them anything? Those are the steps that we need to look at. On a much sadder note, I hate to report that the Ulster Bank is broken again. It is Cyber Monday. People are buying their stuff on the internet and the Ulster Bank is broken. Could it have happened at a worse time for it? However, it is not just Ulster Bank but NatWest and RBS. The Ulster Bank will probably be the last to be fixed again.

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will.

Mr Dickson: On the interesting note that the Ulster Bank's online systems have gone down this evening, does that not prove the great benefits of being able to shop locally, walk in the door of a premises, buy something off the shelf and pay with pounds and pence, rather than go online? There is a great opportunity to go online, but you need to be able to mix that. It has to be, as someone said to me, "bricks and clicks" today to allow you to shop online. However, in the whole social dynamic of our community and in the very small villages and towns that the Member talks about in Fermanagh, you would bring about such a social change that people would never go into such premises and never buy a bag of nails, a packet of crisps or whatever it is that they want. It is vital that we support people shopping locally.

Mr Flanagan: I commend the Alliance Party for managing to get three Members to speak in this debate. *[Laughter.]* It must be a big issue for the Alliance Party when you see who is driving this agenda, so fair play to the Alliance Party. I applaud its ingeniousness.

However, the handling with online banking is something that we will have to face. That is how technology evolves. Problems come up. However, there is a lot to be said for shopping locally, helping small, medium-sized and micro-sized businesses.

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

Mr Flanagan: I encourage everybody to do it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly supports the forthcoming Small Business Saturday on 7 December 2013; and urges the local community to make a special effort to support local traders on that day.

Adjourned at 8.56 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 3 December 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Environment

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): With your permission, Mr Speaker, and in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the eighteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in environment sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 30 October 2013. The statement has been agreed with Mr Kennedy. I would like to start by apologising to the House for the late arrival of copies of the statement. If it is any consolation, I did not get mine too far ahead of you, but I assure the House that, in future, Members will have them in a much more timely fashion.

Danny Kennedy MLA, Minister for Regional Development, and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive at the meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Phil Hogan TD, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. Minister Hogan chaired the meeting.

Ministers noted that the Council approved the terms of reference for an all-island air quality research study into the issue of airborne pollution from residential smoky coal combustion at its meeting on 10 July 2013. The Council welcomed the fact that the procurement process for the study has been initiated, and the study is expected to be completed by May 2014.

The Council welcomed the publication of the revised waste management strategy, 'Delivering Resource Efficiency', in October 2013. Ministers noted publication of the 'All Island Bulky Waste Reuse Best Practice Management Feasibility Study' in July 2013. The Council noted that the North West Region Waste Management Group appointed a preferred bidder on 23 May 2013 and is working towards reaching contract close.

Ministers noted that the Northern Ireland carrier bag levy for single-use bags is to be kept at 5p, and legislation, if approved by the Assembly, will extend the cost to low-cost reusable carrier bags from April 2014.

Ministers noted that revisions are being made to the waste tyre action plan to incorporate the Environment Committee's 12 recommendations.

The Council noted that the waste repatriation programme of work for 2013-14 has been agreed, and Ministers noted that site investigation works have been carried out at the first site in County Tyrone and that the removal of waste commenced early last month. The Council noted

that Dublin City Council has established a framework agreement for the disposal of repatriated waste, and public procurement for the haulage of the repatriated waste to disposal facilities is continuing. The Council noted that joint enforcement action to deal with illegal operators is a priority for both Environment Ministers, and their Departments continue to target resources on that.

The Council noted that coordination continues between both jurisdictions on preparations for the second-cycle river basin management plans under the EU water framework directive. Ministers welcomed the continued coordination on the Clean Coast and Coastcare schemes and the coordination for the symposium on 28 November 2013. The Council also welcomed the presentation of Blue Flag awards in both jurisdictions but noted that there had been a decrease since the previous year due to the stricter award criteria set out in the revised bathing water directive.

Ministers welcomed the continued success of the QUESTOR research partnership in securing European funding for environmental science and technology projects that involve partners in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Europe and globally.

The Council noted that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently finalising the terms of reference for a comprehensive research study of the environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing or fracking. It also noted that the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's second state of the environment report is due for publication by the end of 2013. The Ministers noted that the EPA is in the process of developing a new research programme for the period 2014-2020. The Council noted that legislation currently before the Oireachtas that will enable Science Foundation Ireland to provide research funding on an all-island basis is due to be enacted by the year end.

The Council agreed to hold the next environment meeting on 8 May 2014.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the fact that the Minister mentioned, at the meeting, the incorporation of the Environment Committee's recommendations on the action plan for used tyres. At the meeting, the Minister also mentioned that the commencement date for the extension of the cost to reusable carrier bags will be from April 2014. I am not sure if the Minister is aware of this, but we are seeking his approval — we have been working with officials — to delay the commencement of the carrier bags levy until January 2016. Can the Minister clarify that point?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Chair of the Environment Committee for her question. I am fully aware of the thoughts of the Environment Committee on the issue. You are looking to persuade me to extend this to January 2015.

Ms Lo: Yes, 2015. Sorry.

Mr Durkan: In which case, you will not have to try too hard; in fact, I have already been persuaded. However, today, I am giving a report of the meeting that I had with my counterpart in the Republic of Ireland. I was unaware of that at that stage.

Mr Ross: The Minister referred to the carrier bag levy. Was there any discussion of the impact that it has had not on the reduction of plastic bags at the checkout but on the sales of other types of plastic bag being reported by supermarkets? Also, has there been any reported increase in shoplifting since the introduction of the carrier bag levy?

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Ross. We have seen the impact of the carrier bag levy, certainly, in the reduction of single-use carrier bags. However, compared with other jurisdictions, we have not seen a huge increase in the reuse of reusable bags. In fact, because some of the low-cost reusable bags are so cheap and are not much dearer than a single-use bag, our fear is that they are becoming the new throwaway bag, if you like, and that many people are paying the 5p or 6p for them without necessarily reusing them. That was completely counterproductive. Given the fact that they were made for multiple uses, they are actually worse for the environment than the original 5p or low-cost bags. They are much less biodegradable. That is why I have made the decision to extend the levy. Although I am keeping it at 5p, I am extending that levy to low-cost reusable bags under the value of 20p. Hopefully, when we attach more value to them, people will start to reuse them more and, therefore, there will be fewer plastic carrier bags in circulation.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I welcome the Minister's statement, but I am somewhat disappointed that road safety was not mentioned. Will he bring that forward in the next plenary session? Could he outline to date what new measures he has been working on with the other jurisdiction to reduce fatalities on the roads?

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, Mr Boylan. I am sorry that the Member is disappointed that I have not mentioned road safety in the statement. Road safety was not an issue at the meeting in environment sectoral format. However, last week, when I met Leo Varadkar in transport sectoral format, road safety was to the fore. We share our air and water, and we share our roads. Therefore, it is essential that we have cooperation and collaboration by both jurisdictions on issues of huge importance, such as road safety. That is, certainly, one that is very close to my heart and, I am sure, that of many other Members.

Work is ongoing between jurisdictions, particularly on the mutual recognition of penalty points. I hope to bring forward a road traffic safety improvements Bill early next year that will deal with other issues around graduated learning programmes and bring us into greater harmony with the Republic on drink driving limits. That issue is recognised by the Ministers with responsibility for the environment and transport in the Republic. I look forward to working with them on that.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive statement. This meeting and previous meetings underline the importance of having the environment at the very heart of North/South relations. I note that, on page 1, under "Waste Management", it states:

"The Council welcomed the publication of the revised Waste Management Strategy 'Delivering Resource Efficiency' in October 2013."

Will the Minister outline the main thrust of the revised waste management strategy? Is there a common approach throughout the island of Ireland to that strategy?

10.45 am

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Maginness. The revised waste management strategy takes forward policies that are aimed at moving Northern Ireland from resource management to resource efficiency. The key targets and policies include 50% household waste recycling by 2020; 70% construction and demolition waste recycling by 2020; a 60% recycling target for local authority-collected municipal waste by 2020; higher recycling targets for packaging waste; and landfill restriction on separately collected food waste from households and businesses.

As regards a commonality of approach with Ireland, the revised waste management strategy takes into consideration the new and emerging waste strategies across these islands and not just on this island. For example, as I outlined, my Department is developing proposals to ban separately collected food waste from households and businesses going to landfill, but the development of a landfill restriction on food waste will provide a degree of commonality with our neighbours.

The Department is also exploring the potential for an all-island reuse quality mark for future proposal to the NSMC.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his statement. It has been a little while since I was on the Environment Committee, but, when we talk about the used tyre action plan and the 12 recommendations, are we close to having in place a system whereby all movement of illegal tyres on both sides of the border can be dealt with so that we know exactly who can deal with them, whether that is the PSNI, the NIEA or councils? Do we have a thorough system for stopping the movement of illegal tyres?

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Kinahan. I hope that we are close to that. The all-island used tyre survey has been published, and the findings of the report indicate that, in 2010-11, there were almost 19,000 tons of used tyres in Northern Ireland and 39,000 in the Republic of Ireland. The majority of those tyres were recycled, but other management routes were reported on in the report. The recommendations in the final report focus mainly on data collection, management and reporting, and those areas are being taken forward by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the used tyres working group and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in Ireland.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his statement and for his answers so far. I want to focus on the cross-border movements of waste North/South. The Minister threw some bait out to me with his reference to County Tyrone. Site investigation works

have been carried out at the first site in County Tyrone. Where precisely is that site? What cost is associated with removing and returning that waste? What is the scale of the job and the timeline for completion?

Mr Speaker: That was four questions, Minister. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Durkan: OK. The location of the site is beside County Derry. I will happily speak to the Member later about the finer details of the site and the costs associated with its clear-up. The issue of waste crossing borders is a very serious one, and we take it very seriously. I am glad to say that we are making progress on waste repatriation.

You will be aware of the commitment in the road map agreement with our counterparts in the Republic to undertake repatriation of waste. As I said, 15 sites have been identified with an estimated total of a quarter of a million tons of waste to be recovered. Works began in 2010, and the planned commitment of completing two sites a year has continued. Although six sites have been completed since 2010, a total of almost 64,000 tons of waste has been repatriated, and three further sites are scheduled for waste clearance this year. I have identified one in Tyrone, and there is one in Fermanagh. I will speak to you later on the detail of it.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's statement. Although road safety did not form part of the formal statement to the House, the Minister referred to the importance of road safety. I welcome the television advertisements, which are having an increasing impact. Our constituents, Mr Speaker, are involved in and contribute to that programme. Will the Minister support me in making a clear call to drivers across Northern Ireland not to drink and drive in any circumstances, particularly as our roads in Northern Ireland become much busier coming up to Christmas? I plea for all people to drive safely on the roads.

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Ramsey, for giving me the opportunity — I was remiss not to use it when Mr Boylan gave me the opportunity earlier — to remind people of the importance of staying safe on our roads, particularly as we enter the Christmas period, a time that is all too sadly and all too often associated with death and destruction on our roads. I acknowledge Mr Ramsey's point about the television advertisement campaign run by my Department. I again underline the importance of that medium in driving down deaths and serious injuries on our roads. Through improved education, more enforcement and improved engineering, we have seen the rates of road deaths in Northern Ireland come down very well, and now we are one of the safer countries in Europe as regards deaths on our roads. However, we cannot be complacent, and we must continue to reinforce the message of keeping people safe on our roads and people taking responsibility to keep themselves and other road users safe.

Mr Allister: I note the reference to the Republic's Environmental Protection Agency conducting what is called a comprehensive research study of fracking. Are we contributing to the cost of that? Is that really just a stalling measure, given the Minister's ideological opposition to fracking, to put off the day when a decision might have to be made about that matter? What is the timescale?

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Allister, for telling me what my ideological position is. I have stated in the House and outside it that, in the absence of scientific evidence that fracking is safe and sustainable, I will not permit fracking

or I will look unfavourably on any application from a company to introduce or start fracking here in the North. My Department co-funds that programme of research. It is important that we find out more facts about fracking or hydraulic fracturing. I do not have a timescale, but I will endeavour to find out when we expect results to come in from the research and then be analysed further.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will the Minister assure us that a good, robust communication plan will be put in place for the introduction of phase 2 of the carrier bag levy, especially on the back of the very successful phase 1, in order to avoid the confusion that may come to consumers on the implementation of phase 2?

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Ms Brown. I assure the Member that there will be a communication strategy in place. Communication has been key to the success of phase 1 of the levy and will be key to the success of part 2. We need buy-in from the public. They need to realise why we are asking them to pay for bags. I think that they have embraced the carrier bag levy. We also need participation and buy-in from retailers. That is why I listened to the Committee about slowing down the phasing in of phase 2 in order to give retailers time to prepare for it.

Economic Inactivity: Strategic Framework

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on a new strategic framework to tackle economic inactivity in Northern Ireland.

The Executive's Programme for Government includes a commitment from my Department and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) to develop and implement a strategy to reduce economic inactivity through skills, training, incentives and job creation. The statement has been agreed with my partner in that regard, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

To reflect the need to develop a holistic approach to tackling economic inactivity, the strategic framework has been developed in close partnership with other key stakeholders, including the Department for Social Development (DSD), Invest Northern Ireland and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). I thank those Departments for their valuable contribution to date and their continued cooperation through the development and implementation phases.

Economic inactivity is a labour market classification referring to those neither in work nor unemployed. The baseline study analysed economic inactivity by charting labour market trends over recent decades and compared the situation in Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The current rate of economic inactivity in Northern Ireland is 27.4%. That equates to more than 315,000 people aged between 16 and 64 who are neither in work nor unemployed. I am sure that Members will agree that those figures outline the stark scale of the problem. That is the highest rate across all regions of the UK. Although some states and regions in the European Union and elsewhere in the developed world have higher rates, our situation is challenging in the international context. This level of economic inactivity has been a persistent feature of our economy over the past 30 years, falling within the range of 26% and 32%, irrespective of changes in the economic cycle. Economic inactivity represents a major structural problem in our economy, which, if unaddressed, will limit our ability to develop and transform our economic prospects.

Members may recall that I made a statement earlier this year on the outcomes of the baseline analysis of economic inactivity in Northern Ireland. The baseline study was the first step in the development of the strategic framework and provided a detailed analysis of inactivity in Northern Ireland. It may be useful, therefore, if I spend a few moments summarising the main findings of that study.

Through a detailed analysis of the factors contributing to economic inactivity and the characteristics of those classified as inactive, the study highlighted key areas that the strategic framework should address. Those include developing policy initiatives to help those who are long-term sick and/or persons with disabilities and those with family commitments to re-engage with the labour market; helping older workers get back into work through tackling discrimination barriers, increasing opportunities, and addressing issues of self-confidence and skill level; utilising the outcomes of in-depth analysis to pinpoint policy areas for intervention; developing initiatives with key stakeholders, including health professionals, that will motivate the economically inactive to adopt a positive

approach to work; and helping women and lone parents to move into employment.

The overarching strategic goal is to contribute towards a stable and competitive employment rate of over 70% by 2023, through a reduction in the proportion of the working-age population classified as economically inactive. That reflects our assessment of what constitutes a more balanced labour market that engages people more fully and utilises their skills and talents. In particular, it is worth stressing that our focus is on the overall employment rate. We are not interested in simply reducing economic inactivity through shifting people into the unemployment category or moving people from unemployment into inactivity.

11.00 am

Although our future actions will take into account the changing landscape that arises from welfare reform, they will not be part of the proposed changes to the welfare reform system nor will they be motivated by them. Rather, our response is directed at addressing what has become a long-term structural problem within our economy.

Economic inactivity can be broken down into a number of categories, including those who are in full-time education or retired. Those who are in education are in a benign form of economic inactivity as they are developing their knowledge and skills so that, shortly, they can play a full role in the economy.

The target groups of the strategic framework comprise individuals who would benefit from entry into the labour market but are unable to do so because of health conditions or disabilities that limit their ability to work or family commitments that leave them dependent on out-of-work benefits. I fully recognise that not every person who falls into those categories will be in a position to engage with the labour market or will wish to do so. It is important to stress that the framework will be about supporting people to make transitions when they opt to do so; it is not about compulsion.

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

I fully recognise that the health condition of some in the former group may prevent their progression into work. However, I also recognise that many who have work-limiting conditions or are in a work-limiting situation might, with the right level of support, be able to participate in some way in the labour market.

For both groups, disengagement from working life can restrict the development of the individuals, their families and society. The barriers that the groups face are complex, ranging from a lack of skills and qualifications to psychological issues, such as low motivation and confidence. The barriers will also vary across the two target categories: for example, people who are inactive because of family commitments often have a higher level of skills than the group comprising people with disabilities. The strategic framework seeks, therefore, to address those barriers and ensure that wider attitudes to age or ill health do not impede progress towards work. A clear analysis of the underlying issues will assist the development of the most appropriate support interventions.

The achievement of the overarching goal of a stable and healthy employment rate of over 70% by 2023 will be dependent on the fulfilment of the following strategic

objectives: reducing the level of economic inactivity because of work-limiting health conditions or disabilities by helping individuals in that group to move into employment; reducing the level of economic inactivity because of family commitments by helping lone parents in receipt of out-of-work benefits to move into employment; reducing the inflows to the economically inactive groups through initiatives designed to promote flexible working, extend working lives and maintain employment for individuals who develop health conditions or take on caring responsibilities; and contributing to a reduction in the unemployment rate to pre-recession levels through programmes designed to alleviate barriers to employment.

The achievement of these objectives will require a wide range of actions. The development process has been informed by international best practice to provide a strong foundation for its key actions. We have also, during the development of the strategic framework, undertaken a series of engagements with key stakeholders to better inform our proposals.

The initiatives can be summarised under four key themes. The first theme is increasing engagement and support by promoting the value of work and increasing access to pre-employment and in-work support through innovative new pilot projects, including an extensive mapping exercise of existing service provision to improve connectivity between services.

The second theme involves increasing job opportunities for the unemployed and the economically inactive through new support and incentives for employers to hire such individuals. We propose to facilitate that through a targeted and calibrated subsidy scheme for employers, which will include a guaranteed employment progression route for inactive individuals, through skills training and bespoke support, to promote sustained and meaningful employment.

The third theme involves addressing wider barriers by alleviating or removing wider societal issues that limit engagement with the labour market. That can be done through a series of new measures to help older workers and individuals with mental health issues to overcome disadvantages in the workplace.

The fourth theme is breaking the cycle of inactivity by reducing inflows into the economically inactive groups. That can be done by building on existing strategies and initiatives across government to improve education and employment outcomes for young people and improving advice and support for those at risk of disengaging from the labour market. Specific actions will include a detailed analysis of the options to better integrate health and work services in Northern Ireland.

It is important to recognise that, across the Executive, we are already taking action to support those in our key target groups to engage with the labour market. Indeed, an early initial action to be taken forward by the strategic framework will include new research to map the current service landscape in order to better connect with and improve outcomes for the target groups. We also propose to undertake a series of innovative pilot projects designed to test new approaches to re-engaging and supporting inactive individuals and to build upon the good work already being undertaken to address economic inactivity.

An early key focus of the new strategic framework will be to put in place a new regime to test a limited number of small-scale initiatives for their potential to improve outcomes for the economically inactive. This approach avoids prescriptive solutions and encourages new ideas and models of best practice, and those that are ineffective can be identified. The former can then be scaled up and the latter avoided at relatively little cost. In that way, public confidence and value for money in any wider policy implementation can be ensured.

The policy areas for the pilots to address will include: factors contributing to inactivity in urban and rural settings; skills deficits and barriers that limit engagement with the labour market; mobility issues faced by inactive groups; promotion of early-level opportunities for the low-skilled to enter the labour market; and opportunities for the low-skilled to improve their skills levels and to progress into sustained employment.

Those key themes are intended to link, in a coordinated way, a range of diverse actions across the Northern Ireland Executive that can contribute to a reduction in economic inactivity in Northern Ireland and lead to greater economic participation through the creation of a more diverse, skilled and active working age population. The social and economic benefits of that are great. However, the scale of the challenge that we are setting for ourselves should not be underestimated. To put that in context, reducing the overall rate of economic inactivity by 2% would require a transition of more than 23,000 individuals currently designated as inactive into employment.

In order to achieve those key objectives, it is proposed that a new task force will be formed to coordinate and drive outcomes across Departments and to work closely with the business and community and voluntary sectors to increase wider public awareness of the major issues surrounding inactivity. The task force will provide strategic leadership throughout the life cycle of the strategy, from implementation to monitoring and evaluating progress.

Government alone does not have all the answers. The strategic framework has been informed by discussions with key stakeholders. The next crucial stage of the development process will therefore be to publicly consult on the detail of our proposals with interested parties. We will undertake direct engagement with stakeholders early in the new year, and I take this early opportunity to urge everyone with an interest in this hugely important societal and economic issue to take the time to consider our proposals and to participate fully in the consultation exercise. The findings will then be used to inform the shape of the final strategy and the detailed outworkings of implementation. The development of a strategy to underpin those efforts is an unprecedented action by the Northern Ireland Executive, but I cannot overemphasise the fact that there is no quick-fix solution to the problem.

Efforts to address the multitude of complex factors and barriers that fuel the high rate of economic inactivity in Northern Ireland must be not only innovative but incrementally progressive to ensure that sustainable results are achieved. There are many individuals who, for a range of complex personal and health reasons, will never be able to fully engage with the labour market. However, there are also many individuals who, with the right level of support, will be able to participate in some meaningful work. We have a duty to do everything that we possibly

can to help and support such individuals to meet their full potential to the benefit of the individual, given the positive factors associated with sustained employment, and to the benefit of Northern Ireland as a whole, given the economic and social advantages of having a more buoyant and competitive labour market.

Sustainable results cannot be delivered by government alone. We must coordinate the efforts of all key sectors and stakeholders to maximise the outcomes for those most in need of support. In doing so, I am confident that the final strategy will provide a long-term framework for greater economic participation in Northern Ireland.

Mr Swann (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I thank the Minister for his statement. Minister, your Department has 13 strategies, with 233 recommendations, and 10 implementation plans, with 197 recommendations or actions. That is 430 recommendations or actions in total. In the statement, you say that the framework should develop policy initiatives to help those who are long-term sick and/or persons with disabilities and those with family commitments to re-engage with the labour market; to help older workers back into work; to increase opportunities and address issues of self-confidence and skills levels; and to pinpoint specific policy areas for intervention. Are you seriously telling me that none of those 430 recommendations or actions is doing that? Given that our economic rate has been persistent for 30 years or more, do we know why previous approaches to the problem have not worked? Why are the current initiatives for tackling it not working? What is going to be different?

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair of the Committee for his comments. His party has a certain difficulty with strategies, but they are important. They encapsulate policy, the various initiatives that we are taking forward and new initiatives that need to be added to those. I would like to think that the list that the Member read out is reflective of the good work that has been undertaken by my Department, particularly in recent years. We are seeking to cover a wide range of interventions. In saying that, however, it is important to stress that we need to avoid one-size-fits-all solutions. My Department is dealing with the full spectrum of people in Northern Ireland who will be engaging with the labour market through a whole range of ways and at different levels, including the education system. We need to have in place policies that address the particular circumstances that people find themselves in and the particular challenges that need to be addressed.

A lot of the programmes in place already in my Department tend to cover the people who fall into the category of unemployed. Most of the other projects elsewhere in these islands and around Europe also focus on people who are unemployed. There is a particularly strong focus on youth unemployment. Up to now, economic inactivity has been a much neglected issue. It has, essentially, been accepted by policymakers as a given. What we are now doing through the strategic framework is a Programme for Government commitment. The First Minister and deputy First Minister were very keen to ensure that we were taking forward an initiative in that regard. It seeks to address what has been a structural problem in our economy for a number of decades. It has been persistent, irrespective of the ups and downs of the economic cycle. What I mean by that is that, when we had a situation in which times were

good and there has been pressure for people coming forward into jobs, we have tended to fill those gaps through people coming into Northern Ireland. In many ways, that is a welcome addition that has added much to our economy; it has been a net benefit. However, in that context, we have not been able to make any inroads into economic inactivity, which has pointed to the fact that there are deep structural problems that have to be addressed. We have an economic participation rate in the mid-60s per cent, which is the highest level of inactivity in the UK. That means that we have a large number of people who are not playing any active role in our economy. That is a resource that, in theory, should be available to us, but we are not fully drawing on it. As we look to transform our economy over the coming decades, we need to tap into that.

I fully recognise that there will be people who are not in a position to work. We are not talking about that. There are clear indications that tens of thousands of people who fall into that category would, with the right support, be willing to engage in the labour market. That is why the strategy provides added value. It will seek to address that. In doing that, it will draw on existing good practice across government to tie it together. After we do the mapping exercise, we will see where new interventions can follow from that.

Mr Buchanan: Minister, you mentioned in your statement key areas that the strategic framework should address. One of them is to develop initiatives with key stakeholders, including health professionals, that will motivate the economically inactive to adopt a positive approach to work and help them back into work. It is my understanding that you are reviewing whether you will continue to fund the condition management programme, which was set up for that specific purpose. Will you provide some clarity to the House on that matter?

11.15 am

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his comments. He is right to make a very close association between what we can do around health issues, including public health and mental health, and helping people who are inactive to move into employment. As we move forward with the eventual strategy after the public consultation, I would like to see scope emerging for greater collaboration, for example between GPs and the employment service on referrals, or maybe an even more integrated service. Some interesting pilot work has been conducted on that in parts of Great Britain.

The condition management programme is a more specific matter. We are reviewing that programme. It has evolved in recent years from being an intervention that helps people into employment into largely a health issue. Therefore, there has to be a discussion between my Department and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety about how we can rebalance the intervention in that general area. Those discussions are ongoing, but the Member and others should not be under any illusion that we are not heavily committed to strong integration of employment service work and public health initiatives. On the back of this emerging strategy, we should be much better placed to link the two.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Experience in Britain has shown that increased conditionality on people who are officially accepted as too

sick to work but deemed by the discredited work capability assessment as able to prepare for work has left a group of ESA claimants particularly vulnerable. What additional safeguards or flexibilities does the Minister intend to incorporate in any employment programme to ensure that those people, many of whom are suffering from mental illness, are not subject to a harsh loss of benefits through punitive sanctions as a result of their participation in any proposed scheme?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. He probably ran two or three different themes together, which I will try to work through. First, I want to stress that what we are taking forward as, today, a strategic framework and, in due course, a strategy, is not part of welfare reform. As I mentioned, this has been a structural issue in our economy for well over 30 years. There is an imperative, therefore, to address that. That said, what is happening in welfare reform is part of the landscape in which we are all working at present. I fully appreciate that decisions will be need to be taken by the Executive and the Assembly in due course about how welfare reform is taken forward in Northern Ireland. That is a very active and live debate.

On the question of how conditionality will impact on the strategy, welfare reform is approaching the issue by trying to move people from one form of conditionality to another. That, in some ways, can be something of an artificial move. This is about enabling people. I am not particularly interested in whether people fall under one welfare category or another, although that is a huge factor for them in the benefits they receive and the conditionality that they are under. This is about enabling people who are inactive to move into the world of work, and we know that more than 20,000 people are already indicating that, with the right support, they wish to take that journey.

The Member also mentioned the employment programme. He knows that I am moving from Steps to Work to Steps 2 Success. What we have in Northern Ireland is not a replication of the GB work programme. We have our own specific employment programme, which is designed for Northern Ireland. All along, we have been very keen to avoid what is known as the black box whereby, when people are referred to the programme, they are essentially out of sight, out of mind, and left with the providers to work with. We will have very strong codes of conduct in place, and we are encouraging a strongly individual approach to be taken by the new providers in working with individuals and their particular circumstances. Quite clearly, the barriers that people have been facing, whether inactivity or unemployment, will have to be taken into account very strongly in deciding on the approach that is adopted to try to find work for them.

Mr P Ramsey: I warmly welcome the Minister's statement to the House this morning. Although the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has now left, clearly this is a joint initiative, and collaboration is needed by a number of Departments. Does the Minister acknowledge, as the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has done previously to me, that there is historical and consistent high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity in the north-west? There was a commitment to review unemployment, which has decreased across Northern Ireland but not in the north-west, where, unfortunately, levels are increasing. Will the Minister outline to the House any new initiatives for targeting those

who are economically inactive and long-term unemployed in my constituency, in Derry and Strabane, who have been consistently long-term unemployed?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question and for his welcome for the framework to date. Obviously, the north-west benefits from all the schemes that are in place. I have been particularly encouraged by the uptake of some of our initiatives, in which the north-west has been performing better than other parts of Northern Ireland. That said, I recognise that we have pockets of concentrated unemployment in the north-west that are higher than the Northern Ireland average. The same goes for figures on economic inactivity. It is important that we make the distinction between the two.

What I can say to the Member to give him reassurance is that we are moving towards a system of competitive piloting to take forward the emerging strategy in due course. This will be about people coming forward with ideas across the whole range of interventions we have identified, whether it is transport, childcare issues, mentoring people, dealing with other mobility issues or trying to encourage better awareness of mental health issues in the workplace, to name a few of the different types of things that could come forward.

We also envisage that those things would come forward not necessarily on a pan-Northern Ireland basis but on a more local basis. So, it is entirely possible that proposals will come forward that are north-west specific and will seek to address some of the very particular circumstances that may have arisen in that part of our community. I would be delighted to see such proposals coming forward to see what type of solutions can be found.

On the back of that competitive piloting, we will be assessing where the biggest difference is being made and see which of the solutions can be scaled up, in the number of people being dealt with and in the geographical reach across Northern Ireland.

Mr Ross: In his statement, the Minister mentioned a number of subject areas in which he will be carrying out pilots. Will he give us more information about what those pilots will look like and whether he envisages them being rolled out across the whole of Northern Ireland or in specific areas?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. It touches similar ground to that in Mr Ramsey's question. It is worth stressing that this is very much a new initiative that is being taken forward. It is not just new for the Northern Ireland Executive in the sense that this has not been done before; I am led to understand that this is new in the context of these islands. So, we are in fairly uncharted territory. This is also recognition of the fact that we believe that this is a major structural problem and that we need to get to grips with it one way or another.

I am conscious that there are pockets of good practice already, particularly in Great Britain — in London, Glasgow and in parts of Wales — that we can draw upon, but there is an absence of overarching strategies. We are coming to this from the advantage of having a commitment to the strategy.

Given that we are in relatively new territory, rather than putting in place Northern Ireland-wide initiatives, which will involve a lot of design work and political capital to get them in place and a lot of uncertainty about what is going

to be effective, I and other Ministers think it would be more productive to launch a system of competitive piloting. We will be issuing calls in a range of areas such as support with respect to transport, childcare, mentoring, promotional activity in the workplace, and making employers aware of how to overcome various perceptions that may have built up. Through that system, we will see which pilots are most effective in delivering results and then see whether we can roll them out across Northern Ireland.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat. Maith thú, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that the participation of lone parents in any back-to-work scheme will have to be underpinned by regulations that reflect their additional responsibilities as carers? There will have to be flexible arrangements so that the interests of children are paramount at all times.

Dr Farry: I very much agree with the thrust of what the Member said. I have learnt to my cost that it is wise always to agree with Mr McElduff for the sake of a quieter life.

We have to be conscious that there are two main categories of people who we are trying to assist. The first category is those who are suffering with long-term sickness or disabilities. The other is those with family or caring commitments, who are often lone parents. It is worth spelling out that lone parents are predominantly female and that the overall economic participation figures for males and females vary considerably; I think that there is an almost 10% differential. I previously made a statement to the Assembly on that issue. It is important that we ensure that we maximise the use of resources across both genders to best effect. We are trying to address any imbalances that we find in our economy.

For people with caring responsibilities, it is not simply a case of saying, "There is a job. Off you go and access it". We have to put in place the support arrangements to ensure that they are able to do that. Obviously, the Executive are committed to bringing forward a childcare strategy, which will provide a considerable degree of support at a high level. There will also be a need for other support measures to be put in place. Flexible working goes hand in hand with that. The Member will also be aware that we will bring forward legislation in due course on parental leave and flexible working. That should also make a contribution in this area. It is also important to bear in mind that, at present, and even under future changes with the introduction of universal credit, there is an acknowledgement of the particular situation that women with caring responsibilities find themselves in.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his statement. The lack of employment opportunities is a key issue that needs to be addressed before we can move people out of economic inactivity. The Minister proposes a subsidy scheme for employers, which will include a guaranteed employment progression route for inactive individuals through skills training and bespoke support. Can the Minister provide some detail on how that will work and what will be the cost? Who will pay for it? Can the Minister also tell us whether the proposals will feed into the review of apprenticeships?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her questions. To address the first point, this will not happen in a vacuum or on a stand-alone basis; it is part of the wider efforts of the Executive to create jobs. As we look to transform and

grow our economy over the next number of years, it is important that we have schemes that work in tandem with each other. In particular, we could see a situation in the near future where there is pressure around employment. In the past, we have seen situations where that has been the case, but we have not been able to tap into the pool of people who are economically inactive. Instead, our economy has looked elsewhere for people to come in and fill those vacancies. It is important that we enable people to enter the labour market and that, in tandem, job creation activities proceed. Hopefully, the two will match up with each other.

Wage subsidies might be necessary as the strategy rolls out to provide an incentive to employers to reach into the market of those who are economically inactive. Some people might find themselves in situations where they are unable to compete with more experienced or work-ready people who are unemployed. Therefore, to crack that structural problem, we might need to put in place an incentive. Much more detailed work on how that will operate needs to take place over the next number of months, including addressing the level of intervention.

We need to do some cost modelling to ensure that it has been pitched at the most effective level. However, I draw the attention of the Member and others to the fact that the use of subsidies to employers around employment is not something new but something that has already been done, most recently as part of the youth employment scheme and also under the First Start strand of Steps to Work. Those interventions are designed to assist unemployed young people. There is a track record of that being a successful way of addressing what is otherwise a market failure.

11.30 am

Mr Allister: Of the 315,000 who are economically inactive, how many are just plain work-shy? Does the Minister think that welfare reform, if implemented, would do anything to shrink the work-shy constituency?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his questions in so far as it gives me an opportunity to stress again that I am approaching this from the basis that people in this society want to work if they have the capacity to do so or are not facing barriers. What has often happened with the economically inactive is that they have been, in a sense, forgotten by society. They have been written off, or they have written themselves off by saying that they do not have the capacity to engage with the labour market. There are very few people in this world who deliberately opt out of employment. It is not nice, it is not pleasant, and it limits opportunities for those people to interact, to support family and friends and to avail themselves of other opportunities that people who are in work are capable of accessing. Therefore, it is not a good place to be in. There are people who nonetheless find themselves trapped in that situation, and that is why it is important that we put measures in place to assist them.

Welfare reform is a separate issue from this strategy, and it is worth reinforcing that time after time. Irrespective of any decisions that have been taken or might still be taken for welfare reform at a UK-wide level or implemented in Northern Ireland under parity measures, it is something that we would wish to have done in Northern Ireland, given a structural problem has persisted for the past 30 years.

Welfare reform in itself will facilitate a reassessment of people from different conditionality groups into others, and the system in Northern Ireland will respond and assist people as required. However, my motivation is not to get caught up too much in the particular categories that people find themselves in but to work with them to get them into meaningful employment, for their own sake and the sake of our economy, where that is an appropriate intervention for them to be engaged in.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his statement. Can any lessons be learned from international experience of delivering a strategy on economic inactivity? Why is the focus on aiming for an employment rate of at least 70%?

Dr Farry: I will answer that in the international context, and in some ways, this may also answer the Member's second question. Northern Ireland currently has an economic participation rate of around 66% or 67%, which is the lowest of all UK regions. The UK average is over 70%, and in some regions the percentage will be pushing 75%. Some other high-performing European economies also have a participation figure of around mid-70%. Some other economies in Europe have participation figures lower than our own, including the Republic of Ireland and some of the southern European countries. In those situations, however, we are not fully utilising the people who are available to us and to the economy. There are people who wish to engage but who have, for various reasons, been excluded from engaging in the economy. Therefore, if we are to have a competitive economy, and if we are really to utilise the resources of people available to us to make our presence felt on the global stage, we need to address levels of economic inactivity.

The Member asked about the lessons available to us from other programmes. In the context of these islands, our strategy is, I believe, new and innovative. We are setting a precedent in trying to pull together existing programmes and see what scope there is for new programmes to be taken forward to build on existing practice. There are, however, a number of individual projects happening at local, and perhaps council, level in different communities across the UK. We have been exploring a number of lessons from Scotland, Wales and London. Those could form the basis of similar pilots to be taken forward in Northern Ireland under the competitive piloting process that we hope to roll out as part of the strategy in due course.

Mr McCallister: In an earlier reply, the Minister said that a targeted subsidy scheme for employers was not new. The Chair mentioned, in his opening question, that you have over 400 recommendations. So what exactly is new and different about this approach? Will any of the schemes that you are bringing in be specific to one skills sector? Will any sector be excluded?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. What is new is that, hitherto in Northern Ireland, there has not been a strategy to address economic inactivity. Although we have a well worked-out suite of strategies and interventions, they deal primarily with those who are in work or those who are unemployed. In so far as we address economic inactivity, we assist students, but we do not do so through a prism of regarding them as economically inactive. So we are moving into what is, essentially, new territory.

There is existing good practice in a number of schemes that Departments are taking forward to help those who are

inactive: for example, the work on neighbourhood renewal, the work on public health and early years intervention in education are all good strategic interventions that will address the need for a more balanced labour force as we go forward. However, there is a clear gap in the more immediate support that we can provide to people who find themselves in either of the two categories that I mentioned: the long-term sick or disabled; and those with family and caring commitments. With support, they might be able to overcome the barriers that they are experiencing and enter into work.

There is a wealth of new material coming forward on the back of this. I stress that government does not have all the answers. That is why, as part of the strategy, we will seek proposals, from different organisations and the community and voluntary sector, for programmes that can be taken forward to see which is the most effective. In that way, we can look at what we can scale up across Northern Ireland. I stress to Members that it is critical that we address this issue. This is a major structural problem in our economy that, if left unaddressed for years to come, will hamper our ability to compete in the global economy.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister, for a lengthy and detailed statement that set out the complex interaction of issues that led to our current situation and which need to be unravelled and understood. Minister, you recently met the post-19 lobby group, which wants people to move into economic activity where practical. Will this strategy allow those who want to come forward with innovative ideas the opportunity to engage in the labour market? What will be the approach to delivering the strategic framework?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his questions. In answer to his second question, a task force will be set up across a number of Departments, and it will also work closely with the business community and the voluntary sector. It will want to map out the existing provision to see what is working and assess where there are gaps. We will then want to move to the system of competitive pilots. There will be a call for proposals, which will then need to be assessed and resourced. We want to see what has been successful and what has been less successful, and then focus resources on those that we can scale up on a successful basis across Northern Ireland.

With respect to taking forward that competitive piloting, we will be open to examining programmes that are geographically specific, as Mr Ramsey asked earlier, or programmes that are focusing on very particular aspects of the wider economically inactive population. In terms of programmes that could fit under the evolving strategy from a learning difficulty perspective, yes, there will be scope for proposals to come forward in that regard. Already, we fund a number of programmes to assist people with learning difficulties, most notably through the European social fund, and that will continue. Also, a number of programmes are funded under the collaboration and innovation fund, under NEETs. We are also looking at the disability employment service and reviewing it to see how we can more effectively support people who wish to enter and be sustained in the labour market across a whole range of different conditions.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas cuimsitheach. I thank the Minister for his comprehensive statement. There was much reference throughout it to

welfare reform, specifically with regard to his proposal to undertake a series of innovative pilot projects designed to test new approaches to re-engage and support inactive individuals. What has been learned? What engagement has there been with the Department for Social Development to learn from the less well experiences of the work-related interviews, which seem to be, essentially, just tick-box exercises to get people in and out the door again?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. Let me reinforce that this is not part of welfare reform. It is something that we would have wished to do in any event, because economic inactivity is a structural problem within our economy. That said, welfare reform is a reality, and the particular shape of that reality is something that virtually all of us in this House are uncomfortable with in different ways. Sometimes, the artificial manner in which people have been recategorised from one area to another has caused us concerns.

The Department for Social Development is a key delivery partner in that regard. We will need to be informed of what is happening in terms of changes around welfare, so that we can shape our programmes to deal with the evolving balance of the inactive population. There will be people moved from one form of welfare to another, from no conditionality to a limited conditionality or full conditionality. Those decisions will be taken outside the context of this inactivity strategy and framework. We will simply respond to people as we find them and address their needs.

Let me reiterate my philosophy in approaching this. It is not about a situation where we artificially move people from one category to another, and, all of a sudden, people automatically move into jobs. I look at this from a different angle, whereby we try to address the barriers that people experience and see how we can empower and enable them. Most people want to work. It is not a case that people have opted out and need a degree of compulsion to move them along the journey. It is about how we can best support people who find themselves in situations where they experience barriers in their own lives or in the perception of employers.

Executive Committee Business

Tobacco Retailers Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to move the Tobacco Retailers Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments detailing the order for consideration. The amendments had been grouped for debate in my provisional grouping of amendments selected list. There are two groups of amendments, and we will debate each group in turn. The first debate will be on the Minister's opposition to clauses 1, 5 and 6 and on amendment Nos 1 to 19, 39 and 41, which deal with the register of tobacco retailers and registration.

The second debate will be on amendment Nos 20 to 38, 40 and 42, which deal with offences, enforcement, powers and penalties, together with the Minister's opposition to clause 11. Once the debate on each group is completed, any further amendments to the group will be moved formally as we go through the Bill, and the question on each will be put without further debate. The questions on stand part will be taken at the appropriate points in the Bill. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

11.45 am

Clause 1 (Register of tobacco retailers)

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now come to the first group for debate, which is the Minister's opposition to clauses 1, 5 and 6 and amendment Nos 1 to 19, 39 and 41. Amendments in this group make provision for a register of tobacco retailers maintained by the registration authority, replace reference to "councils" with "registration authority", as well as making a number of other changes for entries in the register. Members will wish to note that if clause 1 stands part of the Bill, I will not call amendment Nos 1, 2, 3, 5 to 11, 13, 15, 17 to 19 and 39 and that amendment No 16 is consequential to amendment No 14.

I call the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to speak to his opposition to clause 1 stand part and to address the amendments in the group.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 1: After clause 1 insert

"Register of tobacco retailers

1A.—(1) *The registration authority must, in accordance with the provisions of this Act, maintain a register of persons carrying on a tobacco business ('the Register').*

(2) On the basis of information contained in the Register, the registration authority must, at all reasonable times, make available for public inspection—

(a) a list of premises at which tobacco businesses are carried on; and

(b) such other information as may be prescribed.

(3) *The registration authority must make available to each council and the Department such information contained in the Register as that council or the Department may require.*

(4) *Information made available under subsection (3) to a council may be used by the council only for the purpose of enabling it or assisting it to perform its functions under—*

(a) *this Act;*

(b) *Part 2 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978; and*

(c) *the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.*

(5) *In any proceedings for an offence under this Act a certificate issued by the registration authority which states that on any date a person was or was not registered in respect of any premises shall be evidence of the facts stated in it; and any such certificate which purports to be issued by the registration authority shall be taken to be so issued unless the contrary is proved.*

(6) *In this Act—*

‘registered’ means entered in the Register, and ‘unregistered’ is to be construed accordingly;

‘the registration authority’ means a body which is established or constituted by or under Northern Ireland legislation and is prescribed for the purposes of this Act.— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 2: In clause 2, page 1, line 11, leave out from “council” to the end of line 12 and insert “registration authority”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 3: In clause 2, page 2, line 6, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 4: In clause 2, page 2, line 7, leave out “or” and insert—

“(aa) the applicant has, within the period of 5 years ending with the day on which the application is made, been convicted of an offence under section 170 or 170B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 in relation to tobacco and been sentenced for that offence to a custodial sentence (whether suspended or not); or”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 5: In clause 2, page 2, line 8, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 6: In clause 2, page 2, line 12, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 7: In clause 2, page 2, line 14, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 8: In clause 2, page 2, line 19, leave out “the council considers appropriate” and insert

“which the Department may direct the authority to include”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 9: In clause 2, page 2, line 20, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 10: In clause 2, page 2, line 24, leave out “the council considers appropriate” and insert

“which the Department may direct the authority to include”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 11: In clause 3, page 2, line 30, leave out from “council” to “situated” in line 31 and insert “registration authority”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 12: In clause 3, page 2, line 35, leave out “3 months” and insert “28 days”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 13: In clause 4, page 2, line 38, leave out “A council” and insert “The registration authority”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 14: In clause 4, page 3, line 1, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

“(2) The registration authority must amend the Register so as to remove—

(a) references to registered premises in respect of which a restricted premises order has effect;

(b) a person’s entry from the Register where that person has, within a period of 5 years ending with the day on which the removal is made, been convicted of an offence under section 170 or 170B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 in relation to tobacco and has been sentenced for that offence to a custodial sentence (whether suspended or not).”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 15: In clause 4, page 3, line 4, leave out “A council” and insert “The registration authority”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 16: In clause 4, page 3, line 5, after “(2)” insert “(a)”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 17: In clause 4, page 3, line 8, leave out “A council” and insert “The registration authority”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 18: In clause 4, page 3, line 10, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 19: In clause 4, page 3, line 13, leave out “a council” and insert “the registration authority”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 39: In clause 22, page 16, leave out lines 33 and 34 and insert—

“‘the Register’ has the meaning given in section 1A(1); ‘registered’, ‘unregistered’ and ‘the registration authority’ have the meanings given in section 1A(6);”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 41: In clause 24, page 17, line 16, leave out “5(2).”—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Amendment No 1 inserts a new clause 1, the effect of which is to require a registration authority to maintain a register of tobacco retailers and to make that information available to the public at all reasonable times. The amendment was suggested by the Health Committee during its scrutiny of the Bill, as similar registers established in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland were based on a central registration system rather than a council-by-council system, and it will assist district councils in their enforcement of legislation. Therefore, I am thankful to Committee members for their input.

Amendment Nos 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18 and 19 are technical in nature and are necessary following the change in legislation from registers held at local council level to a centralised registration system.

Amendment No 4 prohibits a person from registering as a tobacco retailer for a period of five years if he or she has committed an illicit tobacco offence that has resulted in a custodial sentence being applied. The amendment was suggested by the Health Committee during its scrutiny of the Bill, as was amendment No 14, which applies a similar sanction in relation to the existing retailers on the register. The amendments arose out of concern regarding the prolific availability of illicit tobacco and the fact that its reduced cost makes smoking a more affordable option for children and young people. Amendment No 16 is a technical amendment required as a result of the inclusion of amendment No 14, and, again, I thank the Health Committee for its input.

Amendment No 12 requires that notification of any changes to the register should be given within 28 days of that change, rather than three months, which was initially proposed. The amendment was suggested by the Committee to assist councils in their enforcement of the legislation, and I thank it for its input.

Amendment No 39 is a technical amendment, which takes account of new clause 1A with regard to the meaning of “the Register”, “registered”, “unregistered” and “the registration authority”. Amendment No 41 removes the reference to clause 5(2), which was a regulation-making power, as I am proposing that clause 5 no longer stands part of the Bill.

Members will have noted on the Marshalled List my intention to oppose the questions that clauses 1, 5 and 6 stand part of the Bill. The various amendments being proposed to the Bill have resulted in the provisions in those clauses being inserted elsewhere or removed completely if they are no longer required.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of the Committee, I welcome the Consideration Stage of the Tobacco Retailers Bill. The Bill is timely and welcome. Having looked closely at the Bill and what it has to offer, the Committee is confident that it will take us another step forward in tackling underage smoking, and, hence, in protecting the health of our children and young people. It will do that by introducing stricter sanctions against retailers who continue to sell tobacco to under-18s, thereby ensuring that the minimum age of sale policy is more rigorously applied by retailers.

The Bill was referred to the Committee on 23 April 2013. To ensure that there was enough time to scrutinise the legislation, the Committee sought an extension to 18 October. However, I am pleased to say that we finished a week ahead of schedule, thanks to the hard work of members and the cooperation of departmental officials.

The Committee received written submissions from 24 organisations and individuals, and took oral evidence from those representing the widest possible range of interested parties in the time available. Its report was completed on 9 October 2013.

The Committee's detailed scrutiny led to it recommending that the Department make amendments to a significant number of the 26 clauses in the Bill. I am pleased to report that all those recommendations have been accepted by the Minister and are reflected in the amendments that we are considering today. I thank the Minister for his cooperative approach and for taking on board the Committee's recommendations. I am sure that my Committee colleagues will support me in noting the good working relationship that was established between the Committee and the departmental officials at Committee Stage. That certainly helped the process along and paid dividends when it came to agreeing recommendations for amendments.

Before I talk specifically about the amendments in the first grouping, I wish to provide a brief overview of the key issues that we identified as we scrutinised the Bill. There was a major issue around whether there should be one central register or 26 separate registers maintained by the councils. Other issues included illicit tobacco offences and their relevance to the legislation; the importance of all relevant information being shared by all the organisations involved in enforcing the legislation; the severity of restricted premises and restricted sales orders; the importance of deterrents; and proxy purchasing. I will return to each of those issues later in the debate.

I will now comment on the first group of amendments. The Minister is proposing to oppose clause 1 and bring forward a new clause through amendment No 1. The Committee welcomes that. Amendment No 1 creates a registration authority that must maintain a register of persons who are running a tobacco retail business. The original clause 1 proposed that there be 26 separate registers, one for each council area. The Committee was concerned that the lack of a centralised system could result in information not being shared between councils as efficiently as it could be. In particular, members were concerned that details of people convicted of or given fixed penalty notices for tobacco offences, and people convicted of illicit tobacco offences, would not be routinely shared between the councils. The Committee, therefore, asked the Department to explore having a central register as well as or in place of the 26 council registers. We were pleased, therefore, that the Department accepted the Committee's point of view and that a registration authority is to be established.

The Committee is also content that amendment No 1 allows for the register to be made available to the public, and we hope that it will be available online. That removes the need for clause 5, and the Committee supports the Minister's intention to oppose clause 5.

At Committee Stage, we also discussed with officials the possibility that the register would contain details of

fixed penalty notices, convictions and restricted sales orders made against retailers listed on the register. The Department took the view that putting that type of information on a public register could potentially be challenged under human rights law. It also made the point that, the more complex the register became, the more it would cost to administer. Furthermore, if information were provided on fixed penalty notices, convictions and restricted sales orders, it would be imperative that it was kept continually up to date to avoid any errors that could potentially result in legal action against the registration authority. After considering the matter further and taking its own legal advice, the Committee agreed that it was content with the Department's rationale.

Amendment No 4 concerns who can apply to register as a tobacco retailer. That is a significant issue, and it was discussed at length by the Committee. We took the view that, given the responsibility that is involved in selling tobacco, somebody who has a serious conviction for selling illicit tobacco should be prevented from registering as a tobacco retailer. The Department's initial response was that this suggestion raised a number of issues that needed to be investigated further. First, there would be a need to define what a serious conviction is in the context of illicit sales. Secondly, there was an issue about the duration for which somebody could be banned from registering as a tobacco retailer if they have a previous conviction for selling illicit tobacco. Thirdly, there was an issue with regard to offender rehabilitation.

After further consideration, the Department proposed an amendment to clause 2, so that a person who has been convicted of an illicit tobacco offence resulting in a custodial sentence, whether it is suspended or not, shall not be allowed to register as a tobacco retailer for five years from the date of the conviction. The Committee welcomes that approach and Amendment No 4.

Amendment No 14 is linked to that issue. The Committee raised the issue of whether a retailer who was on the register and was later convicted of an illicit tobacco offence resulting in a custodial offence, whether it is suspended or not, would be automatically removed from the register. The Department agreed that this was a sensible suggestion and subsequently proposed an amendment to clause 4 to that effect. The Committee is, therefore, content with amendment No 14.

Amendment No 12 relates to the duty on retailers to notify changes to their details as contained on the register. Councils felt that the time period for notifying a change of name or address or for notifying that a tobacco business is no longer being carried out at premises should be changed from three months to 28 days. In their view, that was a reasonable expectation and would ensure that the register was kept up to date. The Department agreed to make the amendment. The Committee, therefore, is content with Amendment No 12.

The Minister intends to oppose clause 6. Again, the Committee supports that. The clause, as drafted, states that councils must provide to other councils and the Department, if requested, the information that is contained in their own tobacco register. However, given that the registration authority will now maintain the register, rather than 26 councils keeping separate registers, the clause is no longer relevant. The issue of information sharing between the relevant bodies is dealt with in amendment

No 36. I will address that matter later in the debate on the second group of amendments.

Amendment Nos 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 39 and 41 are technical amendments that are proposed by the Minister. The Committee supports those amendments.

Mr Wells: This is an excellent example of how the Committee system in the Northern Ireland Assembly works. There was an initial Bill that the Committee largely supported in principle, but we wished to strengthen its clauses. On several occasions, we met officials from the Department. I have to say that the working relationship was excellent. In exactly the same way that we found when the sunbeds legislation was going through, there was willingness to meet the Committee halfway to explain the position very well and, where there were difficulties, to explain why the Department could not go down the line that the Committee wished to go down. As a result of that, the Bill is now a much better piece of legislation. It is much more balanced. Very importantly, it will tackle, to a large extent, the problem of underage smoking.

I welcome the legislation because it is part of a suite of measures that was introduced by— to be fair to him — the previous Minister, but, more latterly, the present Minister to tackle the issue of tobacco. We must remember that 2,300 people a year die in Northern Ireland as a result of smoking-related diseases. A suite of measures, including the Bill, which deals with that important issue is, in my opinion, very timely.

The amendments that were put forward by the Minister and the Committee will make it more difficult for retailers to sell to those who are too young to consume tobacco products. Initially, there were meant to be 26 registers. An individual who lived in a certain district would look up the register for their area to ascertain whether a retailer was registered or otherwise. There were initial problems with that. First, not everybody in Northern Ireland knows in which district they live. There may be confusion. The retailer may be just across the boundary in another district.

Secondly, with the change in local government organisation when we move to a new council model, there will initially be even more confusion about where people live. We thought that in Northern Ireland, with a population of 1.8 million people in an area the size of Yorkshire, it should not have been beyond the realms of possibility for a central register to be maintained. The Department and the Minister readily agreed to that. With technology, we expect that people who are concerned about a particular retailer will simply log on, put in the appropriate address or postcode and will instantly know whether a person is behaving legally and is registered to sell tobacco.

12.00 noon

We heard some horror stories during Committee Stage about the cost of the system in Scotland. I got the impression that I had followed the wrong career in life and that I should be setting up IT systems to register tobacco retailers because, if that is the cost of the system, it really is extraordinary. I believe that it can be done in a very cheap and cheerful way. The information can be kept on a central website so that people can look it up, and it should not cost a huge amount of money. At the moment, we do not have a registration fee

for those who wish to register to sell tobacco products, so the cost does not fall on small retailers.

This is important because the fundamental tenet of the Bill is the “three strikes and you’re out” principle. As a result of a young mystery shopper being sent by the environmental health department of a local council, if, on three occasions within five years, a person is discovered to be selling tobacco products to young people, he or she loses their licence to sell tobacco. That is a very powerful deterrent, because tobacco retail in Northern Ireland is not so much about the profit that is made on the cigarettes or rolled tobacco sold; tobacco attracts people in to buy other, more profitable products such as newspapers, groceries or sweets. Therefore, the right to sell tobacco is absolutely crucial to the small retailer, who could never survive on selling tobacco products alone.

The real deterrent is that, after a series of misdemeanours, someone will lose the right to sell tobacco. That is absolutely right and will send out a clear signal throughout Northern Ireland that we will not tolerate young people obtaining tobacco. We have already stopped them getting cigarettes from vending machines, which has been extremely successful. We have also stopped point-of-display sales, which has already been rolled out in the big stores and will, more latterly, be introduced in small stores. Children will not have glamorous images of tobacco products in their face. I see this as the third leg of the stool, making it extremely difficult for them to go in —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Certainly.

Mr Allister: Perhaps, with the Member’s knowledge of the Committee’s thinking, he could explain what he has just said about the principle of “three strikes and you’re out” in amendment No 4. That amendment seems to require that you have been convicted and, indeed, been subject to a custodial sentence, suspended or not, to prevent you being registered. Why, then, if there is a “three strikes and you’re out” approach, is that not reflected with the multiplicity of penalty notices being also a disqualifier? Why is that not also reflected in clause 4? Is there an explanation for that?

Mr Wells: Is the Member referring to amendment No 4 or clause 4?

Mr Allister: Amendment No 4.

Mr Wells: Amendment No 4, yes. For Members’ interest, it says:

“the applicant has, within the period of 5 years ending with the day on which the application is made, been convicted of an offence under section 170 or 170B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979”.

There are two pieces of legislation here. There is the existing legislation, which covers the sale of illicit tobacco, which is the 1979 Act, and there is the new legislation, which covers those who sell tobacco to underage young people. My understanding is that that legislation is still not negated by what we propose and that, if someone is convicted of selling contraband tobacco, he or she can be excluded from selling tobacco and can be convicted. This provision is aimed at someone who has been caught on three separate occasions selling tobacco to underage purchasers. After the first and second warnings, there is, of course, provision for fines, but on the third occasion

that person can lose his or her licence, which is a very powerful deterrent. The two are not mutually exclusive, and my understanding — I will stand aside for the Minister, who has a more expert view on this — is that you could be convicted for both offences.

Mr Allister: I am still a bit puzzled about why amendment No 4 sets it down that you have to have been convicted and had a custodial sentence before you are disbarred from being registered if there is an active prohibition resulting from penalty notices, through “three strikes and you’re out”. I would have thought that there should be a correlation between those so that an accumulation of penalty notices would equally prevent you, under what is being addressed in amendment No 4. Is there a reason why that does not?

Mr Wells: You could be convicted of dealing in illicit tobacco and not have incurred the wrath of your local council by being caught by what I have called the “mystery shopper”. It is a technical issue, and I am sure that the Minister has the answer to it and will no doubt clarify it in his summation, but my reading of amendment No 4 is that it allows the authorities two ways of dealing with the issue. If you are selling illicit tobacco that has been smuggled, is contraband or is fake, you can be convicted, and there is a custodial sentence. Equally, if you are selling totally legitimate tobacco that has not been smuggled and is not counterfeit but you are caught on three occasions selling that to young people, you lose your right to sell tobacco. Of course, there is no custodial sentence attached to that particular misdemeanour. You simply lose the right to sell, which I still think is a huge deterrent. It is far and away the most important deterrent for tobacco retailers, because at the moment the sanctions are not particularly effective.

We do not realise that 82% of long-term smokers in Northern Ireland started in their teenage years. If we can prevent young people having ready access to tobacco products when they are young, the chances are that they will not take up the habit when they get into their 20s and 30s. Another statistic is that 80% of those who have taken up tobacco wish that they had not done so and are trying desperately to stop. There are very few people in Northern Ireland who are happy about the fact that they use tobacco products. Indeed, many of them regret the fact that, when they were in their teenage years, there was such ready access to tobacco. The Member has a much more detailed legal background than I have, so my interpretation could be on shaky ground, but I know that the departmental officials will readily provide an explanation that will help the Minister in his summation, and we will listen with interest.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Certainly.

Mr Beggs: I draw the Member’s attention to clause 8(6), which clarifies that, if someone has been caught selling tobacco to underage people on at least two other occasions, the court may impose a ban on tobacco retailing. Therefore, there are two distinctly separate avenues. Originally, that was the proposal in the legislation, but, as a result of the Committee’s intervention — I highlighted the issue myself originally — someone who has been convicted of a serious offence involving smuggling should not be entitled to be on the register in the first place. I hope that that is helpful.

Mr Wells: Remember, of course, that clause 8 will be amended by the Committee and the Minister's amendments. It refers to getting a fixed penalty notice or being convicted of a tobacco offence, so both offences are covered by that. For clarification, it is important that we get further explanation of that point.

I would have liked the register to have gone a bit further and included the details of convictions both of individuals and of premises, but I accept that, when we put that point to it, the Department explained in great detail the possible ramifications under human rights legislation of doing that. Reluctantly, I had to accept that it was right. We did not want this important legislation to be taken straight to judicial review or some form of court action and for that clause to fall or for the whole basis of the legislation to be brought into doubt, so, after a lot of discussion, the Committee agreed that it would not go down that route. Perhaps that was the only area in which there was any active discussion or debate between us and the Department, so, at the end of the day, I reluctantly accepted that.

My basic view is that the legislation puts us ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic in dealing with the issue. Therefore, I hope that other parts of the UK will take note of what has happened. The Bill has benefited from the scrutiny of the Committee, from sympathetic consideration by the Department and from the Minister's willingness to meet the Committee on the important concerns that it had. Therefore, the Committee will not oppose any of the Minister's amendments.

A raft of amendments from the Chair of the Committee has been agreed with the Department, so there is no need for the House to divide on any of those. This is, in my opinion, the Assembly working at its best.

I pay tribute to Conall McDevitt, who had an important role in the early stages of the legislation and is not here to see it come to fruition. He was a very valuable member of the Committee. I am sure that Mr McKinney, who succeeded him, will be an equally valuable member. We respected Mr McDevitt's input into the legislation in the early stages, and I am sure that, had he still been here, he would have been quite happy with it.

Mr McKinney: I thank Mr Wells for his comments. Conall McDevitt was centrally involved in the early stages of the legislation, and I came along only recently. It is also important to reflect on what Mr Wells said about the background to the Bill. The 2,300 people dying in Northern Ireland each year as a result of smoking is too many, and many more suffer long-term illness.

The Bill is timely and welcome. With amendment, it will help to regulate smoking and curb the growing trend among young people, which is the direction of the legislation, which attempts to prevent younger people gaining access to cigarettes.

As the Chair said, the Committee received communications from many sources, and its decisions were well informed. I praise the Minister and departmental officials, who took a considered approach. The Committee took different views and was listened to. We believe that the legislation will be stronger as a result.

The SDLP is content that the Committee has rigorously interrogated aspects of the Bill, specifically the amendments.

The Committee welcomed amendment No 1. The original clause, as was outlined, had 26 registers; a central register makes much more sense and avoids excessive red tape and bureaucracy. In amendment No 4, the period of five years is logical, and we are pleased that the Committee's recommendations were listened to. We are pleased with amendment No 12 and that the movement from three months to 28 days was accepted.

We are content to sit with the Committee's position on this and are pleased to see, as Mr Wells outlined, that the legislation was interrogated by the Committee and the Department. We hope that that has made it stronger legislation. I go back to the central point, however: this is about preventing young people accessing tobacco products, and we hope that it will lead to a significant reduction in the headline figures that I pointed out at the start.

Mr Beggs: I will briefly put the legislation into context. Members mentioned the 2,300 people who die in Northern Ireland each year from tobacco-related causes. On top of that, 17,000 tobacco-related admissions to hospital occur each year, and some 24% of our population still smoke. Interestingly, that percentage has remained stubbornly high and, in fact, has increased very slightly according to the most recent surveys. That means that, each year, while 2,300 people die from smoking-related diseases and many others suffer from them, at least 2,300 young people start to smoke. This is a very addictive drug —

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: Yes, I will.

Mr Wells: On Saturday, the public health authorities in GB calculated that half of the 521 teenagers who take up smoking every day in the United Kingdom will die from a smoking-related disease if they do not give up within a short period.

12.15 pm

Mr Beggs: I thank the Member for that information. That just reinforces the importance of protecting our young people and making them fully aware of the dangers of the disease, and also of protecting them by not enabling them to easily access something that is so addictive and will cause them so much trouble in later life.

Recent surveys indicate that about 8% of our 11- to 16-year-olds are smoking. It is horrendous that people are becoming addicted at such a young age. One fifth of the test purchases by local councils find that retailers have been selling to underage persons. Other surveys indicate that up to half of purchases made by underage users are made directly from retailers. Clearly, something needs to be done to strengthen the legislation in that area and ensure that more of our young people will not suffer ill health in the long term as a result of acquiring an addiction to smoking. It is for that reason that I am very supportive of the legislation in principle.

I agree with others that the Committee Stage was very constructive. The Committee spotted weaknesses in the proposed legislation and suggested improvements, some of which were taken up. On other suggested improvements, having initially been told, "No, you can't do that", the Committee decided to seek further advice and come forward with amendments. Thankfully, the

Department, having a clear message from the Committee, did further research, changed its mind and is seeking to strengthen the legislation in a number of areas with the amendments that have been proposed by the Minister. I agree with others that there has been constructive engagement between the Committee and the Department and the Minister to bring about much better legislation. I fully support all the amendments in the Minister's name, many of which have their origins in the Committee.

Clause 1 allows the councils to control the 26 registers. The Committee highlighted a degree of duplication there. There is the potential for a lack of sharing of information. An individual with retail shops in two council areas might be engaged in bad practice in one area, and it would be up to that council area to tip off the other area that the individual needs to be under particular scrutiny. It seems much more sensible to have a central register that is widely shared between all the councils that are required to try to enforce the legislation. So I support amendment No 1, which replaces clause 1. I note the opposition to clauses 5 and 6, which are related. Amendment No 1, with its provision for a central register and guidance around that, is a much better way of regulating the register, keeping a close eye and sharing information.

I agree with Mr Wells that it would be nice if there was a huge level of detail in the register, but I had to accept the points made by the officials that it would be bureaucratic and might cost a significant amount of money. Ultimately, it might have to be paid for by ratepayers. On top of that, there would be risks from not having accurate information on it, which could affect someone's business incorrectly. For those reasons, I accept that it has to be kept to a reasonable level of detail, as Mr Wells said.

If it is agreed that there should be a central register, there are many more amendments that automatically flow from that, which largely replace "council" with "registration authority". Amendment Nos 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19 and 39 deal with that, and I support all of them.

Amendment No 41 is a consequential amendment of removing clause 5, and I support it.

One of the issues that I raised was about those who may have been convicted under the regulations of smuggling tobacco, which the Department had previously overlooked. I was grateful for the support of the rest of the Committee on this, particularly from my SDLP colleague Conall McDevitt who, along with me, highlighted the issue in the early days. The Department, in fact, told us that you could not use the legislation — I am referring to the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 — when considering whether someone is suitable for retailing. It strikes me that someone who is convicted of the serious offence of smuggling obviously has no regard for the law. If they are willing to profit from smuggling illegal and maybe even counterfeit cigarettes, they clearly have no regard for an individual's health. As such, I would say that there is a high risk that such individuals also have no regard for whether they sell cigarettes to young people under the legal age. Given all those risk factors, I think that it is entirely right that we should prevent them joining the register in the first place, as per amendment No 4. Not only that but if they were already on the register, it would be inappropriate for them to remain on it if they had been convicted of a serious offence involving a custodial sentence. From my reading of it, amendment No 14 therefore allows for the

removal of such people from the register. That is a very significant power that will stop those who may be profiting and surviving in a very competitive market while others, who are operating legally, may be forced to close. It is important that we have a level playing field and that we stop those who are breaking the law and are profiting from illegal activity from undermining legitimate business. So, I think that it is right that we should remove such serious offenders from the register.

I also support amendment No 12. The relevant clause originally said that a retailer would have three months to apply to join the register. Applying to join the register is a very simple process, with a minimum amount of information needed. It is not complicated and it is free. No one, therefore, should require a long time to complete it. However, originally, retailers were to be given three months to join the register. What message was that sending? It was not saying that this is important and that it is important that you join the register and act legally. Therefore, I support the Committee's idea that a much shorter period should be applied, and it is now down to 28 days.

Someone who takes over a business can obviously get caught up in all the legal aspects involving the transaction of the business and perhaps in sorting out the arrangements with their wholesaler, their bank and their solicitor. Equally, this is another arrangement that retailers will have to sort out so that they are fully aware of the law and undertake to abide by it. If they do not so, they will very quickly find that there are penalties. So, I support amendment No 12, because it provides for a much smaller window of opportunity for registration. That will hopefully mean that retailers abide by the guidance and receive, at an early stage, a visit from the local environmental health officers who normally carry out those sorts of inspections. It will make those who commence retailing tobacco fully aware of the law in that regard and ensure that new retailers get off to a positive start, by working within the law and having a positive relationship with their local council.

I support all the group 1 amendments proposed in the Minister's name, as well as the Minister's opposition to the clauses listed. I look forward to speaking in the second part of this debate.

Mr McCarthy: I will be brief; I know that it is coming up to lunchtime. I support the Bill and the comments of our Committee Chair and Deputy Chair. I would like to put on record my appreciation and thanks to the Committee officials for their excellent work during our deliberations.

The Bill is an example of good collaborative working between the Committee and the Department. It was already a good Bill, but the process that we have gone through has significantly strengthened the forthcoming legislation. As has been said, although all the amendments before us come from the Department and are in the name of the Minister, they reflect the deliberations of the Committee. I put on record my recognition of the pragmatic manner in which the Minister and his officials responded to the views of our Committee.

There is strong support for the legislation. The underlying rationale for the Bill and my support for it were articulated at Second Stage. I particularly welcome the move to a central registration system that all councils can access, rather than a situation in which there are 11 or 26 different systems across the councils. Although I have no doubt

that councils will use their best endeavours to liaise and communicate with each other, a central register makes that so much simpler, and it reduces the risks of gaps in communication.

Every attempt to deter our young people from starting such a filthy habit and to warn them of its deadly dangers must be strongly supported. As the Deputy Chair of the Committee said, the Assembly is taking a lead on this very important issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.27 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Belfast City Hospital: Ward 5 North

1. **Mr McKinney** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what changes are planned for ward 5 north of the Belfast City Hospital. (AQO 5160/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Ward 5 north of the Belfast City Hospital provides a GP direct assessment service. There are also 19 collocated medical beds. The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the GP direct assessment function and capacity will remain in the Belfast City Hospital but will be relocated to ward 6 north. The direct assessment service in the trust is also being enhanced, with the introduction of direct GP admission and assessment on the Royal Victoria Hospital site. The collocated medical beds in the City Hospital will transfer to the Royal Victoria Hospital, and the changes are expected to take place in early December.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister. Does he agree that the accessibility of community care beds is an integral part of health provision in Northern Ireland and should be maintained?

Mr Poots: I absolutely agree that that is the case, and the decision that we took to ensure that there was a differentiation between a hospital that is carrying out emergency care and a hospital that is carrying out elective care enabled us to point the hospitals in two very clear directions. It will also ensure that we will be able to best meet community needs and, at the same time, that elective care is carried out with less disturbance and interruption from the emergency sector of a hospital.

Mr Dunne: Will the Minister advise what the plans are in the Belfast Trust for bowel surgery?

Mr Poots: There is a proposal to move the service to the Belfast City Hospital site, and one of the recommendations of a public consultation on the reorganisation of the delivery of acute services in Belfast is the relocation of elective surgery that is delivered at the Royal hospitals to the Belfast City Hospital and the Mater to enable all the emergency surgery to be based at the Royal hospitals. One of the proposed models for general surgery that was accepted is that specialist units for colorectal surgery and oesophagogastric surgery move to the Belfast City Hospital, allowing separation of the elective and emergency flows in ensuring that emergency and elective patients receive the level of care appropriate to their clinical needs and enabling the development of sustainable, compliant junior doctor and consultant rotas.

Resuscitation Strategy

2. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what a community resuscitation strategy will achieve. (AQO 5161/11-15)

Mr Poots: The vision for the community resuscitation strategy is to increase survival rates for people who suffer an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest to the highest level that can be achieved across Northern Ireland. To help to achieve this, seven objectives have been identified in the strategy, which was published for consultation on 20 November. I encourage everyone to contribute any ideas that they feel could strengthen the strategy in any way.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for that. Does the Minister consider that the current provision for CPR training is adequate or does it need improving?

Mr Poots: The Department recognises the importance of having people who are trained in CPR skills, and that is included in standard 9 in the 'Service Framework for Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing', which was published in 2009. A lot of resuscitation training is taking place each year in Northern Ireland, which is organised by various organisations. As resources are finite, the challenge is to achieve as much as possible with the resources that are available. As the pilot that was undertaken by my Department demonstrated, cascade training is feasible and is a viable way of increasing the pool of people who can provide CPR in an emergency. Even a modest increase in the survival rate could mean that up to 100 people across Northern Ireland would be alive who would otherwise not have survived their cardiac arrest. So, we believe that it is very important that we have further training for people in cardiac resuscitation, and we believe that that can make a massive difference to the number of people who survive out-of-hospital heart attacks.

Mrs McKeivitt: Does the Minister accept that, given the correlation between response times and cardiac arrest survival, a strong communication infrastructure is necessary to tackle out-of-hospital cardiac arrest fatalities?

Mr Poots: Communication is vital. In the first instance, the more people we have trained in cardiac resuscitation, the quicker the response will be. For every minute that a person has a cardiac arrest without having any defibrillation or life-saving work done on them, the risk rises by 10%. It is a big issue. We also need to know where the defibrillators are. There are around 1,000 defibrillators across Northern Ireland, and they are of no benefit to anybody if they are in a box somewhere that nobody knows about. We need to be very clear, whether they are in clubs, railway stations, bus stations, and places where there are lots of public movement, that people know that they are readily accessible. We need as many people as possible in the community who are trained and capable of using them. Communication, response and reaction are critical, so that the public can hold the line until the first responders, in the form of our Ambulance Service, get there.

Mr McCarthy: Will the Minister assure us that all the efforts in the strategy will reach those in sporting organisations, in particular, where young people, all too frequently, collapse suddenly in the middle of the field? If they have a defibrillator in their club, death could possibly be prevented.

Mr Poots: A regional business case application for sustainable delivery of emergency life support (ELS) training through schools, workplaces and communities in Northern Ireland has been developed by the Northern Trust on behalf of all the trusts. It was submitted to the Health and Social Care Board in December 2011. The application requested recurrent funding for community development resuscitation (CDR) posts across each of the five trusts, with each of the CDR officers being responsible for the delivery of ELS training in schools, communities and across the health service to front line staff. I understand that those posts have been funded until March 2014 and will help to enable us to get information out to the schools.

We can work very closely with the sporting clubs, who have a massive reach into the community, and we need to look at other organisations as well — the Boys' Brigade, the Girls' Brigade, the Scouts, and all those areas where we can have the skills developed in the community that can make that fundamental difference when someone has a heart attack.

Mr Speaker: Mr Wells is not in his place for question 3.

Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services

4. **Ms Maeve McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the issue of paediatric cardiac surgery. (AQO 5163/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am continuing my discussions with the Republic of Ireland's Minister for Health, Dr James Reilly TD, to explore whether it will be possible to establish a two-centred paediatric and congenital cardiac services model on the island of Ireland, to be located in Belfast and Dublin. My overriding concern is the safety of those very vulnerable children and obtaining the best possible treatment and care for them. I am aiming to make my final decision on the future arrangements for this service as soon as possible.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for that. Given the real public concern around the timeline on this issue, can he confirm that there will be a decision that will involve surgery being maintained in Belfast and can he confirm the timeline on that decision?

Mr Poots: I had hoped to be in a position to make my announcement this week, but discussions are ongoing. I think that people should not underestimate how difficult this process has been and the challenges involved. We need everybody to sing off the same hymn sheet, and we are working very hard to achieve that. Hopefully, we are very close to getting there. I will bring the information to the House and to the public as soon as I can. I trust that that will be very soon. As I indicated, I had hoped to do so this week. I do not believe that it should, necessarily, be much longer, and we really need to get that message out to the people who have real and genuine concerns and, obviously, real needs.

Mr Clarke: I am sure that the Minister is aware that this is a press item today in the media. Does he agree that a two-centred model would serve as a positive example of good cooperation between Belfast and Dublin and be a possible way forward for cardiac services in Northern Ireland?

Mr Poots: Clearly, it is not feasible for Northern Ireland to have a stand-alone service. I think most people recognise

that we do not have the sort of numbers going through the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children to make that feasible. Therefore, we need to work with others on the delivery of that service. Do we look to England, Scotland or the Republic of Ireland? Perhaps it will be a mix. Those involved in some of the most complex cases, whether they are in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland, leave the island to travel to England because of the complexity of the operations required. Others would be best suited to Dublin. However, I believe that there is an opportunity for us to retain services in Belfast, which is what we have been arguing for and seeking to achieve. However, the services provided must be safe and sustainable, and it is our challenge to ensure that. There has been massive improvement in the delivery of congenital cardiac care, including surgery, which is carried out very safely. We need to ensure that whatever we offer in Northern Ireland meets the same safety standard as that offered anywhere else. We cannot fall short of that. Ensuring that standard of safety is one of the key elements that we are working to achieve.

Mr P Ramsey: The subject is causing deep worry, anxiety and distress to parents. I sense the Minister's frustration today with the process and at not being able to make a formal decision. Will he outline to the House the obstacles or concerns that mean that he is not able to do so?

Mr Poots: I need cooperation from everyone involved. If surgeons in Dublin are to take up the role, I need their cooperation. If they are not prepared to help us, I need the cooperation of surgeons from another centre. I do not underestimate our ask of the surgeons in Dublin. I am asking a lot of them, so it is not unreasonable that they do not immediately jump up and say, "We want to facilitate Minister Poots and his request". We need to recognise that, if they agree to assist us, they will be taking on a major challenge and will need our respect.

We will continue the negotiations, which are at a tentative stage. I trust that we will be able to work our way through them so that we can report to the Assembly very soon.

Mr Beggs: As of 9 December, when Professor Wood completes his work in Belfast, there will be no paediatric cardiac surgeon in Belfast. Does the Minister agree that there is a real danger of many of the specialist children's services starting to unravel and that we have only a short, critical window in which to act?

Mr Poots: I am very well aware of the short and critical window. The service was under pressure before Professor Wood announced his intention to move on. We have advertised for a replacement, and we are very grateful for the interest that has been shown. We will make every effort to fill his position. It is a big ask to get someone of Professor Wood's standing, and we have to be realistic about that. It may be that the person will require further training, which makes it all the more essential that we liaise with a centre that has all the skills and expertise that will allow us to develop our staff in the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.

Familial Hypercholesterolaemia

5. **Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions have been taken to assist families at increased risk of high levels of cholesterol. (AQO 5164/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care (HSC) and Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke (NICHHS) are working in partnership to develop a new Northern Ireland-wide service to identify people with a particular genetic disorder called familial hypercholesterolaemia (FH), which causes very high blood cholesterol. That will build on the existing service in the Belfast HSC Trust area and should result in an additional 1,000 people with FH being diagnosed and treated over the first four years of the programme.

2.15 pm

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he tell us how common countryside FH services are in an international context?

Mr Poots: Early identification and treatment of FH will prevent cardiovascular deaths in this population. Additional cases are generally found by systematically identifying, investigating and testing family members of all people known to have FH. The service that we are funding through a partnership between Health and Social Care and the Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke Association is supporting the development of a bespoke IT system that will facilitate the appointment of specialist FH nurses and additional genetic testing. At that point, Northern Ireland will be one of only a few countries to have a countryside FH service, including Wales and the Netherlands.

A manual baseline audit has been completed to identify the current Northern Ireland FH population. A business case for a regional FH register and specialist nurses to provide cascaded testing for FH has been approved. Recurrent funding of £107,000 per annum has been identified to fund the development of FH cascaded testing services. This was possible only because of the lobbying and work of the Chest, Heart and Stroke Association on the issue.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. What efforts are being made to trace, track and treat high levels of cholesterol in families that are genetically prone to the condition?

Mr Poots: That is, essentially, what the FH screening is about. The service framework for cardiovascular health and well-being has recently been reviewed, and a revised version will be published shortly. It sets out standards for prevention, assessment, diagnosis, treatment, care, rehabilitation and palliative care for individuals and communities who have or are at a greater risk of developing cardiovascular disease. That framework was launched in 2009 and has led to a number of improvements in the quality of care that people in Northern Ireland receive. The revised framework will build on earlier success, set new priorities for cardiovascular health in Northern Ireland and continue to improve the health and well-being of the population. The revised framework contains a specific standard relating to the identification and treatment of all people with genetically linked high cholesterol. The identification of other family members through a regional register remains a priority.

Mr Gardiner: I appreciate what the Minister has said, but can he advise what preventative action he has taken with preschool children and their parents to reduce the likelihood of high cholesterol levels later in life?

Mr Poots: The Public Health Agency has a key role in advising on how people can manage cholesterol. Some

people have naturally higher cholesterol levels than others, therefore some people can get away with eating foods that may cause others major problems. Obviously, we encourage people to have less fat and sugar in their diet, and perhaps not as much carbohydrate as some might take. That will reduce their levels of cholesterol. Good advice for young people is to have a good bowl of porridge every morning. That is one of the best means of dealing with cholesterol. It is funny that the simple things in life very often provide the best solutions.

Coronary Artery Disease

6. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he has taken to increase early intervention work and reduce morbidity and mortality rates from heart and circulatory disease. (AQO 5165/11-15)

Mr Poots: Death rates from coronary artery disease have been falling steadily over a number of months. This is due to a number of factors, including early intervention, improvements in drug treatments and better awareness of symptoms. Action taken by Health and Social Care includes the expansion of cardiac catheterisation capacity, the development of a new primary percutaneous coronary intervention service, the development of a community resuscitation strategy, and the review of the service framework for cardiovascular health and well-being to set new priorities for cardiovascular health. Public information campaigns highlight the health risks caused by smoking and obesity and provide information on the signs and symptoms of conditions.

Mr I McCrea: In the past, the Minister has referred to inequalities in the health service. With circulatory disease, can the Minister outline the extent of the inequalities that exist between particular groups across Northern Ireland?

Mr Poots: The standardised death rate for circulatory disease in Northern Ireland reduced by more than two fifths between the 1997-2001 and 2006-2010 periods, which is very positive. Over the same period, the rate in the 20 most deprived areas saw a smaller reduction of one third. That means that, although the mortality rates improved across all areas, the inequality gap actually increased. That is a big issue for us.

The standardised hospital admissions rate due to circulatory disease reduced by 5% between the 2000-02 and 2008-2010 periods. Throughout that time, the inequality gap between the most deprived areas and the rest of Northern Ireland was fairly steady and stood at 13%. Clearly, there is an inequality gap. That inequality gap continues to increase, which is a matter of regret.

We must continue to get the messages out there and to develop the infrastructure that will support people in these areas. We really need a change of lifestyle for many people. That will make the fundamental difference to outcomes in health inequalities.

Mr Kinahan: Children are more likely to receive an electronic gadget as a Christmas present than a bicycle. What is the Minister doing to reinforce to parents the importance of their children exercising and of their leading by example?

Mr Poots: In all these things, it is very important that we work across Departments. We have a cross-

departmental working group. We discuss how best we can get messages through to the public, including children. Of course, schools are the best place to get messages through to children because they spend a lot of their time in school. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure supports us in getting messages out through sporting clubs. However, very often, people who are engaged in sporting clubs are doing the right things in any event. Schools are fundamental to us in getting the right health messages out. If public health is initiated from the earlier points in life, it will be considerably less of a challenge as people move into adulthood. We have far too many young people who are clinically obese. For many of them, it is avoidable. We need to get the messages out, particularly through education.

Blood Donations: Ban on Gay Men

7. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to his response to the 'Ban on Blood Donations from Gay Men' debate in the Assembly on 5 November 2013, to outline the rationale behind his concerns that he would not get a fair hearing in the Court of Appeal. (AQO 5166/11-15)

Mr Poots: On 8 November, I replied to the Member's priority question for written answer pointing out:

"I have not said that the Courts have failed to act impartially in cases in which I have been involved."

I also remind the Member that there is not, and never has been, a ban on blood donations from gay men. Rather, there is a ban on men who have oral or anal sex with other men. The restriction relates to behaviour as opposed to orientation. A number of other categories of individuals are also excluded from donating. The judge concluded that any change in Northern Ireland to the donor restriction on men who have sex with men was not my responsibility.

Mr Agnew: On 5 November, you asked:

"do I believe that I would get fairness in the Court of Appeal or would there be a circling of the wagons?" — [Official Report, Bound Volume 89, p89, col 2].

You have publicly raised a concern about the fairness of our appeal courts. Could you please outline when you believe that there has been a circling of the wagons in the past or are you simply scapegoating the courts —

Mr Speaker: Order. I am protecting the Member plus the Minister. I am being very careful that the Member does not stray into an area that could be seen as contempt of court. I just warn the Member and the Minister.

Mr Agnew: Minister, could you outline any evidence that you have on which to base your concerns or are you scapegoating the courts for your own errors?

Mr Poots: The Member asks a question. If he thinks that some sort of deity exists in courts and that they are places of absolute perfection, I have to say that I am not in a similar place. However, I am not alone in that. In this House — in the Committees of this House — His Honour Judge Marrinan, with reference to the appointments committee in the courts, which is headed up by the most senior people in the courts, said of an appointment:

"It was an illegal act, in my view... it was so irrational and so unfair that, had I felt confident about going

for judicial review and not fearful that I might end up bankrupt by doing so, I would have been very hopeful, given a fair wind, that a judge would have found the decision to be irrational and have the appearance of bias against me. I would have rather hoped that that would be the decision. Unfortunately, I just did not have the confidence, given the factors that I have just mentioned and the fact that a judge would then be put in the very difficult position of having to make such findings against the highest judicial figures in the land. I just did not feel confident that I would succeed, nor did my skilled QCs."

Those QCs were David Schofield and Nick Hanna. Those are not the words of Edwin Poots; they are the words of His Honour Judge Murrin.

Mr Givan: Lord Sumption, in a speech made only two weeks ago, made a number of comments about the judiciary and the attempts through which judge-made law is now undermining the democratic process. He said that he believes that politics is a better way of resolving questions of social policy, rather than judge-made law. Does the Minister agree?

Mr Poots: That is a matter that I have stressed to the House over and over again. I think it is so poor that some Members of this House seem to think that it would be better if laws were made in courts, as opposed to being made in a legislature and then enacted in courts. That is how the state was originally devised: that Parliament made the laws and the courts ensured that the laws were enacted properly. Lord Sumption quite rightly pointed out:

"It is important to bear in mind that in a Parliamentary democracy the legislature can selectively enact into law whatever parts of the Convention or the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights it pleases. We do not need the Convention in order to introduce changes for which there is a democratic mandate. The Convention, and its judicial apparatus of enforcement, are only necessary in order to impose changes for which there is no democratic mandate. It is a constraint on the democratic process. I think that most people would recognise that there must be some constraints on the democratic process in the interests of protecting politically vulnerable minorities from oppression and entrenching a limited number of rights that the consensus of our societies recognises as truly fundamental. Almost all written constitutions do this. But the moment that one moves beyond cases of real oppression and beyond the truly fundamental, one leaves the realm of consensus behind and enters that of legitimate political debate where issues ought to be resolved politically."

This House should be making those key decisions.

Mr Speaker: Mr Kelly is not in his place.

Emergency Departments: Non-emergency Attendance

9. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to discourage non-emergency attendances at emergency departments. (AQO 5168/11-15)

Mr Poots: I launched the Health and Social Care Board's Choose Well public awareness campaign, which aims to help people gain a better understanding of the choices available and allows them to get access to the right services quickly. The number of genuine urgent and emergency cases rises during winter, meaning that hospitals, GPs and community nursing teams all have their hands full. Choose Well is about helping the staff in our emergency services concentrate on the people who are the most sick and injured. It is about making it clear to the public that the emergency and 999 services are for life-threatening and serious conditions. Minor healthcare issues can be dealt with by checking advice online, at home, by a pharmacist or by a GP.

Mrs Hale: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he inform the House what information is available within the emergency departments themselves about the appropriate use of those facilities?

Mr Poots: A range of options is used to raise awareness of appropriate health services for patients in direct contact with our hospitals and, in particular, in emergency departments (EDs). Patients can be advised on the appropriateness of attendance at the triage point. That will avoid inappropriate future attendances. Senior nurses can redirect patients to other facilities — for example, GP out-of-hours services, a local pharmacy or, indeed, their own GP. Posters in the main waiting areas can advise patients on the use of GP out-of-hours services. Advice is also offered to non-ED patients on what services are available to them locally. Patients can be advised by telephone of the use of appropriate services when queries are made regarding their condition.

Mr Speaker: That concludes questions for oral answer to the Health Minister. We now move to topical questions.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I will take your point of order after Question Time. We will move on to topical questions to the Health Minister. Question 1 has been withdrawn.

2.30 pm

Cherry Tree House

2. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when, to ensure that the public are aware of any action that is being taken, he will make a statement about the nature of the investigation into the serious claims that have been made against Cherry Tree House Nursing and Residential Home and the RQIA. (AQT 462/11-15)

Mr Poots: I will be happy to bring that forward when the RQIA has completed its work.

Mrs Cochrane: The investigation of the actions against the regulator is being undertaken by other employees of the same body. Does the Minister think that an investigation by the RQIA of the RQIA is independent or objective?

Mr Poots: I could comment on that happening in other places, but I will refrain. Independent regulation of healthcare is a big issue, and I am happy for there to be independent regulation. It is important that there is independent regulation. We fund the RQIA, but it is responsible for its own actions and activities, so we do

not give it direction about what to do. I have been looking at other areas including, for example, the Care Quality Commission, which is a non-departmental body of the United Kingdom Government that was established in 2009. While it describes itself as an independent regulator of all health and social care services in England, it is, in fact, accountable to the public through Parliament and the Secretary of State for Health, and much of its funding comes from the taxpayer. In Scotland, a public body was created in April 2011. It is part of the Scottish National Health Service, and its function is to implement the healthcare priorities of the Scottish Government, in particular the healthcare quality strategy of the NHS. In Wales, there is an independent inspectorate and regulator of all healthcare, and it carries out its functions on behalf of Welsh Ministers.

I have to admit that it is a challenge to get a body that is wholly independent of government, because the question is this: who will pay for it? People will always be of the opinion that he who pays the piper calls the tune. I genuinely want independent regulation because it is good to keep everybody aware that that can be carried out and to keep people on top of their game. However, the most important aspect is that, culturally, people should want to do their best everywhere they work for people they care for, and, in that respect, culture is more important than regulation.

Hospitals: Staffing Levels

3. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how his Department measures safe staffing levels across our hospitals and to state any shortages that there might be in Antrim Area Hospital. (AQT 463/11-15)

Mr Poots: We have a means of identifying the numbers of staff that we should have in our facilities, and we seek to uphold that. We have different numbers of people in wards at different times, and we have different challenges in our hospitals. On some occasions, the people on the ground will decide to pull people from one ward and put them another ward where there are particular pressures. That is the natural course of action.

I should say that the feedback that I have been getting on Antrim Area Hospital over the last number of months in particular has been so much more positive than was the case in the past. We all need to recognise that and give some praise to all the people who are involved in delivering the service that they are delivering. The difference has been fundamental.

Our Chief Nursing Officer has carried work out on normative staffing levels for nurses. She is responsible for ensuring that we have the appropriate number of nurses in our hospitals.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for that response. I understand that England is bringing in mandatory recording of safe staffing levels in its hospitals. From discussions with hospital staff members, I can say that that is also needed here, not only to ensure optimum performance by nurses, midwives, consultants and every other member of staff in the hospital but for ideal patient care. Has the Minister any plans to do that in Northern Ireland?

Mr Poots: As indicated, the Chief Nursing Officer has carried out work on normative staffing levels for nurses. I am delighted to say that, over the past two and a half years, we have appointed many more nurses; in fact, we have appointed around 500 more nurses. That is good news for the people of Northern Ireland. I am sure that the Member will appreciate that and, perhaps, want to include it in a press release that goes out in the future.

Ulster Hospital: Accommodation

4. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the pressures at the Ulster Hospital site in having sufficient space to accommodate the services and departments that are required there. (AQT 464/11-15)

Mr Poots: Some people might be surprised to know that the South Eastern Trust is in discussions with Knock Golf Club regarding the acquisition of land currently leased to Knock Golf Club adjacent to the location of the proposed emergency department and phase B of the acute services block. If that land is acquired, it may be utilised to provide additional car parking. We also facilitated an acquisition of Tor Bank School, which is immediately adjacent to the hospital site.

I visited the hospital site, and the Member of Parliament for Strangford has had people lobbying me, particularly about the MacDermott unit, which is the cancer unit for people in the South Eastern Trust. Those facilities are not fit for purpose. Frankly, I am not happy that people who are receiving treatment for cancer are being treated in substandard facilities. That is a challenge for the South Eastern Trust to resolve.

The trust is making the case that it does not have the space on the Ulster Hospital site to accommodate a new facility for the MacDermott unit. I have been saying clearly to the trust that the South Eastern Trust provides services for the people across the South Eastern Trust area, and many of them will be at the main site, which is at the Ulster Hospital. There may be services that it would be better providing on some of the other sites that the Ulster Hospital has. You have the old Bangor hospital, the old Ards hospital, the hospital in Downpatrick and, indeed, Lagan Valley Hospital. All those sites offer options for further services to be carried out there to enable the key acute services to be carried out at the main hospital, which is the Ulster Hospital, and to ensure that the best possible facilities are available to people requiring those acute services. The South Eastern Trust needs to fundamentally look at how it uses its estate and makes best use of its estate. I certainly think that there are other areas in its estate on which it could do a lot more work without impacting on or damaging in any way, shape or form the service that is provided to people in the South Eastern Trust.

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

Mr Poots: Sorry.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for that extensive answer. Obviously, as a Lagan Valley MLA, I will make the argument for the transfer of any services to Lagan Valley Hospital. Does the Minister agree that, in the past, there were plans for services to be transferred to that hospital? Has the Minister any idea where those plans lie?

Mr Poots: The Lagan Valley site is a strong site and a strong contender in that it remains a hospital with an emergency department, and other key facilities are still available at the site. So, while the Ulster Hospital is the main acute hospital in the South Eastern Trust, we certainly recognise that the Lagan Valley Hospital carries out an excellent service. Services can be expanded on that site, and, in view of the pressures on the Ulster Hospital, they almost certainly should be expanded at that site. I do not think that it is an acceptable reason or, indeed, excuse that people who currently use the Ulster Hospital may not like to travel the distance to Lagan Valley, because people who come from the Lisburn area are expected to travel the distance to the Ulster. As I recall, it is the same distance from Lisburn to Dundonald as it is from Dundonald to Lisburn.

Termination of Pregnancy: Fatal Foetal Abnormalities

5. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he has taken in recent months on the issue of abortion and, in particular, lethal foetal abnormalities. (AQT 465/11-15)

Mr Poots: That is one of the vexed questions that come before us to which it is very difficult to get the perfect answer. We are committed to publishing the guidance for health professionals on the termination of pregnancy at the earliest opportunity, although it is taking longer than I had hoped. The number and complexity of the responses received mean that it will take more time before a paper can be brought to the Executive. I am mindful that previous versions of guidance since 2004 have been successfully challenged in the courts, and further legal advice requested through the Departmental Solicitor's Office (DSO) has confirmed that the revised guidelines cannot change the options available to couples who face the very difficult and emotional circumstances of lethal foetal abnormality. Any changes around lethal foetal abnormalities would require amendments to criminal law, which is a matter for the Department of Justice (DOJ). I have written to the Minister of Justice and other Executive colleagues on the matter. Work continues on revising the guidance to take account of the responses to the consultation and to reflect existing law. A document summarising issues raised in the consultation is available on the Department's website.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his answer. What meetings has he had with couples affected by lethal foetal abnormality?

Mr Poots: I have met both couples who came into the public domain as a result of being advised that their baby had a lethal abnormality. I also met the clinicians who were providing advice to the couples. I am writing directly to both families to provide them with an update on the situation. I have also received a vast amount of correspondence from others who have been in similar circumstances. Many of them made the decision to proceed with the pregnancy, because that is what they wished to do. They received real value from going ahead with the pregnancy. However, I understand fully that other people are in different circumstances and do not feel that that is the case for them.

We will try to deal as sensitively as possible with all the issues. It is important that sensitivity be applied in what are very personal, difficult and, indeed, heartbreaking decisions. I believe that all the couples want to have the child in the first place. They are not people who want to engage in some form of dispensing with a pregnancy because it was unplanned. We need to deal with all the cases very sensitively and give due consideration to everything that is said to us.

Antrim Area Hospital: Emergency Department Waiting Times

6. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what impact the new wing at Antrim Area Hospital has had on A&E waiting times. (AQT 466/11-15)

Mr Poots: Not only is there a new wing, but there has been a change in the management team and the management structure. Together, they have made a massive impact on Antrim Area Hospital. At the end of September, 109,000 people were waiting for outpatient appointments. That figure is down by 21,000. In September, 79 people waited longer than 12 hours in the emergency department. Although 79 is too many, that is the lowest figure over the past four years. We can see that Antrim hospital is not in the headlines. That is very positive, because the hospital was in the headlines, very often for all the wrong reasons. The fact that it is not in the headlines is an indication that the public are much more satisfied with the service that is being provided at the site.

Mr Milne: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. Are any other measures in place or is any new thinking being brought forward to reduce waiting times further from the figures that the Minister has stated? Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Poots: The measures that are being taken are that people are on the ground day and daily, working very closely with people in Antrim hospital. I should clarify that 79 is not the number for Antrim hospital but for Northern Ireland in its entirety. Some time ago, Antrim was the worst-performing hospital for 12-hour breaches: that is no longer the case.

It has been performing remarkably well, and I welcome the fact that people are on the ground talking to the staff, hearing what the problems are and addressing those problems quickly. As a consequence, the public are seeing a service that has improved vastly. We will continue to work with the Northern Trust to ensure that that improvement continues.

2.45 pm

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Mr Wells, I will get to you after Question Time. I know that you are waiting patiently.

Finance and Personnel

Mr Speaker: Mr Kelly is not in his place to ask question 1.

Civil Service: Sick Absence

2. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he is taking to address the rise in levels of Civil Service sickness absence. (AQO 5176/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I thank the Member for his question. Managing attendance and reducing sick absence remains a key priority for the Civil Service. I have asked my officials to consider any changes or strategies that may be necessary to ensure that our ministerial targets are met.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his detailed response. What specific actions to reduce absence are being considered?

Mr Hamilton: I am very concerned about the upward trend in sickness absence figures for the Civil Service, which defies the trend of recent years when sickness absence was going progressively down. Sickness absence rose to 10.6 days on average in the past year, which is well off our target for the year. I am worried that not only have we not met this year's target, but that we are quite a way from meeting the current year's target, which is nine days of sickness absence. I am sure that Members will appreciate that getting down from 10.6 to nine is going to be exceptionally challenging.

My officials are considering a range of potential actions, including a stress survey and a follow-up action plan, which is planned for early 2014, because stress-related sicknesses account for around 30% of the working days that have been lost. I have asked for a review of best practice models for attendance management, including looking at the role of the line manager, centralising elements of the process and the support service, and robust case management for long-term sickness absence. I have also asked for a refocusing on the management of sickness absence policy and procedures to ensure that it is managed robustly by Departments.

Some people say that we need to go harder on those who are off on the sick and some would say that we need to be a bit softer. I think that we need a mixture of a bit of carrot and a bit of stick. My officials are considering a wide range of options and, although my personal preference is to improve attendance through positive measures such as the prevention of illness and the promotion of a healthier lifestyle, I have not ruled out any specific options whatsoever.

Mr Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Evidence shows that a healthier workforce is more productive, and case studies show a correlation between walking or cycling to work and fewer sick days. Sustrans suggests that, by focusing on that and implementing appropriate measures, we could halve the number of sick days in the Civil Service.

Does the Minister agree that health and well-being are key to addressing this problem? Will he introduce, among other things, more shower facilities and bike parking facilities to give employees in the Civil Service that choice? Will he also raise the importance of better cycling infrastructure with the Minister for Regional Development?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Chair for his question. I am surprised that he did not extol his own virtues as someone who is now at least attempting to cycle to work more. It is admirable that he tries to cycle all the way down from the Ballymoney area to Belfast. He will be entering the Giro d'Italia if he can keep that up.

I agree that having a healthier workforce is by far the best way to deal with this problem. I am prepared to recommend to Executive colleagues that we introduce a whole range of measures, some of which are very much focused on employee engagement, and some of which, perhaps, look at the terms and conditions on sickness absence. I would rather not have to do that if we can ensure that we promote a healthier workforce, and that includes walking and cycling to work.

My Department — indeed, the entire Civil Service — promotes a cycle to work scheme that gives financial incentives to members of staff to purchase bikes. We have seen some of the benefits of that, but there could always be more improvements. I know that the Member asked a written question recently about showering facilities in Civil Service buildings. The numbers that we have are more encouraging than I thought was the case, but, of course, where circumstances allow, there is space to do it and it is appropriate to do it, I would like to see that increased. Of course, when we move into new buildings, which is something that we are doing to rationalise our estate, it will be one of the criteria that we will be looking at to make sure that it is there so that we can encourage more people to cycle to work.

Mr Gardiner: What proportion of sickness absence in the Civil Service is due to stress or other psychiatric conditions?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. It is an important area of consideration. The proportion of working days lost due to psychiatric illnesses such as anxiety, stress, depression and others was 29.8%, so nearly 30% of the total, in 2012-13. Obviously, wanting to be considered as a considerate employer, that is a very high level and a cause for concern. That will be the focus and attention of a lot of the measures that I want to see addressed by officials in their review of what we do on sickness.

It is worth remembering that, even though the Member's question and follow-up questions have focused on the amount of sickness that takes place, over half of all civil servants — 52.3% — do not take a single sick day all year. That is worth noting and remembering when we discuss the issue.

Public Sector Reform

4. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the work of the public sector reform division. (AQO 5178/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: As Members will be aware, public sector reform is a high priority for me. Going forward, finances will be tight and there will be greater demand from a better informed, growing and ageing population. My agenda is not to shrink public services but to make better use of the resources that we have for the public sector.

One of my first actions as Minister was to establish the new public sector reform division, to which the Member

has referred. The director has been appointed, and he is currently identifying a small, multidisciplinary team to develop and progress a work programme of activity. That programme is being informed by researching best practice approaches that have merit from other parts of the world. Meanwhile, I and the senior staff within the public sector reform division have been engaging with industry, the community and voluntary sector and trade unions to listen to their views and thoughts on the opportunities for delivering reform in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, arm's-length bodies and local councils.

I will ensure that the public sector reform division is a resource that will not only concentrate on DFP activity, or those areas where I, as Finance Minister, have lead responsibility for joined-up areas, but is available to help all ministerial colleagues. By improving public services across the board, everyone will gain and we will have the best opportunity to maximise the public resources available to all of our citizens.

Mr Ross: The Minister has made no secret of his desire to see public sector reform. Indeed, I have heard him speak passionately about it in a number of different forums. Will he highlight to the House which organisations, groups or Departments he has met and what kind of reaction he has had from them to his proposals?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. As I alluded to in the first answer, I have met a variety of organisations, including business organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and others. I have also met trade unions. I met the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and NIPSA separately. I have also met the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, which hosted a very useful session with about 40 of its member organisations just over a week ago. That is a fairly broad and eclectic bunch of people.

The response that I have had has been almost universally enthusiastic. Obviously, those different groups will come at the issue from slightly different perspectives, but what is encouraging for me in taking forward public sector reform right across Northern Ireland is that everybody agrees that they want to see a much more efficient, effective and innovative public sector. We may squabble and disagree from time to time on how that actually happens on the ground, but I am enthused by the fact that everybody is on board with the principle and a conversation has started across Northern Ireland on the issue.

We have not just focused on Northern Ireland. I have met the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and also, last week, I met the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, which is focusing a lot of its work and attention on the very issue of public sector innovation. I am very keen to continue and follow up that engagement to see what Northern Ireland can contribute across the whole of Europe to improving public sector innovation in all member states and all regions.

There is an opportunity for Northern Ireland to share what we do well, but also to learn from the experiences of others.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí. The Minister is right about the need to introduce innovation and risk

taking into the Civil Service, albeit well thought through risk taking. However, does he now recognise that attacking the integrity of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and the Audit Office was the wrong way to go about it, and will he now withdraw those remarks?

Mr Hamilton: I do not think that I have anything to withdraw. I do not think that I ever attacked the credibility or integrity of anybody in this House. During the recent debate on the Public Accounts Committee's work for the previous year, I think I did what it was my duty and responsibility to do.

In response to a question yesterday from Mr Dallat, the Deputy Chair of that Committee, I highlighted that I accept where good work is carried out by the Public Accounts Committee, particularly when it focuses not just on value for money but on where we in the public sector sometimes fail to achieve the outcomes that we desire. However, I will not cease in pointing out issues to the PAC. I cannot sit here, and Executive colleagues cannot stand here either, and just take one-way traffic from the PAC all the time. We have the right to push back, every bit as much as they have the right to come at us.

When some comments made publicly by the PAC and its members do damage to the principle of public sector innovation and cause civil servants to think twice about taking a well thought out and carefully considered risk, the work of the PAC is damaging. When the PAC goes into the public domain and says things such as there is a sense or air of corruption about a particular contract, without putting into the public domain any evidence whatsoever about that, it should reflect on whether it is right and proper to accuse people in the public arena — who have no comeback — of being corrupt, and whether that has a positive or negative impact on the principles of public sector reform, which I think that he and I agree on.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. The Minister will know that I am a big fan of his public sector reform ideas. How regularly does he meet with his Executive colleagues to discuss potential opportunities to improve service delivery, and are some Departments more willing to engage than others?

Mr Hamilton: I am glad that I have one fan. I have yet to meet regularly with ministerial colleagues on this particular issue, although I hope to meet them on a one-to-one basis over the coming months as we progress the 2015-16 Budget. I want to see that Budget as an opportunity to discuss public sector reform and innovation. As we look at a public spending environment that is likely to see contraction, particularly on the current expenditure side, it is important that I seek to focus the minds of colleagues on trying to reform their own Departments. The Budget is an incredibly important opportunity to do that.

Whilst I may have views on which Ministers may be better at engaging than others, given that I have yet to engage with them properly, I will not be drawn into any comment about whether they are good boys, bad boys or otherwise.

Treasury: Country and Regional Analysis

5. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on communication between his Department and the Treasury regarding the country and regional analysis. (AQO 5179/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. Officials have liaised as normal with the Treasury in providing the necessary information used for the production of the country and regional analysis that the Treasury produces on an annual basis.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Minister for his deeply informative answer, but can he give me an assurance that he is scrutinising line by line all lines of expenditure attached to the North through that analysis, given the continuing delay in publishing, which has been attributed to quality assurance issues?

Mr Hamilton: Absolutely. It was as carefully considered an answer as it was a question, I suggest. I can confirm that I carefully considered this report, particularly since the Member raised it via his question. It would not make comfortable reading for somebody of his political persuasion, because it shows very clearly that identifiable expenditure per head for England, Scotland and Wales was £8,500, £10,100 and £9,700 respectively. Spending per head in Northern Ireland was the highest in the whole of the United Kingdom at £10,900, which represents 124% of the UK average.

3.00 pm

Mr Flanagan and many of his colleagues habitually come to this House and say how much better off we would be if we left the United Kingdom and join in a united Ireland, which is, of course, in dire financial straits. The report that Mr Flanagan's question has helpfully highlighted only goes to show that Northern Ireland is receiving an exceptionally good deal through its membership of the United Kingdom. So, I encourage the Member to carefully consider a report that shows that, in Northern Ireland, we spend the highest levels per head of population in the UK on education, social protection, agriculture and many other areas of public expenditure. So, I encourage the Member to read the very report that he highlighted in his questions. I am sure that it will encourage him to question his political views.

Mr I McCrea: There is no doubt that the report the Minister referred to reassures our connection with the rest of the United Kingdom. The Members across the Chamber could learn from that. Will the Minister outline how we, in Northern Ireland, compare with other regions in the United Kingdom; namely, Scotland and Wales?

Mr Hamilton: I agree with the Member: I hope that the Members opposite do learn from the report, although I suspect that they will not. Even when it is presented evidentially in black and white in front of them, I suspect that they will not reach an objective conclusion.

As I pointed out in response to the Member opposite, the report makes favourable reading for Northern Ireland. In some ways, I am not proud of the fact that we are so dependent on other taxpayers in the United Kingdom for the lifestyles and the public expenditure that we have in Northern Ireland. As we grow our economy and our economy improves, I would like to see us closing that gap over time and not being as dependent on taxpayers elsewhere in the United Kingdom for public expenditure here. From this report, we see that, in Northern Ireland, we have £10,900 spent per head of the population compared with £8,500 in England, which is the lowest figure. That shows that Northern Ireland's people are getting an

exceptionally good deal out of their membership of the United Kingdom.

Devolution: Commission

6. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the creation of a commission on devolution in Northern Ireland similar to the Silk and Calman commissions in Wales and Scotland. (AQO 5180/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. The 'Building a Prosperous and United Community' document commits us to examining the potential for devolving additional fiscal powers by autumn 2014. As part of that, we are examining the Calman commission and Silk commission reports. As both produced similar findings, a full commission to consider the devolution of fiscal powers to Northern Ireland may not be justified.

The most important consideration for us is the devolution of corporation tax. Clearly, we want to draw on the findings, but I do not want to unduly delay this work. The economic pact commitment is to put recommendations to the Executive by autumn 2014, and I want to achieve that. Therefore, there are no plans at this stage to establish a commission for Northern Ireland.

Mr B McCrea: Does the Minister agree that, after the Scottish referendum, in which I am confident that Scotland will vote to remain a part of the United Kingdom, it is likely that there will be further examination of the devolution of fiscal powers to the Scottish and Welsh regions? Does he not accept that Northern Ireland will be at a disadvantage when such discussions take place because we do not have a commission that will have looked at all the possibilities?

Mr Hamilton: I do not accept that we would be at a disadvantage. I hope that the Member is right in his conclusion about the Scottish referendum, not least because the result that he and I want will hasten the devolution of corporation tax powers to Northern Ireland. That would be an exceptionally large undertaking for this Administration. We have had the devolution of air passenger duty (APD) powers for direct long-haul flights. That is an important thing to note, because it is something that Wales and Scotland are very envious of. They requested those powers from Treasury but were turned down. So, if the Member and I were sitting in a different Administration, in Edinburgh or Cardiff, we might be asking whether we were at a disadvantage to Northern Ireland because it has devolution of APD powers for direct long-haul flights.

As devolution embeds across the UK, different devolved regions will seek the devolution of different tax powers to suit their particular objectives. It is not that I am or the Executive are against pursuing the devolution of certain tax powers. As I said, we have already secured APD, and we are vigorously pursuing corporation tax powers, which, as we all know, would have a transformative effect on our economy. We do that where there is a clear economic benefit for Northern Ireland.

Some of the taxes that have been or will be devolved to Scotland and that are also being sought by Wales do not, I think, give them an economic advantage over Northern Ireland. In fact, I fail to see what huge transformative economic advantage would come from having powers over

landfill tax or, indeed, stamp duty. That is not to disregard those taxes or to say that we would not consider devolving them, but, from my discussions with Ministers in those regions, I think that they are quite envious of what we have and what we are pursuing in terms of corporation tax.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his answers up to now. Given that the Scottish tax forecast was published for the first time last year, does the Minister not agree that he should be arguing for more accurate tax forecasts so that we can have more informed economic decision-making?

Mr Hamilton: The HMRC also recently published its estimates of taxes and what each region is contributing via taxes. Again, much like Mr Flanagan's question, that does not make for entirely pretty reading for Northern Ireland. It shows that we are in receipt of quite a large subvention from the United Kingdom, which the Member will know. That sits at £10.5 billion, which is a huge amount of money for us to receive.

Of course it would be better if we had much more accurate figures about what we raise in tax. It certainly would help us in our ongoing discussions on corporation tax if we were able to hollow out precisely what we raise and what it will cost the Exchequer to devolve those powers to Northern Ireland. By its very nature, and given the type of state that we have, it is hard to get a precise figure for what taxes are raised in Northern Ireland versus what taxes are raised in Scotland or Wales and other regions of the United Kingdom. There are figures that do marry up. If you look at the HMRC's report versus our net fiscal balance report, you will see that there are a lot of similarities, and that shows that, by using similar methodologies, we are, more or less, getting the right answer.

Mr McKinney: I would not be as confident as Mr McCrea appears to be in reading the Scottish public's mind on devolution. What powers identified by the Silk and Calman commissions would the Minister consider for devolution to Northern Ireland?

Mr Hamilton: Rather than the Member joining the soothsayer in the far corner in reading into what the Scottish electorate might think, I think, from listening to recent reports, that it may be better if the Member and his colleagues started to think about what the nationalist electorate in Northern Ireland is thinking. That may be more beneficial for him and his party in the short term.

I have to say that I come to the taxes that we are considering with a fairly open mind. I think that there are considerable issues with many of the taxes that we may get if we were to request them from Treasury. Take, for example, income tax: the HMRC report, which I referred to in response to the previous Member who spoke, showed that Northern Ireland raises about £3.5 billion in income tax every year. If we were to devolve that, it begs this question: do you want to put that level up or do you want to take it down? Both have consequences for costs. If you put it up, people are going to have to pay for it. If you bring it down, it means less money for public services. Even if you keep it static, there would be administration costs, in the same way that there are for corporation tax. There also is the fluctuation cost, in that you are dependent on what the take is in any particular year. Over the past couple of years, we have seen the tax take on income tax

go down by £200 million in Northern Ireland, according to the HMRC. That would be £200 million that we would have to meet out of our own Budget, instead of getting it back through the subvention that we get in the block grant. So, there are considerations like that. Sometimes, it looks attractive, but that is superficial.

In response to Mr McCrea, I mentioned issues about landfill tax and stamp duty. If we were to devolve those, there may be things that we would be able to do that are good for policy, but I seriously doubt whether those two or income tax would have the sort of transformative effect that corporation tax powers would have on our economy. That is why I would argue that we should be focused, first and foremost, on that number one priority to see corporation tax powers devolved to Northern Ireland. Let us ensure that we can do that and deliver on it, and then, following on from that, we can look at other options.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for the very articulate way in which he has dealt with the question, which is one that is arousing interest in the Assembly and elsewhere. Will he be quite specific about why we are not pressing the Government to be treated in exactly the same way as Scotland and Wales on the matter?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. I am more than happy to have the debate about whether we should devolve additional tax powers to the Stormont Assembly and what powers we should devolve. It is a conversation that we should have. It perhaps shows a sign of our growing maturity as an institution that we are prepared to consider additional tax devolution powers coming to the Assembly. However, we have to do so in a very open way. As I said in reply to the Member who spoke previously, we have to consider that sometimes doing so can look attractive superficially, but, when you bore into it, it is not the best idea for Northern Ireland, given the financial position that we find ourselves in.

I am very happy to have the discussion, but we have to approach discussion on what powers we would consider devolving to Northern Ireland on the basis of some principles. The foremost principle for doing so is that it is of economic benefit to Northern Ireland. We did not perhaps want to see air passenger duty in itself devolved, but it was the means of ensuring that we kept the direct flight from Belfast to New York. As I mentioned, corporation tax is something that we are pursuing because we can see the long-term economic benefit for Northern Ireland.

Some might want to see other powers being devolved for political or accountability reasons. I think that the Scottish Government in particular are pursuing a lot of those powers because it suits their political agenda. The powers do not necessarily suit the fiscal situation or the economy in Scotland, but the Government want to do it politically. We have to be very clear that we will consider any and all taxes being devolved to the Assembly if they produce an economic benefit and are, of course, affordable to the Assembly and the people whom we serve.

Desertcreat: Community Safety College

7. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the delivery of the Desertcreat project. (AQO 5181/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. The addendum to the business case was formally approved by my Department on 26 November this year. The tender process will now be completed and a preferred bidder appointed. It is expected that construction of the new Community Safety College at Desertcreat will commence in the new year. The delivery of the new police, fire and prison training college is a key Programme for Government commitment. The investment will deliver a world-class training facility for those essential public services, which have suffered from underinvestment by direct rule Ministers.

Mr Givan: I thank the Minister for that announcement. Obviously, we have been pursuing the project for a long time. It has been bedevilled by delays, but, finally, the Minister has been able to announce that progress has been made. How much of Her Majesty's Treasury funding is tied up in the project and when does that need to be paid for?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his follow-up question. I am very glad to announce that we have been able to make progress on that scheme. The Member, through his chairmanship of the Justice Committee, will know that what is proposed is a world-class facility. I am absolutely certain that police forces and fire services from around the world will want to visit it and use it to train their staff.

The Member is right to raise the issue of Her Majesty's Treasury funding. Under the devolution of policing and justice settlement, Her Majesty's Treasury provided some £70.3 million in a ring-fenced fund for the Northern Ireland Community Safety College. The Department of Justice currently enjoys end-year flexibility for those funds and will continue to do so until the end of the Budget period in 2015. It is my understanding, however, that if those funds are not utilised by April 2015, there is a possibility that some of that ring-fenced element may be lost to the Treasury.

I have agreed with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that we will continue to monitor closely the delivery of the project, but my message to the Department of Justice is that it needs to proceed post-haste. I appreciate that there have been delays and that not all of them have been of that Department's making by any means whatsoever, but it needs to proceed post-haste to access that £70.3 million of funding ring-fenced and set aside for the project.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Is there any provision in the contract for social clauses similar to those in the DCAL stadium development programme?

Mr Hamilton: A contract is not yet in place. The tender process was paused because of the cost overrun. The estimated cost was at one level, and the prices that came in were substantially higher. The bill of reductions exercise reduced the construction costs by some £25 million. As the Member will know, the Executive are committed to ensuring that there are social clauses in all contracts moving forward, not just construction contracts. I fully expect that this contract, like all other contracts, will include social clauses. Given that they are construction contracts, they will, not exclusively but particularly, concentrate on long-term unemployed people and creating apprenticeships.

3.15 pm

Mr Speaker: That concludes oral questions to the Minister. We now move to topical questions. Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Ulster Bank: IT Glitches

1. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has had any discussions with the Ulster Bank in light of the recent glitches in its IT systems and, if so, what was the outcome of those discussions and did he receive any reassurances. (AQT 471/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his very topical question. It is probably the first topical question that I have had, even though this is my fourth go at this. Yes, I have had discussions. I did that as soon as I became aware that problems were developing last night and customers were expressing concern that they could not make payments or access their money at cash machines. That caused some embarrassment in stores when they could not pay. When they needed emergency access to cash at a hole in the wall, they could not get it. I made contact and had communication overnight and early this morning with Ulster Bank. This afternoon, I spoke on the telephone to Stephen Cruise, the head of retail banking at Ulster Bank.

The bank accepts and understands that this has been bad news for its customers. It is the third time that such an incident has happened, albeit not as bad as the one back in June 2012. I think that we can seek some solace and reassurance from the fact that, I am told, it is not the same IT issue. I am not sure whether that is something to seek solace from, but it is not the same problem, so one would not expect the recurrence and the longevity of the previous problem. I am informed that all problems have now been overcome and that the problem that arose last evening now seems to be fixed. There are some indications that, in RBS across the water, some problems still exist.

I know that other banks have had similar issues, but this is, of course, the third time that Ulster Bank has had problems. I do not think that Ulster Bank needs me to tell it that this causes some damage to its reputation and that it causes its customers some concern. I have sought some assurances, in so far as I can, that this sort of incident will not happen again, but we are dealing with IT systems, and who knows what can happen? I take some solace from the fact that the bank has assured me that RBS continues to invest quite heavily in its IT systems because it appreciates and realises that this is causing it difficulties.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. Given that, as the Minister has said, this is happening all too frequently, does he agree that part of the discussion has to be about a decoupling of the Ulster Bank IT systems from those of the Royal Bank of Scotland to protect us here?

Mr Hamilton: That is an operational matter that would have to be considered by Ulster Bank in the context of its ownership by the RBS group. I imagine that decoupling would come at a considerable cost to Ulster Bank, and I would be worried that, although, in some ways, it might seem to be the right thing to do, it might come with a huge price tag to customers here in Northern Ireland, who would, ultimately, have to pay for something like that. On

the basis that I have no authority or say at all over what the banks do, I will continue to press them.

The Ulster Bank, as we have recognised previously in this House, is critical to the banking system in Northern Ireland and, ergo, critical to the economy in Northern Ireland. It is important that its customers can access their funds when they need to.

I am assured by the bank that anyone who has been out of pocket as a result of this latest problem will be reimbursed. Anyone who continues to experience problems of any kind should call into their local branch or telephone Ulster Bank's call centre.

I am worried about one other aspect, which I think is worth reiterating in the House, in case anyone is listening. Some criminals appear to be trying to capitalise on this and are issuing phishing emails to Ulster Bank customers saying that, because of the system crash, they should re-enter their account details. It would be a terrible shame if people, having had the embarrassment of not being able to make a payment, were to fall foul of criminal activity. I take this opportunity to reiterate to the general public not to fall for that. The bank will not be asking anyone for their personal identification number, their bank account details or anything like that online.

Financial Transactions Capital

3. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures he can take to prevent the Executive's 2013-14 allocation of financial transactions capital being surrendered to Her Majesty's Government. (AQT 473/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. Over recent months, I have, along with my Scottish and Welsh counterparts, lobbied the Chief Secretary to the Treasury for end-year flexibility in respect of financial transactions capital, which, as the Member and the House will know, is a new device that the Government are bringing forward to try to increase spending on capital projects in the private sector. I am pleased to confirm that such a scheme has now been agreed between Treasury and the devolved Administrations.

The scheme will allow the Northern Ireland Executive flexibility to carry forward unspent financial transactions capital funding across each of the next two financial years. This flexibility amounts to 20% carry forward of unused financial transactions capital funding into 2014-15 and 10% into 2015-16. That will ensure that we have more time to develop suitable schemes and will significantly reduce the risk of any funding being surrendered to Her Majesty's Treasury.

Mr Easton: What is the position for Scotland and Wales?

Mr Hamilton: Scotland and Wales will receive the same flexibilities that Northern Ireland is receiving. They will receive 20% carry over in the first year and 10% in the second year. I am not sure what that represents as regards their total expenditure, but, for Northern Ireland, I can inform the House that this year we will be able to carry forward £9.4 million into next year, and next year we will be able to carry forward £5.4 million into 2015-16.

I have been encouraged by the engagement that I and my officials have had with other Departments. Departments

are now starting to come forward with some exceptionally good schemes that would use up financial transactions capital. I am optimistic that we will not have to use all of the carry forward provision. Nonetheless, it is a useful device to have in case we hit a situation where, because these schemes are very demand led, one may not move forward and we may need to have flexibility or we would possibly lose money to the Treasury, which is not something that I or anybody in the House wants to see happen.

Mr Speaker: Mr Kelly is not in his place for question 4.

Narrow Water Bridge

5. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he agrees that the construction of the Narrow Water bridge would create badly needed jobs in the tourism and construction sectors. (AQT 475/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I am perhaps not as disappointed as the Member, given that she represents the constituency, but I am disappointed that this scheme has not been able to go forward. Listening to representatives from the area who are in the House and to others from the area, there was a great belief that the construction of the bridge would not just improve connectivity, which is important, but would provide a boost to tourism on both sides of the border. In that respect, it is disappointing that the scheme will not be going ahead.

I am now in the position, alongside my counterpart in the Irish Republic, of having roughly £17 million worth of EU funding unspent. It is important that we get that money spent, and that is my priority. Disappointing as it will be for the Member and people in the area that the Narrow Water bridge scheme will not be going forward, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland must now make sure that we spend the money that we got from Europe on a project.

Ms Ruane: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí go dtí seo. Can I urge the Minister to consider that the best way of spending the money is by liaising with his Southern counterparts to ensure that the project does go ahead? I am surprised to hear that he does not believe that it will go ahead. With the right political will, it can do so. Can the Minister let me know what he and his Department have done to ensure that the project does go ahead rather than lose the money from this important project?

Mr Hamilton: The unfortunate reality for the Member and the project is that the letter of offer issued by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) has now been withdrawn. So, the scheme is off the table in that regard. Our priority is to ensure that the EU funding available to us is spent. I was in Brussels early last week and spoke to senior officials from the Directorate-General for Regional Policy (DG Regio) who deal with INTERREG and Peace funding, and the message coming very clearly from them is that the impression it would give if Northern Ireland were unable to spend the money, when we have sought and received an extension of Peace funding into a fourth strand, would not be good.

Although Members may be disappointed that the Narrow Water bridge scheme is not going forward, my priority and that of my counterparts in the Irish Republic is to ensure that the money that is available to us is spent on a project that is equally worthwhile and improves the cross-border infrastructure.

HM Revenue and Customs: Job Losses

6. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on any discussions that he has had with HMRC, given that he will be aware of its plans to close services here and to significantly reduce the number of local jobs. (AQT 476/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I am very concerned. I think that some of the jobs are located in Enniskillen, which is in the Member's constituency, so he will have a particular concern. None are located in my constituency, but I am pretty sure that people working in Dorchester House, Belfast, come from all parts of the Province. So it is deeply concerning that HMRC has come forward with a plan that has the potential to make quite a few hundred people redundant in Northern Ireland.

My officials have discussed and will continue to discuss the issue with our counterparts in HMRC. I am due to meet Treasury Ministers tomorrow, and I might be able to raise the issue on the margins of that meeting, which is, first and foremost, about banking.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Minister for his response. It would be interesting to be a fly on the wall at the meeting when he discusses banking and HMRC.

Can the Minister give us an assurance that he and his Executive colleagues will do everything in their power to try to retain the jobs locally? In particular, will he engage in discussion with HMRC to see whether any of the services that are being transferred to Britain could actually be delivered better by the first-class services that are on offer here?

Mr Hamilton: The Member can have an absolute assurance that colleagues and I will make every possible effort to retain all of those jobs, just as we fought hard to ensure that the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) jobs would be retained in Coleraine. I know that my Executive colleague the Minister for Enterprise, Arlene Foster, in particular, is taking forward this issue, not least because she has the same constituency interest as the Member. I think that we can make to HMRC, as we did with DVA, a robust case. Whilst the nature of the job done by HMRC employees in Northern Ireland might change as a result of changes that HMRC is going through, they represent a good value-for-money solution to some of its problems, including the cost-cutting measures that it will have to introduce. We have done that with child maintenance and social security. Repeatedly, we have bid for and secured big contracts to provide services back into England, and I think that we can do likewise for the DVA and HRMC.

EU Funds: Additionality

7. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he is satisfied that, in the devolutionary arrangement, there is transparent additionality of EU funds, given that, under EU regulations, there is a requirement for actual additionality in regard to funding under regional and social funding. (AQT 477/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Member asks a good question. Perhaps we do not measure that as clearly as we might want to. I am happy to speak to officials about how precisely we measure and ensure additionality. As the Member is right to point out, it is imperative that we get from this money something that is additional and adds value to Northern

Ireland, rather than a redistribution of cash that we might have got from Treasury anyway.

Mr Allister: I welcome the fact that the Minister will do that, and I suggest that he conduct a severe audit. Some years ago, long before his time, I received from his Department correspondence that left one with the very distinct impression of anything but transparency and a severe question mark over whether there was actual additionality. I think it is something that a devolved institution could well be missing out on substantially.

Mr Hamilton: The Member and I agree in our disagreements with many things that the European Union does, but I do not have time to go through all of that. I have always been clear that we should get back as much of our money as we can to spend on projects that are beneficial to Northern Ireland. In that respect, I also agree with the Member that we need to have genuine additionality for what we spend. I have not particularly consulted on that during my term in office, but I am happy to pick up the issue and correspond with the Member on what I find.

3.30 pm

Assembly Business

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Those of you who are Church of Ireland will know the line in the catechism that states:

“We have left undone those things which we ought to have done ... miserable offenders.”

I think that I fall into that category yet again. I wish to apologise to you and to the House. Again, my only feeble excuse is that the Health Minister is a very productive Minister and goes through questions at a rapid speed, and I simply cannot keep up with him.

Mr Speaker: I hear very much the Member's apology to the House. I have to say that this is the second occasion in a very short time that the Member has had to come to the House to apologise because he was not in his place at Question Time, but the Member very graciously comes to the House and apologises, which is something that I would very much want other Members to do. Other Members could take Mr Wells's example in coming to the House to apologise. I have been watching over the past number of weeks when more and more Members have been missing at Question Time. We are keeping a list, and quite a number of Members need to come to the House, like Mr Wells has done, to apologise or at least give a reason why they are not in their place during Question Time. I thank Mr Wells for coming to make the apology to the House.

Executive Committee Business

Tobacco Retailers Bill: Consideration Stage

Clause 1 (Register of tobacco retailers)

Debate resumed on Question, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 1: After clause 1 insert

“Register of tobacco retailers

1A.—(1) *The registration authority must, in accordance with the provisions of this Act, maintain a register of persons carrying on a tobacco business (‘the Register’).*

(2) On the basis of information contained in the Register, the registration authority must, at all reasonable times, make available for public inspection—

(a) a list of premises at which tobacco businesses are carried on; and

(b) such other information as may be prescribed.

(3) The registration authority must make available to each council and the Department such information contained in the Register as that council or the Department may require.

(4) Information made available under subsection (3) to a council may be used by the council only for the purpose of enabling it or assisting it to perform its functions under—

(a) this Act;

(b) Part 2 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978; and

(c) the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.

(5) In any proceedings for an offence under this Act a certificate issued by the registration authority which states that on any date a person was or was not registered in respect of any premises shall be evidence of the facts stated in it; and any such certificate which purports to be issued by the registration authority shall be taken to be so issued unless the contrary is proved.

(6) In this Act—

‘registered’ means entered in the Register, and ‘unregistered’ is to be construed accordingly;

‘the registration authority’ means a body which is established or constituted by or under Northern Ireland legislation and is prescribed for the purposes of this Act.”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 2: In clause 2, page 1, line 1, leave out from “council” to the end of line 12 and insert “registration authority”—.— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 3: In clause 2, page 2, line 6, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”—.— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 4: In clause 2, page 2, line 7, leave out “or” and insert—

“(aa) the applicant has, within the period of 5 years ending with the day on which the application is made, been convicted of an offence under section 170 or 170B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 in relation to tobacco and been sentenced for that offence to a custodial sentence (whether suspended or not); or”.— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 5: In clause 2, page 2, line 8, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”.— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

No 6: In clause 2, page 2, line 12, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”.— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

No 7: In clause 2, page 2, line 14, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”.— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

No 8: In clause 2, page 2, line 19, leave out “the council considers appropriate” and insert

“which the Department may direct the authority to include”.— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 9: In clause 2, page 2, line 20, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”.— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

No 10: In clause 2, page 2, line 24, leave out “the council considers appropriate” and insert

“which the Department may direct the authority to include”.— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 11: In clause 3, page 2, line 30, leave out from “council” to “situated” in line 31 and insert “registration authority”.— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

No 12: In clause 3, page 2, line 35, leave out “3 months” and insert “28 days”.— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

No 13: In clause 4, page 2, line 38, leave out “A council” and insert “The registration authority”.— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

No 14: In clause 4, page 3, line 1, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

“(2) The registration authority must amend the Register so as to remove—

(a) references to registered premises in respect of which a restricted premises order has effect;

(b) a person’s entry from the Register where that person has, within a period of 5 years ending with the day on which the removal is made, been convicted of an offence under section 170 or 170B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 in relation to tobacco and has been sentenced for that offence to a custodial sentence (whether suspended or not).”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 15: In clause 4, page 3, line 4, leave out “A council” and insert “The registration authority”.— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

No 16: In clause 4, page 3, line 5, after “(2)” insert “(a)”.— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

No 17: In clause 4, page 3, line 8, leave out “A council” and insert “The registration authority”.— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

No 18: In clause 4, page 3, line 10, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”.— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

No 19: In clause 4, page 3, line 13, leave out “a council” and insert “the registration authority”.— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

No 39: In clause 22, page 16, leave out lines 33 and 34 and insert—

“‘the Register’ has the meaning given in section 1A(1); ‘registered’, ‘unregistered’ and ‘the registration authority’ have the meanings given in section 1A(6);”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 41: In clause 24, page 17, line 16, leave out “5(2)”.— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

Ms Brown: As a member of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee, I support the amendments tabled by the Minister.

Each member can speak for themselves, but the amendments in group 1 have been brought forward with the Committee’s support as members were concerned that there was a need for a centralised registration system. Under the draft Bill, individual authorities were to be responsible for maintaining and creating a register for the respective areas of authority. However, it is felt that a system of individual registration might not prove to be effective enough, especially when it comes to enforcement on the basis of evidence being brought forward that a retailer has committed an offence. The group 1 amendments, therefore, provide for the creation of a centralised registration system, which I hope will provide the necessary benefits when it comes to enforcement, and I believe that a centralised system will simplify the process of maintaining the register.

We must do more to stop the many young people who take up smoking from doing so. It is a lethal, highly addictive habit, the effects of which are very well known to us all. Studies have shown that those who smoke start young, and this Bill recognises that fact.

At this stage, I will take the opportunity to quote four killer facts provided by Northern Ireland Chest, Heart and Stroke. I know that they have been mentioned in the debate today, but I think that it is right and proper that they are highlighted once again. First, 83% of smokers started in their teens, with research showing that 8% of 11- to 16-year-olds are current smokers and that half of those young people who smoke regularly purchase tobacco from newsagents and other retailers in spite of legislation that makes it illegal to sell tobacco to anyone under the age of 18. Secondly, approximately 17,000 people a year are admitted to hospital for treatment for smoking-related illnesses. Thirdly, treating smoking-related diseases costs our hospitals over £150 million every year. Fourthly, and this has been mentioned quite a few times today, 2,300

people in Northern Ireland die from smoking every year. Those are very serious points that we have to consider.

Although it is the responsibility of the individual — it is the individual's choice to smoke — we must do all that we can to stop young people, in particular, from taking up smoking in the first instance. Many young people manage to purchase tobacco over the counter. That is why the Bill focuses on the retailer by seeking to deter and regulate their behaviour. However, the Bill should not hinder retailers in their business. If they stand on the right side of the law, they have nothing to fear.

The Bill effectively enforces social responsibility. Although much work has been done on asking for proof of age, far too many young people, for whatever reason, are still choosing to take up smoking. Most retailers are responsible business owners, but the Bill seeks to deter and catch those who do not behave in a responsible manner. That will be welcomed by all of us and, indeed, by responsible retailers. I hope that the Bill will transform the sale of tobacco products by promoting responsibility and making it harder for retailers who are guilty of selling tobacco to those under the legal age of 18 to continue to act illegally and irresponsibly. I welcome the Bill and support the amendments tabled in this group.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank all those who contributed to the debate on the amendments in group 1. These amendments have been agreed with the Health Committee, and I express my gratitude to the Health Committee. This has been a demonstration of how we can work together on issues of importance to deliver for the public.

The Chair of the Committee raised the question of registration. The merits of a centralised registration that is accessible to all via a public-facing website was discussed at Committee Stage. In addition to offering a more practical solution to members of the public, a centralised system would allow district council staff to verify easily which retailers are operating premises in other council areas. That function would be beneficial to the sharing of information on relevant offences that could lead to applications for banning orders.

An issue was also raised — I think, by Mr Beggs — relating to illicit tobacco. Following the concerns raised at Second Stage and Committee Stage, I have tabled an amendment to allow courts to include a conviction for selling illicit tobacco as one of the three offences that could lead to a banning order. The Bill will now prohibit a person from registering as a tobacco retailer for five years if he or she has been convicted of a serious illicit tobacco offence; that is one that has resulted in a custodial sentence being applied. Similarly, a person can be removed from the register if it is discovered that they have committed such an offence.

That takes me to the query that Mr Allister raised during Mr Wells's contribution. A little confusion seemed to prevail at that moment. At the outset, I should say that individuals who commit minor offences were already dealt with in the Bill. This amendment simply adds to it. As set out in clauses 7 and 8, three minor offences can lead to a retailer being banned from supplying tobacco. That is described as three relevant tobacco offences. Those are non-custodial offences. Many of them may just be public warnings from

an environmental health officer from a council. That is very significant.

The issue that Mr Allister raised related to individuals who may not be in the business currently — or, indeed, who may be in the business — but have carried out a serious offence. The Committee believed that one serious offence should be significant enough to ban people from selling tobacco. For example, in the case of an individual who was selling large quantities of illicit tobacco, that single offence could lead to a custodial sentence. The Committee felt that such individuals were not suitable to sell tobacco. We happily agreed with the Committee to add that amendment. However, that does not deviate from the fact that three minor offences can also stop you from selling tobacco for five years.

I trust that that deals with the issues that have been raised during the process. I urge the House to support the amendments as proposed and reject the original clause 1 as proposed.

Mr Speaker: The Minister's opposition to clause 1 has already been debated. I remind Members that, if clause 1 stands part of the Bill, I will not call amendment Nos 1, 2, 3, 5 to 11, 13, 15, 17 to 19 and 39.

Question put and negatived.

Clause 1 disagreed to.

New Clause

Amendment No 1 made: After clause 1 insert

“Register of tobacco retailers

1A.—(1) *The registration authority must, in accordance with the provisions of this Act, maintain a register of persons carrying on a tobacco business ('the Register').*

(2) On the basis of information contained in the Register, the registration authority must, at all reasonable times, make available for public inspection—

(a) a list of premises at which tobacco businesses are carried on; and

(b) such other information as may be prescribed.

(3) The registration authority must make available to each council and the Department such information contained in the Register as that council or the Department may require.

(4) Information made available under subsection (3) to a council may be used by the council only for the purpose of enabling it or assisting it to perform its functions under—

(a) this Act;

(b) Part 2 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978; and

(c) the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.

(5) In any proceedings for an offence under this Act a certificate issued by the registration authority which states that on any date a person was or was not registered in respect of any premises shall be evidence of the facts stated in it; and any such certificate which

purports to be issued by the registration authority shall be taken to be so issued unless the contrary is proved.

(6) In this Act—

‘registered’ means entered in the Register, and ‘unregistered’ is to be construed accordingly;

‘the registration authority’ means a body which is established or constituted by or under Northern Ireland legislation and is prescribed for the purposes of this Act.— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2 (Application for registration)

Amendment No 2 made: In page 1, line 11, leave out from “council” to the end of line 12 and insert “registration authority”—. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 3 made: In page 2, line 6, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 4 made: In page 2, line 7, leave out “or” and insert—

“(aa) the applicant has, within the period of 5 years ending with the day on which the application is made, been convicted of an offence under section 170 or 170B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 in relation to tobacco and been sentenced for that offence to a custodial sentence (whether suspended or not); or”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Mr Speaker: Amendment Nos 5 to 7 have already been debated and are technical amendments to clause 2. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group the amendments for the Question.

Amendment No 5 made: In page 2, line 8, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 6 made: In page 2, line 12, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 7 made: In page 2, line 14, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 8 made: In page 2, line 19, leave out “the council considers appropriate” and insert

“which the Department may direct the authority to include”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 9 made: In page 2, line 20, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 10 made: In page 2, line 24, leave out “the council considers appropriate” and insert

“which the Department may direct the authority to include”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3 (Duty to notify certain changes)

Amendment No 11 made: In page 2, line 30, leave out from “council” to “situated” in line 31 and insert “registration authority”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 12 made: In page 2, line 35, leave out “3 months” and insert “28 days”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4 (Changes to and removal from the Register)

Amendment No 13 made: In page 2, line 38, leave out “A council” and insert “The registration authority”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 14 made: In page 3, line 1, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

“(2) The registration authority must amend the Register so as to remove—

(a) references to registered premises in respect of which a restricted premises order has effect;

(b) a person’s entry from the Register where that person has, within a period of 5 years ending with the day on which the removal is made, been convicted of an offence under section 170 or 170B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 in relation to tobacco and has been sentenced for that offence to a custodial sentence (whether suspended or not).”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 15 made: In page 3, line 4, leave out “A council” and insert “The registration authority”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 16 made: In page 3, line 5, after “(2)” insert “(a)”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 17 made: In page 3, line 8, leave out “A council” and insert “The registration authority”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 18 made: In page 3, line 10, leave out “council” and insert “registration authority”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 19 made: In page 3, line 13, leave out “a council” and insert “the registration authority”. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Clause 4, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5 disagreed to.

Clause 6 disagreed to.

Mr Speaker: Before we move on to the second group of amendments, can I confirm that amendment No 15 was made? I think that the answer to that is yes.

Clause 7 (Restricted premises orders)

Mr Speaker: We now come to the second group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 20, it will be convenient to debate the Minister’s opposition to clause 11, as well as amendment Nos 21 to 38, 40 and 42. Members

will note that amendment Nos 27 and 29 are consequential to amendment No 25, amendment Nos 28 and 30 are consequential to amendment No 26, and amendment Nos 32 and 33 are consequential to amendment No 31. I call the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to move amendment No 20, speak to his opposition to clause 11 stand part and to address the other amendments in the group.

Mr G Kelly: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have come to the House to apologise to the Speaker, the two Ministers involved and their officials, because I missed two questions for oral answer and a topical question. I apologise to the House for not being here.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for coming to the House and apologising to the House. Once again, like Mr Wells, who came to the House to apologise, it sets an example of what Members should do: they should come to the House to apologise and give a reason why they were not in their place during Question Time.

Mr Poots: I beg to move amendment No 20: In page 4, line 8, leave out "may not exceed one year" and insert

"must not be less than 28 days or more than 3 years".

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 21: In page 4, line 14, leave out "3" and insert "5".—
[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 22: In page 5, line 10, at end insert—

"(ba) an offence relating to tobacco committed under section 170 or 170B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 on any premises in Northern Ireland (which are accordingly 'the premises in relation to which the offence is committed');

(bb) an offence committed under section 8F, 8G or 8H of the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979 on any premises in Northern Ireland (which are accordingly 'the premises in relation to which the offence is committed');— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 23: In clause 8, page 5, line 40, leave out "may not exceed one year" and insert

"must not be less than 28 days or more than 3 years".— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 24: In clause 8, page 5, line 42, leave out "3" and insert "5".— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 25: After clause 9 insert—

"Restricted premises orders: display of notices

9A. (1) This section applies where—

(a) a restricted premises order has effect in respect of premises ('the relevant premises'); and

(b) a person ('P') carries on a retail business at the relevant premises.

(2) P must display a notice in the relevant premises in accordance with subsection (3).

(3) The notice must—

(a) state that a restricted premises order has been made in respect of the relevant premises and the period for which the order has effect;

(b) be displayed in a prominent position in the relevant premises where it is readily visible to persons at every relevant point of sale; and

(c) be displayed no later than 5 days after the date on which the restricted premises order has effect.

(4) A relevant point of sale is one that was used for the sale of tobacco or cigarette papers at any time during the period of 2 months ending with the date on which the restricted premises order was made.

(5) Regulations may specify—

(a) the dimensions of the notice to be displayed in accordance with this section;

(b) the wording of the statement to be displayed on the notice; and

(c) the size of the statement.".— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 26: After clause 9 insert—

"Restricted premises orders: no tobacco in retail area

9B. (1) This section applies where—

(a) a restricted premises order has effect in respect of premises ('the relevant premises'); and

(b) a person ('P') carries on a retail business at the relevant premises.

(2) P must, no later than the day after the date on which the restricted premises order has effect, ensure that no tobacco or cigarette papers are in the retail area of the relevant premises.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply to tobacco and cigarette papers in the retail area of the relevant premises which an individual may have for his or her own use.

(4) In this section 'retail area' means any part of the relevant premises used for the serving of customers or the display of goods.".— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 27: In clause 10, page 6, line 37, at end insert—

"(6A) If a person fails, without reasonable excuse, to comply with section 9A(2), the person commits an offence.".— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 28: In clause 10, page 6, line 37, at end insert—

"(6B) If a person fails, without reasonable excuse, to comply with section 9B(2), the person commits an offence.".— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 29: In clause 10, page 7, line 4, at end insert—

"(d) subsection (6A) is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale;".— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 30: In clause 10, page 7, line 4, at end insert—

“(e) subsection (6B) is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 31: In clause 12, page 7, line 14, leave out from “the proper” to the end of line 15 and insert

“ascertaining whether any of the following offences is being or has been committed on the premises and, if so, by whom—

- (i) an offence under section 10;*
- (ii) an offence under Article 3, 4 or 4A of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978;*
- (iii) an offence under Article 4, 4A or 5 of the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991;”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

No 32: In clause 12, page 7, line 34, leave out from “of the proper” to the end of line 34 and insert “mentioned in subsection (1)(a).”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 33: In clause 12, page 7, line 37, leave out from “of the proper” to “this Act” in line 38 and insert “mentioned in subsection (1)(a).”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 34: In clause 13, page 8, line 21, leave out from “an offence” to the end of line 24 and insert—

- “(a) an offence under section 10(1), (2), (3), (6A) or (6B),*
- (b) an offence under Article 3, 4 or 4A of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978,*
- (c) an offence under Article 4, 4A or 5 of the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991;”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

No 35: In clause 16, page 10, line 29, leave out “3” and insert “5”.— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 36: After clause 16 insert—

“Council’s duty to share information about enforcement

16A. (1) Every council must make available to every other council, the registration authority and the Department such information relating to—

- (a) fixed penalty notices given in respect of tobacco offences committed in the district of that council,*
- (b) convictions in respect of tobacco offences committed in the district of that council, and*
- (c) restricted premises orders and restricted sale orders made on an application by that council, as the other council, the registration authority or, as the case may be, the Department may require.*

(2) Information made available under subsection (1) to a council or the registration authority may be used by the council or the registration authority only for the purpose of enabling it or assisting it to perform its functions under this Act.

(3) In this section ‘tobacco offence’ has the meaning given in section 7(14).”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 37: In clause 18, page 11, line 1, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

“(2) In Article 3(3) (prohibition on sale of tobacco, etc. to persons under 18) for ‘level 4’ substitute ‘level 5’.”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 38: In clause 18, page 14, line 38, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

“(3) After Article 4 insert—

‘Purchase of tobacco on behalf of persons under 18

4A. (1) A person aged 18 or over who knowingly buys or attempts to buy tobacco or cigarette papers on behalf of a person under the age of 18 shall be guilty of an offence.

(2) A person guilty of an offence under paragraph (1) is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 40: In clause 23, page 17, line 9, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

“(3) Paragraph (aa) of section 2(3) does not apply in relation to an offence mentioned in that paragraph which is committed before the commencement of that paragraph.

(4) Paragraph (b) of section 4(2) does not apply in relation to an offence mentioned in that paragraph which is committed before the commencement of that paragraph.

(5) Section 12 does not apply in relation to an offence mentioned in section 12(1)(a) which is committed before the commencement of that section.

(6) Section 13 does not apply in relation to an offence mentioned in section 13(1) which is committed before the commencement of that section.

(7) Subsection (2) of section 18 does not apply in relation to an offence which is committed before the commencement of that subsection.”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

No 42: In the long title, leave out

“to confer additional powers of enforcement in relation to offences under Articles 3 and 4 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978;”

and insert

“to amend the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978; to confer additional powers of enforcement in relation to offences under that Order and the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991;”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Mr Poots: Amendment No 20 extends the maximum period for which a court may issue a restricted premises order from one year to three years and sets a minimum period of 28 days for such an order. Amendment No 23 amends the equivalent provision in clause 8 for restricted

sale orders. The amendments were suggested by the Health Committee during its scrutiny of the Bill, following reports of banning periods of less than one week being issued in jurisdictions where similar legislation exists. I am thankful to the Committee members for their work in identifying that.

As the Bill was introduced, three relevant offences had to be committed within a three-year period before a council could apply to a court for a restricted premises order or a restricted sale order. Amendment Nos 21 and 24 allow instead for an application to be made following three offences within five years. That will remove some pressure from councils and should act as a greater deterrent for retailers from making underage sales. Once again, the amendments were made at the suggestion of Committee members, and I believe that they strengthen the Bill and am accordingly grateful.

Amendment No 22 allows for the inclusion of an offence of selling illicit tobacco as one of three offences that could lead to a restricted sale or premises order. The illicit tobacco trade seriously undermines tobacco control measures put in place by my Department. Therefore, I am grateful to the Health Committee for suggesting the measure, and I am pleased to propose it as an amendment at this stage.

Amendment Nos 25 and 26 also arose out of discussions held at Committee Stage. Both apply to circumstances where a retailer is subject to a restricted premises order. The former requires a retailer to display a notice stating the period of the order. The latter requires that all tobacco products should be removed from the retail area of the shop, thereby removing temptation for a retailer to make a sale whilst under a banning order. Amendment Nos 27 to 30 insert provisions creating offences and penalties in relation to amendment Nos 25 and 26.

Amendment Nos 31 to 34 are being proposed in order to consolidate in one place in the Bill, under clause 12, the enforcement provisions relating to powers of entry, fixed penalty notices and the obstruction of officers.

Amendment No 35 raises the fine for obstructing an officer from level 3 to level 5 on the standard scale of fines for offences punishable on summary conviction only. Level 5 is a fine not exceeding £5,000. Similarly, amendment No 37 raises the fine for selling tobacco to a person under the age of 18 from level 4 to level 5. Both of those amendments were suggested by the Health Committee during its scrutiny of the Bill, as it was considered that a level 5 fine was more appropriate. In addition, amendment No 37 removes the existing subsection (2) from clause 18, as those provisions have been included now under clause 12.

Amendment No 36 places a duty on councils to share information with each other, the registration authority and the Department. That requirement, which was suggested by the Health Committee, will assist enforcement of the legislation, and I am thankful to Committee members for their input.

Amendment No 38 removes clause 18(3) as it is no longer required as a result of amendment Nos 31 to 34. It also inserts a new subsection, which, again, came about as a result of discussions at Committee Stage. The new subsection makes it an offence for an adult to purchase tobacco products on behalf of a person under the age of 18. Studies show that a considerable proportion of young

people obtain tobacco from either friends or relatives. Creating an offence of proxy purchasing should help to prevent that. I thank Committee members for suggesting the amendment.

Amendment No 40 relates to clause 23. It provides that named sections of the Bill, relating to offences, apply only from when those sections are commenced.

Members will have noted on the Marshalled List my intention to oppose the Question that clause 11 stand part of the Bill. The amended clauses 12 to 16 contain sufficient powers to enable authorised officers to enforce the legislation. Therefore, the general provision included in clause 11 is no longer needed.

As a result of all of the amendments that I have outlined in groups 1 and 2, the scope of the Bill has changed slightly. That has required a substantial amendment to the long title.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I will now comment on the second group of amendments.

Amendment Nos 20 and 23 relate to the period for which restricted premises orders and restricted sales orders can be made. As drafted, the Bill does not specify a minimum period for a restricted premises order or a restricted sales order. Some stakeholders, such as the Chief Environmental Health Officers Group, were concerned that that would result in the courts issuing very short orders for a number of days or weeks that would have little impact on those convicted. The Committee learned that, in the South, no minimum period is specified, and courts there have issued some very short orders. Furthermore, the Department advised that, while there is no minimum period in the Scottish legislation, officials there are considering introducing one because of the short length of the orders that are being made.

The Bill, as drafted, specified that the maximum period for an order is one year. Some stakeholders, including the cancer charities, suggested that that should be increased to three years. The Committee learned that, in the South, the maximum period is 90 days; in Scotland, it is two years; and, in England and Wales, it is one year. The Department proposed amendments to clauses 7 and 8 to state that the duration of restricted premises and restricted sales orders must be at least 28 days and may not exceed three years. The Committee was content with that approach. It, therefore, welcomes amendment Nos 20 and 23.

Amendment Nos 21 and 24 relate to the threshold for a court to be able to impose either a restricted premises or a restricted sales order. As drafted, the Bill states that three offences committed in three years will result in a restricted premises order or restricted sales order. However, given the frequency of test purchasing exercises, the Committee suggested that three offences in five years would be more realistic in securing a restricted premises order or a restricted sales order and would act as a better deterrent. Councils, via NILGA, advised that they were content with that suggestion. The Department responded by saying that it was in favour of the Committee's suggestion. It proposed amendments to clauses 7 and 8 accordingly. The Committee was content with the Department's approach and welcomes amendment Nos 21 and 24.

Amendment No 22 relates to illicit tobacco offences. The Committee was of the view that an illicit tobacco offence should count towards the three offences that result in a restricted premises order or a restricted sales order under clause 7(14). The Committee raised the issue during the introductory scrutiny of the Bill, and, at Second Stage, the Minister gave an undertaking that he would consider the matter further.

At the Committee meeting on 15 May 2013, officials agreed to look at an amendment to include reference to offences committed under the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979 and the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. In considering the issue, the Committee sought information on what sort of behaviour someone would have to be engaged in for HMRC to seek a prosecution for illicit tobacco. The Committee learned that, in the North, HMRC uses the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 to seek prosecutions for illicit tobacco. In a letter dated 26 July 2013, the Minister advised that there were five convictions under that Act in 2012. One was for smuggling over eight million cigarettes; two were for smuggling 200,000 cigarettes; and two were for smuggling 330,000 cigarettes. The Committee was satisfied that illicit tobacco offences related to a serious level of criminal activity.

The Department agreed with the Committee's thinking. It proposed an amendment to clause 7 to extend the definition of tobacco offences to include certain offences under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 and the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979. That is covered by amendment No 22 and is welcomed by the Committee.

4.00 pm

Amendment No 25 requires businesses that are subject to a restricted premises order to display a notice to that effect. The cancer charities and the councils advised the Committee that, in Scotland, a business that is subject to a restricted premises order has to display a notice. The Committee believed that this would act as a good deterrent, as well as making the public aware that a premises had broken the law. The Department agreed with the Committee's position and proposed an amendment to clause 9, with associated offences and penalties created in amendments to clause 10. The relevant amendments are Nos 25, 27 and 29, which the Committee supports.

Amendment No 26 requires that, when a business is subject to a restricted premises order, it is not allowed to display tobacco in the retail area. A number of stakeholders suggested to the Committee that, when a restricted premises order is in place, the retailer should be required to remove tobacco products from the premises to prevent any inadvertent breach of the order and to make it easier for councils to check that a premises was complying with the order. When the Committee put this suggestion to the Department, it advised that it would be more reasonable to require that the tobacco products should be removed from the retail area rather than the premises entirely. The Department reasoned that there are security issues with requiring the retailer to have to remove tobacco from the premises entirely. If a retailer was forced to store the tobacco at a private dwelling, it could make them the target of a break-in. The Committee believed that this was a reasonable approach and agreed with the Department's amendment to clause 9 and the amendments to clause 10, which create associated offences and penalties. The

relevant amendments are Nos 26, 28 and 30, which the Committee supports.

The Minister intends to oppose clause 11, given the amendments that he is proposing to clauses 12 to 16. The Committee supports the Minister's opposition to clause 11. Amendment Nos 31, 32 and 33 all amend clause 12 in order to consolidate in one place in the Bill the powers of entry of authorised officers. The Committee supports those amendments.

Amendment No 34 allows councils to issue fixed penalty notices for a wider range of offences than were originally included in the Bill. In particular, the councils and the charities were keen that fixed penalty notices should be available regarding sales from vending machines. The Department agreed with this thinking and has proposed an amendment that will do that, as well as allowing for fixed penalty notices for selling unpackaged cigarettes and failure to display a warning sign. The Committee, therefore, welcomes amendment No 34.

Amendment No 35 concerns the level of fine for obstructing a council officer. The Bill, as drafted, stipulates a fine not exceeding level 3 of £1,000. However, the councils suggested to the Committee that a level 5 fine — a maximum of £5,000 — would be more appropriate. When questioned on this issue, the Department responded that a level 3 fine is the standard fine for this type of offence in other legislation and, therefore, a level 3 fine should apply in the Bill. However, the Committee proposed that, if this was the case, thought should be given to amending other legislation to bring it into line with the level of fine that was decided on in the Bill for obstructing an officer. After consideration, the Department proposed an amendment to clause 16 to make the fine for obstructing an authorised officer one not exceeding level 5. The Committee was content, and we support amendment No 35.

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

Amendment No 36 creates a new clause regarding the duties on councils to share information about enforcement. The issue of enforcement was raised by the councils and the cancer charities. They were concerned that the Bill was not drafted in such a way as to ensure that all the relevant information is shared by all the relevant agencies in order to ensure that this legislation can be properly enforced. They were in favour of the creation of one central information point, which brings together details of people who have been convicted of or given fixed penalty notices for tobacco offences, details of who is subject to restricted premises orders and restricted sales orders, and details of people who have been convicted of illicit tobacco offences. After consideration, the Department agreed to amend clause 16 to create a duty on councils to share with other councils, the registration authority and the Department details of fixed penalty notices, convictions, and restricted premises orders and restricted sales orders. The Committee was content with that proposed amendment.

As for how information on people who have been convicted of illicit tobacco offences would be shared, the Department explained that it could not use the Bill to require HMRC to share details of illicit tobacco convictions with the councils. The Department advised that it was working with the Department of Justice to develop a protocol between HMRC and local councils in the North so that

details of convictions would be shared. The councils would subsequently share that information with the registration authority. Again, the Committee was content with those arrangements, and we therefore support amendment No 36.

Amendment No 37 deals with the level of fine that can be applied to someone caught selling tobacco to a person under 18. The councils and the cancer charities alerted the Committee to the fact that the current fine does not exceed level 4, or £2,500. They argued that that is too low to act as a real deterrent against selling tobacco to a child. In their view, a level 5 fine of £5,000 would be more appropriate. The Committee put that suggestion to the Department, which accepted it and agreed to make an amendment to clause 18. The Committee therefore supports amendment No 37.

Amendment No 38 creates an offence of proxy purchasing and is welcomed by the Committee. The retailers and manufacturers, as well as the cancer charities, proposed that the Bill should be amended to create an offence for an adult to purchase tobacco on behalf of someone under 18. That offence has been introduced in Scotland and is known as proxy purchasing. The Department initially made the point that the enforcement of a provision on proxy purchasing by tobacco control officers would be very difficult. The officers would need to observe children giving money to an adult and the adult going into a shop. They would need to stop that adult and seek his or her identity. However, after consideration, the Department proposed an amendment to clause 18 to create an offence for proxy purchasing, with a maximum penalty of a level 5 fine. The Committee was content with that amendment.

Amendment No 40 concerns amendments to clause 23. Those amendments, which are being proposed by the Minister, were not brought to the Committee during Committee Stage. However, the Minister wrote to the Committee on 7 November to advise us that, after taking further legal advice, he is of the view that the amendments he had proposed for preventing a person from registering as a tobacco retailer or removing a person from the register if they have been convicted of an illicit tobacco offence may be contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights, as they would be retrospective.

The Minister is proposing a new amendment, which provides that the relevant clauses do not apply to offences that were committed previously. However, they do apply to illicit tobacco offences that are committed once the Bill becomes law. Given that Committee Stage had already been completed, the Committee agreed to note the Minister's proposed amendment to clause 23.

Amendment No 42 relates to the long title and the Committee is content with that amendment.

Mr Wells: I think it is quite remarkable that we have been able to bring together legislation that is generally accepted by the leading cancer charities, by the district councils, through the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), their representative body, by all of the disparate members of the Committee and by the Minister. It is quite a unique situation that we have been able, by rational negotiation and discussion, to come to a Bill that seems to have met the needs of almost everyone. Of course, there are people who believe that we should have gone further, but I think that even the cancer charities accept that the Committee and the Minister have gone

as far as they can within the existing parameters that are set, in terms of the present legal standing, former judicial reviews and such things as the European Court of Human Rights.

I believe that what we have here is a very balanced series of measures that, in my opinion, send out a very clear message to retailers in Northern Ireland, whether they are multinational supermarkets or the small tobacconist on the corner. If you sell tobacco to underage children, your business is under threat. Your business is under threat because the amendments make it very clear that, if you commit three offences within five years — so it is hanging over you for quite a long time — you can lose your right to sell tobacco products for a period that can be as little as 28 days or as much as three years. You also risk a fine up to level 5.

I heartily congratulate the Minister and Department, because we were able to obtain a consistency of fine levels throughout the legislation at level 5, so people know exactly where they stand. Equally, level 5 is a very severe sanction. Of course, it is entirely up to the courts and judges to establish what they feel is a fair and reasonable fine, but the potential of a £5,000 fine will greatly concentrate the mind of tobacco retailers.

In addition, you have the ignominy of having to put a poster or notice in your window telling your customers exactly what you did wrong, as well as dealing with the impact that that has. Therefore, people will not be coming in to buy their tobacco. If they arrive at the door, they will see that a restricted premises order is in operation, so there is no sense in coming in. That is a powerful deterrent, especially for the leading groups of retailers — the big concerns that own several score or maybe over 100 units in Northern Ireland.

There was a proposal that, if one retailer in a multinational lost its right to sell tobacco, that should be extended to every one of its shops in Northern Ireland. As much as some of us harboured briefly that idea, it would have been a bit draconian and would probably not have stood up in the courts. I do not think that we would have been able to stand over the suggestion that if, for instance, one small branch of Tesco made that mistake, all branches of Tesco would be barred from selling tobacco, so sense prevailed.

Not only is the legislation sending out a clear message to tobacco retailers about the sale of tobacco but the opportunity was taken, again with the cooperation of the Minister and the Department, to bring in two issues: the sale of illicit tobacco and proxy sales. I am reminded of an incident in Warrenpoint about six years ago when a lorry driver was caught with several million cigarettes in a container. He argued in court that they were for personal use. The judge got out his calculator and said that at 2,000 per day it would take him 300 years to smoke the cigarettes. Therefore, the judge ruled that they were not for personal use, were illicit and were intended for the black market.

The problem is that we have no control over the quality of black market cigarettes or where they are sold and to whom. Therefore, laws that place an onus on retailers not to be involved in that illicit trade are welcome. When we suggested that, we were not certain whether the legislation was a suitable vehicle for it, but the Department reacted

promptly to say that, yes, it was. That sends out a clear signal.

There is also the issue of proxy purchasing. We accept that the vast majority of people took up smoking as teenagers. Ms Brown suggested that the percentage was 82%, while I suggested 80%. Unfortunately, some of those individuals did not go in and buy the cigarettes then. They asked an older person to do it for them. Those people are equally culpable in this, because if they are using their older appearance or age to obtain tobacco products, they are hooking younger people on an activity that we know is disastrous for their health. Therefore, I am delighted once again that there was strong support for that measure from the Department, and we are happy that it was accepted.

I am also pleased that the Minister was able to clear up the technical issue raised by Mr Allister. I am always worried when Mr Allister gets to his feet, because I am aware that he is a leading QC and a legal expert. You seldom win an argument with Mr Allister on legal issues, so I am glad that the cavalry arrived in the form of the Department to clarify that issue.

I was a bit worried when the Chair talked about taking Fearghal — I think she meant “taking further action”. Certainly, some of us would at times say, “Do take Fearghal”, but I think that that was a slip of the tongue, or perhaps it was the Londonderry accent, and I got it wrong.

Clause 11 is no longer needed. There was a demand from some members of the Committee that the register include a list of all the individuals who had transgressed under the legislation and were subject to restricted sales orders. That raised huge difficulties about keeping the register up to date and ensuring its accuracy. However, retailers said to us that it would be helpful for them to know that if someone applied for a job to sell tobacco in their shop, they could look up the register and see whether the person had a previous conviction. For practical reasons, that was not applicable.

What we did suggest, however, was that it was perfectly legal for someone who wished to employ someone to sell tobacco to ask on the application form, “Have you had a conviction under this legislation preventing you from selling tobacco?” If a person failed to answer that question accurately, and the truth was subsequently discovered, that would be just grounds for removing that person from employment. That is the way to solve the problem of trying to identify people with a track record, rather than creating a huge bureaucratic nightmare by having the register continually updated, with people appealing decisions about their inclusion and pointing out inaccuracies.

4.15 pm

We have achieved a huge advancement in dissuading our young people from taking up cigarettes. Maybe it is too much of claim, but I would like to think that, as a result of this legislation, lives will be saved in Northern Ireland and that young people who would otherwise have been tempted to buy illicit tobacco, or those who would have been tempted to buy it for them on a proxy basis, will be deterred. I hope that young people will be deterred from taking up smoking and that their lives will be saved. In addition to the 2,300 people who die every year from this terrible affliction, half of all those who take up smoking at any age will die from a smoking related condition. That is

a dreadful, dreadful statistic, and anything that we can do to discourage people from getting hooked in the first place has to be a job well done by this Assembly.

I commend the legislation to the Assembly. As far as the amendments and the Minister’s opposition to various clauses are concerned, there is total agreement, so there need not be any further division in the House.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We will now take Mr Fearghal McKinney.

Mr McKinney: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I welcome the chance to speak once more on the Bill. The latter part of our consideration is crucial, given that offences and enforcement will be a key mechanism that can be utilised to reduce the illicit provision of tobacco. I re-emphasise the point that Mr Wells made: 2,300 people a year — I know that this was said this morning but it is worth repeating — which equates roughly to 45 people a week, die of smoking related illnesses, never mind all those who carry with them long-term illnesses as a result of the early take-up of tobacco products. Anything that can assist in reducing those numbers is helpful.

The SDLP is content with the Committee’s position on clauses 7 to 26 and with the amendments tabled by the Department. Looking at amendment No 20, the original draft of the Bill did not specify the minimum period for a restricted premises order. On the receipt of evidence from many stakeholders, we were concerned that that absence would lead to the courts here issuing very short restricted premises orders. We were also informed that, in the Republic, where no minimum period for a restricting order exists, the courts imposed very short restricting orders. For that reason, we are content with the Department’s amendment.

Turning to clause 8, the Committee suggested that, given the nature and the frequency of test-purchasing exercises, three offences in five years was a more realistic time frame. The SDLP is content that the Department has accepted that reasoning and drafted amendments accordingly. A number of stakeholders raised questions about the circumstances in which councils would seek restricted sales orders. Representatives from the Chief Environmental Health Officers Group relayed to the Committee that they believed that the purpose of restricted sales orders was to deal with a person who owns a number of premises. We have touched on that issue. The Committee asked the Department for clarification and is suitably content.

The Minister has indicated that he is opposed to clause 11. The SDLP is content to agree with the Committee and the Minister on that.

Amendment No 38 provides for the offence of proxy purchasing. It was noted that that offence has already been created in Scotland. The Department initially made the point that it would be extremely difficult to enforce that sort of offence because officers would need to observe a transaction between a child and an adult. It is the SDLP’s view that legislation of that sort is necessary and that difficulty of enforcement is not a suitable reason to discard any proxy purchasing provision.

In summary, the SDLP, consistent with our contributions this morning, is content with the Committee’s position.

Mr Beggs: I declare an interest in that my dad is a local councillor. Councils will have the job of implementing the legislation and acting on its measures on the ground.

I welcome the strengthening of sentencing that is proposed on restricted premises orders through amendment Nos 20 and 23. Originally, we were advised that the sentence was not to exceed one year but the difficulty is that, on many occasions, the judiciary will look at the maximum sentence and then determine what the minimum sentence might be. As others indicated, in Scotland and, I believe, the Irish Republic, a very lenient sentence of a few days has been issued. That is no real penalty. So, I certainly support the concept of having a minimum period of 28 days and a maximum period of three years for very severe or repeat offences; that is appropriate. It is important to give a message that this is important in protecting the health of our young people.

I will now move on to amendment No 21, in conjunction with amendment No 24. Amendment No 21 provides for the extension of the test period from three years to five years. In other words, if you are caught committing an offence, perhaps through a test purchase or other evidence, three times in a five-year period, as opposed to the original three-year period, you would risk going to court and losing your licence. I think that that is very important. Environmental health officers told us that about 15% of retail outlets are subjected to test purchasing. If that were done randomly, very few would be subjected to three test purchases in three years. Thankfully, there is a degree of scoping and attention given to those retailers that are suspected of selling to younger persons. That will increase the likelihood, but increasing the period to five years will significantly increase the pressure on retailers and their staff to ensure that no sales are made to underage persons.

I will now move on to amendment No 22, which is very important. I am pleased that, subsequent to the Bill's publication, the Minister recognised the Committee's concern and brought forward this very significant amendment. Personally, I believe that it will be very important in fighting organised crime and those paramilitaries involved in fundraising through illegal tobacco sales. Smugglers need outlets to move on their product, and it is important that we all work together to try to cut those retail outlets down.

The amendment includes in the Bill offences defined as tobacco offences under sections of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 and the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979. That is important because those offences will be included when determining whether there should be a restricted sales order or perhaps even whether a licence should ultimately be granted. Other offences will be included, so there will be huge pressure on retailers not to handle illegal goods. Perhaps it is cigarettes on which the excise duty has not been paid or those that, as Mr Wells indicated, have been illegally branded to give the appearance of regular cigarettes. No one really knows what product is inside such cigarettes, so there is huge danger there.

So what effect will this have in practice? If, as I say through test purchasing or, as in a recent news story, video evidence, there is a conviction under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 or the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979, the retailer will also be at risk of losing

his licence to sell tobacco. That is a very powerful tool, and I do not think that it should be underestimated. It will be important in the community's fight against organised crime and, indeed, those who use the money to fund illegal activities and even more serious criminality.

Amendment No 25 deals with the display of notices under restricted premises orders. Again, that was not included in the Bill originally, but such a provision has been applied elsewhere, such as in Scotland. I think that there is an embarrassment factor if a retailer has to put a notice up in his window to indicate that he has breached the legislation by selling to underage people or because of other offences. That has merit.

Amendment No 26 is a new clause that states that no tobacco should be stored in a retail area. If we want to be sure that it is not being sold on, it is better that there is a clear demarcation so that there will not be tobacco in the retail area. As others have said, I agree that it would be unreasonable to force some small retailers in particular, which may have no other location in which to store the tobacco other than their premises, to take their tobacco off the premises. Most shops and retailers have a secure store area. Therefore, that would be a reasonable area for them to keep their tobacco in during a ban.

It would be helpful if the Minister could address the aspect of clause 9B(3), which says that the individual may have cigarettes for his or her own use. I hope that that will be a personal packet of cigarettes, and not a carton of cigarettes for their own use. I ask the Minister to reflect on whether, at a subsequent stage, there is a need to further refine that, and whether he is confident that it will prevent multiple packets of cigarettes being in the retail area and someone claiming, "Oh, but these are only for my own personal use". I hope that it would be for only a single pack of cigarettes that someone may personally consume, if it were in that premises at all in such a situation.

Amendment Nos 27, 28, 29 and 30 are simply technical amendments that are subsequent to the prior two amendments. I am also supportive of them. I support the Minister in his opposition to clause 11. With the new central register, that clause is no longer appropriate.

Amendment No 31 is another interesting aspect. It is under the heading of increasing the scope and power of entry and test. Perhaps it will widen the areas in which test purchases can occur and offences can be detected. I welcome that and amendment No 32, which is similar. Amendment No 33 is a technical amendment. Amendment No 34 concerns fixed penalties for certain offences. That, again, is a technical amendment to widen fixed penalty areas so that it will be possible to include a wider aspect.

Amendment No 35 concerns the "Obstruction, etc. of authorised officers". That is the heading in the Bill that that section would affect. I support the proposal to increase the level 3 to a level 5 for anyone who might obstruct an officer when perhaps inspecting premises. That is entirely appropriate. What if a retailer knew that they had a level 5 offence behind the door? Are we going to allow them to get off with a level 3 offence by simply not allowing them through the door? It is entirely appropriate that there should be a level 5 offence for failing to allow authorised officers to access the premises. There would be a clear message that you will not be worse off — or, sorry, you will

certainly not better yourself by taking a lesser fine if you block access. Perhaps that is the correct way to put it.

Amendment No 36 is a new clause about a duty on councils to share information about enforcement. Again, that is entirely appropriate. It makes it very clear that there would be sharing of information for mutual benefit.

An important and interesting aspect of this is on the new clause 16A(3), where the tobacco offence is defined. When you trace it all back, you see that this will also include, from my reading of it and I hope the Minister will clarify, offences under the customs and excise legislation and the tobacco Act. So, councils will gather this information, with information, hopefully, coming through from Revenue and Customs and other sources through protocol. They will have information available about all offences that any individual retailer may have committed, and this will be a warning because, when you are willing to breach the law in one area, you are also more likely to breach the law in others. That, in turn, may result in better targeting of those test purchases and better use of the time spent by environmental health officers trying to uphold the law in the course of their duty.

4.30 pm

Amendment No 23 is also quite technical. It amends section 2 of the 1998 order. I view that as being another technical amendment.

Amendment No 38 enacts a new offence under a form of proxy purchase. This is as a result of the Committee becoming aware of this being a useful tool. I think that it is appropriate. How are young people getting their cigarettes? I am sure that there are adults who are supplying them. I accept that it will be difficult to enforce this on every occasion, but I am sure that many responsible adults who may have been providing them and were unaware that they may have been breaching the law will now recognise that they will be very clearly breaking the law. Hopefully, fewer adults will be involved in purchasing cigarettes for young people. Again, it is all important to cut off the supply of cigarettes to our younger population. Young people get addicted and, ultimately, after many years, they will suffer ill health and an early death. It is because smoking is so addictive that it is important that we do all that is possible to try to cut off the addiction at that early stage.

I have to admit that I regret the need for amendment No 40. I would have thought that, if someone had committed a serious offence in the past five years, it could be taken into account in future. Regrettably, legal advice seems to be coming through that that is not possible. Sometimes, I view the law as an ass, and I think that this is one occasion. If someone had been convicted of selling cigarettes to people under 18 in the past six months, and if they were to be convicted a third time, why should significant action not be taken against them? The legal advice to the Minister, and I dare say, through him to the Committee, is that, under human rights regulations, this is not possible. I do not understand that. I think that this is strange, but it is important that we do not torpedo what is otherwise very good legislation.

Obviously, the long title has to be changed to reflect the significant changes that the amendments will make to the Bill.

I view this legislative process as being very positive. It has engaged the voluntary sector with the Committee, and it has engaged the Committee with the Department and, in turn, the Minister. Each sector has been listening carefully to evidence of best practice and relevant information that is available. They have all contributed to what I believe to be much better and stronger legislation, and legislation that I believe will protect our children and young people much better than what was originally proposed. For that, I am very thankful. So, I will be supporting the Minister's amendments, and I will be opposing the others that have become redundant.

Mr McCarthy: Once again, I voice my support for the Committee Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson and, of course, for this group of amendments. I believe that the amendments constitute a much stronger approach to enforcement than the wording in the Bill. Nonetheless, there does remain an appropriate level of balance and proportionality in the revised way forward. Effective enforcement and, as a result, deterrence will be critical in turning the good intent behind the Bill into real change.

I believe that, in getting the Bill to this stage, this is a good day. Let those commentators who say that nothing ever comes from this place acknowledge that the Bill will, undoubtedly, save lives in Northern Ireland and beyond. I am proud to be part of it, and I support the amendments.

Mr Dunne: I will follow my colleague from Strangford in much the same time limit.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Tobacco Retailers Bill. There has been a lot of good work done, headed by the Chairperson, and the Committee has had a good session on the matter. A lot of progress has been made.

I wish to say a few words on the amendments listed in group 2, which refer to offences, enforcement, powers and penalties. Again, it is felt that there is a need to tighten up on the penalties where a retailer is guilty of an offence. Many of the original penalties for offences have been strengthened in order to deter retailers from taking a risk. This will allow councils to be given enforcement powers to ensure compliance with the new legislation and allow for fixed penalties to be issued where offences have occurred.

I welcome amendment No 38, which amends clause 18 and makes it an offence to purchase tobacco on behalf of someone else, knowing that they are not the legal age to smoke. This is significant, it is progress, and it will go a long way in trying to control the sale of tobacco to young people.

Unfortunately, it is estimated that 83% of smokers started smoking in their teens. That is a major risk area. The latest research shows that 8% of 11- to 16-year-olds are current smokers. Half of those young people who smoke regularly purchase tobacco from newsagents and other retailers in spite of the current legislation.

The fact that approximately 17,000 people are admitted to hospital a year for smoking-related illnesses and that it is estimated that 2,300 people die in Northern Ireland a year from smoking shows that there is room for major improvement. We must try to tackle the problems associated with smoking.

Like many Members earlier, I commend the positive consultation we have had with the charity groups on this matter. We commend the work of the charities in trying

to control smoking, to help people to stop smoking and to discourage young people from engaging in smoking. Many charity workers are volunteers who give up their time willingly to engage in this positive work. The strengthened enforcement action and sanctions proposed against retailers selling tobacco to underage persons will help us to seek and make progress on this issue.

Mr Gardiner: Consideration Stage of a Bill gives all Members an opportunity to speak and vote on particular amendments and clauses before the Bill enters its final stages. I welcome the amendments tabled, and it would appear, more generally, that Minister Poots listened carefully to the many issues raised by the Committee.

I welcome amendment No 25, which refers to the duty on restricted premises to display a notice. Prevention is always better than cure. I therefore hope that the obligation to display notices will become yet another deterrent to breaking the law. I have said throughout the Bill's stages that enforcement is the single biggest issue in this Bill, and, for that matter, any other Bill. There is no point in making new laws without foolproof pathways for enforcing them.

I still have grave concerns about the enforcement of the existing law against selling tobacco to underage children. Under the present legislation, enforcement has been a problem. Tobacco retailers were visited by council officials 1,393 times over a 156-week period, which equates to fewer than nine visits per week over all 26 council areas and one visit every three weeks for each council area. That does not look much like a rigorous enforcement regime to me. It is a shockingly bad performance. When you pass laws that are not properly enforced, you bring the law into disrepute. You also bring into disrepute the Assembly that makes those laws. Today, we need to ask whether a clear enforcement pathway is laid out in the legislation. Fortunately, I believe so. However, there should be a named official in the new council structure who is responsible for enforcing the legislation in his or her area. I see some merit in a form of council performance review being built into the Bill so that we can see whether councils are doing better than their predecessors. There is no point in imposing heavy fines if you do not enforce the system better than having each council make only one visit every three weeks, as was the case under the old legislation.

The final point that I wish to make is on amendment No 36. The Minister proposes to create a new clause to compel councils to share with one another information held on their premises; for example, a list of those issued with fixed notices. That is to be welcomed. However, I urge the Minister to ensure that the clause is properly enforced, because, if there is a disjointed approach, we will never get to the root of the problem. I hope that the Minister listens to and acts on my concerns.

Mr Poots: I thank all those who took part in the debate. The discussion seemed to concentrate on illicit tobacco. The legislation focuses mainly on tobacco retailers. I strongly desire much more forceful action on illicit tobacco. Our efforts to encourage people not to smoke are undermined as a consequence of inactivity on the part of national government and HMRC when it comes to going after those dealing in illicit tobacco. That is where our biggest problem lies. In truth, in pursuing those people, there are no losers apart from the criminals. If they are not pursued, the Government lose taxation on legitimate tobacco as a result of illicit tobacco being sold, legitimate

businesses that produce or retail tobacco are hurt as consequence of people selling illicit tobacco and criminals make vast amounts of money, much of which they plough back into developing criminal empires and carrying out further criminal activity. Therefore, for the life of me, I do not understand why there is not a much more forceful and robust pursuit of people who engage in the crime.

Mr Beggs raised the issue of having cigarettes for personal use in a shop, subject to a restricted premises order. Advice provided at the time of drafting the amendment stated that the provision was necessary. The legislation applies only to tobacco available for sale. If an enforcement officer witnesses a sale, the seller cannot claim that the tobacco was for personal use.

If, during a visit, an enforcement officer sees a quantity of cigarettes in the retail area that he or she perceives to be larger than could be deemed to be for personal use, they can use their own judgement to decide whether a prosecution is in order.

4.45 pm

I wish that we could always be as harmonious when it comes to health as we have been on this issue today and that we could find this level of agreement on a range of health issues. I suspect that that will not be the case, but it has been very positive to work with the Health Committee and the Assembly on bringing this legislation forward in a way that demonstrates that we can constructively work together for the greater good.

I thank my staff, who worked closely with the Committee and dealt with the issues that were raised in a very practical way.

Amendment No 20 agreed to.

Amendment No 21 made: In page 4, line 14, leave out "3" and insert "5".— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

Amendment No 22 made: In page 5, line 10, at end insert—

"(ba) an offence relating to tobacco committed under section 170 or 170B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 on any premises in Northern Ireland (which are accordingly 'the premises in relation to which the offence is committed');

(bb) an offence committed under section 8F, 8G or 8H of the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979 on any premises in Northern Ireland (which are accordingly 'the premises in relation to which the offence is committed');".— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

Clause 7, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8 (Restricted sale orders)

Amendment No 23 made: In page 5, line 40, leave out "may not exceed one year" and insert

"must not be less than 28 days or more than 3 years".— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 24 made: In page 5, line 42, leave out "3" and insert "5".— *[Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

Clause 8, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause

Amendment No 25 made: After clause 9 insert—

“Restricted premises orders: display of notices

9A. (1) This section applies where—

(a) a restricted premises order has effect in respect of premises (‘the relevant premises’); and

(b) a person (‘P’) carries on a retail business at the relevant premises.

(2) P must display a notice in the relevant premises in accordance with subsection (3).

(3) The notice must—

(a) state that a restricted premises order has been made in respect of the relevant premises and the period for which the order has effect;

(b) be displayed in a prominent position in the relevant premises where it is readily visible to persons at every relevant point of sale; and

(c) be displayed no later than 5 days after the date on which the restricted premises order has effect.

(4) A relevant point of sale is one that was used for the sale of tobacco or cigarette papers at any time during the period of 2 months ending with the date on which the restricted premises order was made.

(5) Regulations may specify—

(a) the dimensions of the notice to be displayed in accordance with this section;

(b) the wording of the statement to be displayed on the notice; and

(c) the size of the statement.”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause

Amendment No 26 made: After clause 9 insert—

“Restricted premises orders: no tobacco in retail area

9B. (1) This section applies where—

(a) a restricted premises order has effect in respect of premises (‘the relevant premises’); and

(b) a person (‘P’) carries on a retail business at the relevant premises.

(2) P must, no later than the day after the date on which the restricted premises order has effect, ensure that no tobacco or cigarette papers are in the retail area of the relevant premises.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply to tobacco and cigarette papers in the retail area of the relevant premises which an individual may have for his or her own use.

(4) In this section ‘retail area’ means any part of the relevant premises used for the serving of customers or the display of goods.”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 10 (Offences)

Amendment No 27 made: In page 6, line 37, at end insert—

“(6A) If a person fails, without reasonable excuse, to comply with section 9A(2), the person commits an offence.”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 28 made: In page 6, line 37, at end insert—

“(6B) If a person fails, without reasonable excuse, to comply with section 9B(2), the person commits an offence.”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 29 made: In page 7, line 4, at end insert—

“(d) subsection (6A) is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale;”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 30 made: In page 7, line 4, at end insert—

“(e) subsection (6B) is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Clause 10, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 11 disagreed to.

Clause 12 (Powers of entry)

Amendment No 31 made: In page 7, line 14, leave out from “the proper” to the end of line 15 and insert

“ascertaining whether any of the following offences is being or has been committed on the premises and, if so, by whom—

(i) an offence under section 10;

(ii) an offence under Article 3, 4 or 4A of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978;

(iii) an offence under Article 4, 4A or 5 of the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991;”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 32 made: In page 7, line 34, leave out from “of the proper” to the end of line 34 and insert “mentioned in subsection (1)(a).”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 33 made: In page 7, line 37, leave out from “of the proper” to “this Act” in line 38 and insert “mentioned in subsection (1)(a).”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Clause 12, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 13 (Fixed penalties for certain offences)

Amendment No 34 made: In page 8, line 21, leave out from “an offence” to the end of line 24 and insert—

“(a) an offence under section 10(1), (2), (3), (6A) or (6B),

(b) an offence under Article 3, 4 or 4A of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978,

(c) an offence under Article 4, 4A or 5 of the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Clause 13, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 14 and 15 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 16 (Obstruction, etc. of authorised officers)

Amendment No 35 made: In page 10, line 29, leave out “3” and insert “5”.— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Clause 16, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause

Amendment No 36 made: After clause 16 insert—

“Council’s duty to share information about enforcement

16A.—(1) Every council must make available to every other council, the registration authority and the Department such information relating to—

- (a) fixed penalty notices given in respect of tobacco offences committed in the district of that council,
- (b) convictions in respect of tobacco offences committed in the district of that council, and
- (c) restricted premises orders and restricted sale orders made on an application by that council, as the other council, the registration authority or, as the case may be, the Department may require.

(2) Information made available under subsection (1) to a council or the registration authority may be used by the council or the registration authority only for the purpose of enabling it or assisting it to perform its functions under this Act.

(3) In this section ‘tobacco offence’ has the meaning given in section 7(14).”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 17 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 18 (Amendment of the Order of 1978)

Amendment No 37 made: In page 11, line 1, leave out subsection (2) and insert

“(2) In Article 3(3) (prohibition on sale of tobacco, etc. to persons under 18) for ‘level 4’ substitute ‘level 5’.”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Amendment No 38 made: In page 14, line 38, leave out subsection (3) and insert

“(3) After Article 4 insert—

‘Purchase of tobacco on behalf of persons under 18

4A. (1) A person aged 18 or over who knowingly buys or attempts to buy tobacco or cigarette papers on behalf of a person under the age of 18 shall be guilty of an offence.

(2) A person guilty of an offence under paragraph (1) is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding

level 5 on the standard scale.”.— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Clause 18, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 19 to 21 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 22 (Interpretation)

Amendment No 39 made: In page 16, leave out lines 33 and 34 and insert

“‘the Register’ has the meaning given in section 1A(1); ‘registered’, ‘unregistered’ and ‘the registration authority’ have the meanings given in section 1A(6);”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Clause 22, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 23 (Transitional provision)

Amendment No 40 made: In page 17, line 9, leave out subsection (3) and insert

“(3) Paragraph (aa) of section 2(3) does not apply in relation to an offence mentioned in that paragraph which is committed before the commencement of that paragraph.

(4) Paragraph (b) of section 4(2) does not apply in relation to an offence mentioned in that paragraph which is committed before the commencement of that paragraph.

(5) Section 12 does not apply in relation to an offence mentioned in section 12(1)(a) which is committed before the commencement of that section.

(6) Section 13 does not apply in relation to an offence mentioned in section 13(1) which is committed before the commencement of that section.

(7) Subsection (2) of section 18 does not apply in relation to an offence which is committed before the commencement of that subsection.”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Clause 23, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 24 (Regulations and orders)

Amendment No 41 made: In page 17, line 16, leave out “5(2).”— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Clause 24, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 25 and 26 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long Title

Amendment No 42 made: Leave out

“to confer additional powers of enforcement in relation to offences under Articles 3 and 4 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978;”

and insert

“to amend the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978; to confer additional powers of enforcement in relation to offences under that Order and the Children and Young Persons

(Protection from Tobacco) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991;— [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Long title, as amended, agreed to.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Tobacco Retailers Bill, and it stands referred to the Speaker. Members may take their ease for a moment.

Assembly Business

Mr Givan: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether the Speaker's Office can give me some advice. Members of the House will know that the Smithwick tribunal has been carrying out an investigation into potential collusion between the gardaí and the IRA in respect of the murder of RUC officers. Publication of that report is imminent, and I want to establish the remit of the Assembly in being able to consider and debate it. That is something that this party would want to do.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We will consult the Business Office and be advised on the procedural options.

Private Members' Business

School Hours

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and is published on the Marshalled List. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes. *[Interruption.]* Members should be quiet to hear the motion. I call Mr Chris Hazzard to move the motion.

Mr Hazzard: It is Michaela.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: OK, it has been changed, and I have not been informed. I call Michaela Boyle.

Ms Boyle: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to review the current compulsory instruction time in schools; and to examine whether current fixed term dates, school opening hours, holidays and training days correspond with what is required to meet the needs of pupils, parents and the economy, and that they are in line with international best practice for delivering the best outcomes for all pupils.

This is a very important debate. There are strong social and economic arguments to be made for greater standardisation of school holidays in our primary and secondary sectors and between the different sectors.

5.00 pm

Almost all parents with children attending different schools at the same time have encountered the same problems of one child being off school during term time while the other or others are at school on the same day. This often presents additional logistical and financial implications for working families who have to get someone to look after the child who is off school. In many instances, if that support is not available, one parent has to take a day off work, sometimes losing pay or using up their statutory holidays. This differentiation in school holidays has the implication of many working days being lost to the local economy, which has implications for competitiveness and efficiency in the private and public sectors.

The school term dates guidelines published by the Department of Education bear little or no resemblance to the actual holidays taken by educational establishments. That is particularly the case between schools at primary and secondary level in the same catchment areas, as well as between the varying education sectors. Baker days, which are taken at the discretion of each educational establishment, further compound this underlying problem. Although it would be impossible to streamline and standardise every holiday across each sector, I believe that major socio-economic benefits would be derived through greater regulation in this regard.

There is a major opportunity to achieve progressive outcomes in this regard through widening out area planning to look at areas of cooperation and coordination between, for example, schools in the primary and

secondary sector in each catchment area. It is timely that the Minister recently announced a review of the home-to-school transport system, as schools in rural areas are affected by transport that is not in place on a certain school closure day in a nearby town while a rural school is open. There needs to be greater harmonisation of school opening and closing times, particularly between urban and rural areas.

Coordination and better management of the public sector and school transport system may well be cost-effective, and that is one area that we ask the Minister to look at. In each education and library board (ELB) there is a working group that consults with schools on their school holiday dates each year and discusses the provision of transport and school meals in their area.

The problems associated with the wide variations in holidays are constantly raised with me by parents. By making progress on the issue, we can bring real, practical benefits to large families right across the board. Schools are required to operate for 200 days a year, and they can avail themselves of five of those days for school staff development. Schools have to be creative and strategic in their planning for those days in the schools development plan and should work with parents, communities and other schools with heightened communication to ensure that planning across the locality suits the needs of all.

The other five days, known as Baker days, are used by schools for training days, and pupils do not attend on those days. There are also exceptional closure days that schools will not be able to plan for. Schools set their own training days within their own education and library board. I believe that the practicalities of specific schools in an area holding training days together would assist with the needs of most families.

Looking at international best practice in other countries, we see that there are a number of different examples that highlight the need for change. We need to look at countries with best practice as we cannot work in an insular society. If we look at America, we see that the issue of summer learning loss has received a great deal of attention.

A recent survey conducted by the National Summer Learning Association revealed that two thirds of teachers were forced to spend three to four weeks reteaching old material that had been lost over the summer break. Other studies, including studies conducted by education bodies in Britain, have shown that summer learning loss is particularly damaging to students who are making the transition from primary to secondary school.

A Cambridge University study found that, between year 6 and year 7, 30% of students make no progress in mathematics and 50% make no progress in English or science. With the market for skilled jobs becoming ever more competitive, and if we are to have a fighting chance in the global race, we need to be producing students who are able to compete not only with their European contemporaries but with such countries as South Korea, China, Singapore and Hong Kong. We owe it to our children to prepare them as well as we can to deal with that competition. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test shows that those countries persistently outrank us in their reading, mathematical and scientific abilities. I will take maths, for instance. In the latest tests, in 2009, China topped the scale with a

score of 600, followed by Singapore, Hong Kong and Korea. Other countries are now making moves to increase their competitiveness. The French are looking to reduce summer holidays by two weeks, while in Germany they have been increasing classroom time for students. We must follow suit or we will be left behind.

Finally, we agree with the approach to deliver the best outcomes for pupils, and, as the amendment states, an appropriate consultation should be undertaken. We will therefore be supporting the amendment. However, I believe that examples of international best practice should be sought in order to progress. Training days and Baker days should be regulated by the Department to facilitate more cost-effective use of school transport, more cost-effective provision of free school meals and critical mass of teacher training. There should be teacher training conferences on a regional basis, for example. I believe that that would improve the education we can offer to our children. It would also give us a much needed boost in the global race.

I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Storey: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "economy," and insert

"and that appropriate consultation is undertaken with schools and managing authorities to ensure an agreed approach to deliver the best outcomes for pupils."

When a motion comes to the House, it always begs a question as to what provoked it. You try as best as you possibly can to get into the mind of the individual or the party that has tabled the motion to see why it is of such importance. I will come to some understanding of that in a moment or two, because I think it is relevant to the reasons why the debate is being held.

The proposer of the motion set out in some detail the current arrangements for a school term. We have school holidays, optional days, exceptional days and school development days. Those are set inside the framework within which the board of governors, the school and the system operate to ensure the maximum benefit to our pupils.

However, when we come to the issue of changes to the current arrangements, I find it somewhat difficult to correlate the motion with the answer that was given to the motion's proposer, ironically, a few weeks ago, on 5 September 2013. The proposer of the motion, Michaela Boyle, asked the Minister of Education how he planned to achieve standardisation of school holidays across all primary and secondary sectors. In his response, the Minister, rightly, identified the chief executive's working group on the harmonisation of services.

It consists of representatives from the education and library boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and the Governing Bodies Association. However, in the penultimate paragraph, the Minister states:

"In December 2012, the Department asked the Association of Chief Executives to explore the possibility for better co-ordination of school days and opening and closing times in a bid to further reduce transport costs. The Association concluded that there is as much harmonisation of school days as possible at the present time."

Let us wind forward by just a few weeks to today. It will be interesting to see how the Minister can come to the House and be able to give us an answer that is different from what was given to the Assembly just a matter of weeks ago. I would appreciate it if the Minister could expand on what has changed or what has happened to the Department's thinking between then and now.

In the final paragraph, he goes on to say:

"The flexibility in place regarding staff training and school development days allows schools to use these days in the most appropriate way to accommodate their school management and training requirements."

We need to keep that as our focus: this is about ensuring that there are adequate and appropriate ways to accommodate schools' management and training requirements.

I have benefited as a parent of three children who went to three different schools. Parental choice still exists, thankfully, despite attempts by the Minister and his Department to remove it. My children were able to benefit as a result of going to three different types of school in two different geographical areas: two in Coleraine and one in Ballymoney. There is no doubt from a parent's point of view — the proposer of the motion referred to this — that harmonisation would be of benefit. It would benefit family arrangements, how and when you get your children to and from school, and all those things. It has that social element.

It also has a transport benefit. That is why I find it strange that another question was asked, this time by Barry McElduff, a colleague of the proposer, about the transport arrangements. Sorry, it was my colleague Gregory Campbell, who asked the question of the Minister for Regional Development.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The two of them are often mistaken.

Mr Storey: There is a vast difference between the two of them, I can assure you. It is like the difference between day and night.

The Minister for Regional Development stated:

"I can advise that no discussions have taken place between my Department and the Department of Education, regarding a consultation exercise on the effects of changing school starting and finishing times. I consider this would be a matter for ... the Department of Education". — [Official Report, Bound Volume 84, WA249].

That was earlier in the year. All those matters would point to the fact that, up until now, other than the work that has been carried out by the chief executives' working group, there have been no definitive proposals on how to move forward.

That brings us to the motion and its possible connection to the home-to-school transport review, which the Minister kindly informed us about yesterday in an answer to one of his colleagues. The Committee for Education received that information from the Minister around the same time. All of a sudden, he has now decided to go with a review of home-to-school transport. However, he has yet to tell us — well, he has told us.

Let us wind back to performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU). It has relevance to the debate because the proposer has linked home-to-school transport and the issue of opening times. PEDU was set up to look at a number of areas, such as catering and transport. It produced 29 recommendations on transport. We received correspondence from the Department to tell us that a working plan would be provided to us in June. A couple of weeks ago, we were told that we would not have sight of the working plan because that is a piece of work that the Department believes should be undertaken by the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) as and when it ever comes into existence. Therefore, we are not going to see the plan now.

5.15 pm

Today, I would like the Minister to clarify what is the correlation between the work that would be carried out in this review, the work of the home-to-school transport review that he announced yesterday and the PEDU recommendations, which are sitting on the desk of someone in Rathgael House who knows what the working plan is but is not prepared to share it with the rest of us. As far as PEDU was concerned, those recommendations were for very practical changes that could be brought about to give financial benefit to the structures that are in place.

I will conclude with the issue of best practice. The Minister and the Department are very global; they love to look across the world. That was why we decided to amend the motion. There has to be consultation with local schools, but not the sort of consultation that took place on the common funding formula, which was a total disaster. The Minister knows that it was a disaster, despite what he said today in 'The Irish News'. The consultation on the review of shared education was only partial, so let us have a proper consultation with schools.

Let us look at best practice. We have gone around the world again with today's PISA announcement, which, no doubt, will be used as a means for setting another agenda. However, we will deal that as the days roll out. Korea is said to be one of the places that we should look to because of the wonderful education that they have there. I wonder how many Members watched the programme that was on television last night. How long do children in Korea spend in school? How many hours do they spend in school?

Mr O'Dowd: Is this Korea?

Mr Storey: No, but the Minister tells us that we should look at international best practice. They spend hours upon hours in school. There is a very good policy that the Minister should adopt, and that is to ask what is relevant to pupils in our schools here, right across Northern Ireland. We are not Brazil, we are Northern Ireland.

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

Mr Storey: The Minister should recognise that, in any of these proposals, where harmonisation can be brought about —

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

Mr Storey: — it should be brought about with the schools, not for the schools. I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr Rogers: The motion aims to provide a more universal approach to the timing and number of school holidays, which is a legitimate proposal. However, we must be mindful of the associated impacts that a change in the current compulsory instruction time could have on exam timetables.

The school year is really dictated by two things: UCAS and the yellow buses. UCAS and Central Applications Office (CAO) offers appear in early August, so external exams must happen in tandem with those that take place in England, Scotland and the Republic, in May and June. The only time for flexibility is at the beginning of the school year. Maybe the school year could begin a little earlier if we could get the bus operators to begin their school year earlier as well. That would create the opportunity for school terms of the same length, with clearly defined breaks.

Compulsory instruction time is set by the Department. A move away from that to a situation where head teachers have the ability to introduce flexibility into school terms and school hours would mean an additional burden on teaching staff. Surely a head teacher's primary focus should be the emotional and educational development of the children and young people in their care. To assign yet another non-teaching administrative job to them would be a mistake.

As other Members have said, the needs of pupils and children must be paramount in any decision that is taken about our education system. Our focus in this House must be on the quality of the education provided to our children while they are attending school.

I welcome the amendment from the Members opposite. Not just my party, but every teacher, parent and school has serious concerns about real and meaningful consultation by the Department, whether it is about the common funding formula or whatever. Listen to educationalists who keep saying that early intervention is the only way to address numeracy and literacy. Research has highlighted the importance of early years in the life changes of children. We must put the mechanisms in place to support children when they first enter a structured learning environment.

A Member who spoke earlier talked about school and staff development days. Yes, they are essential if a school is to grow. A school needs the high-quality staff development opportunities that DE has slashed the budget on. I think that standardisation would restrict that development.

A Member who spoke earlier talked about a number of schools working together. That may work quite well in the primary sector when a number of primary schools in an area come together to do their school development on the same day. One school's development needs are not necessarily another school's development needs. One school might need just one day to review its school development plan and another school might need two days when it is at the end of a cycle and wants to rebuild its development plan. Schools are unique. What suits one school does not suit the next.

We as legislators must also be ready to learn. We must look to our comparable locations in order to evaluate and develop our approach to school life. The SDLP believes that every school must be a good school. We want to listen to our teaching staff and hear their views on how we can

tackle the deficits in our education system at the moment. I only wish that some Members of the House would swap jobs for a week with a P4 teacher with 30 children in the class, or with a post-primary teacher, to see what it is really like.

I hope that the Member opposite was not suggesting that we lengthen the school day when he talked about Korea. Ask any teacher who is at class last period in the evening what that is like. I think that is a major concern. We must actively engage with our teaching professions in order to ensure the best possible education for all our children.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the motion and the idea of a review, but when I first looked at the motion, I thought that Members would need 20 or 30 minutes each to deal with all the different aspects that it opens up. We do need to review many aspects, but I am concerned that we are opening up a Pandora's box. I see that Gove, on 1 July, actually referred to the summer holiday break as the tyranny of a summer holiday break, which I think is a bit much for all those who need those holidays.

We have seen today from the PISA results that we need to make sure that our education is as good as it can be. If a review gets us there, let us do it, but let us not do it in such a way that adds more to the teachers. They are already overworked and have too much coming at them. We also need to review everything else that we are doing to get it in the right order so that we can concentrate on the disadvantaged. We should then look at sharing education, which should drive everything in the future and get everything in the right order.

We support the motion. We also support the amendment, although I find it a little rich, when neither of the two major parties really supported our debate on better consultation. I also wonder whether, where it states "agreed", that means agreement between the two major parties, rather than all of us. Let us get back to the spirit of the Belfast Agreement. If we are going for proper consultation and agreement, let us include everyone in it.

So many things are opened up in this debate, but maybe we should review how schools teach and use that time. The four and a half hours a day are adequate, but I am concerned that, if we look at a whole mass of different ideas, we will come up with too many changes that will throw the teachers. We should look at the other factors, like health, outside exercise, sport, and all the other things that come into the school timetable. We know from so much that we have listened to in the Chamber that over 80% of the education of a child is actually in the community. That is where we should concentrate. From that, what comes through in the debate is that, if we are going to look at reviewing it all, we have to get better joined-up relationships between the Departments, with health, welfare, DSD, the councils and everyone working together, because it is all part of the same thing.

Look at the fixed term dates. I think that we have all heard that, in the summer, many people who have been doing well at school end up going backwards and not learning so much, so maybe that is where we should start, but I hesitate to say that we should shorten the summer holiday when I look at the cultural events that happen at the beginning of the summer and the industrial holidays that go on in the middle of the summer. In many cases, the professionals then take time off in September. There are

all the other knock-on effects on people's lives, jobs and holidays, and yet it is healthy to look at it.

At the same time, when OFMDFM announced the shared way forward, it mentioned 100 summer schools. Maybe that is an avenue that we should be using. Those summer schools could be in leadership, sports, outdoors or numeracy and literacy. There is a whole opening there for us and maybe we should use the review to look at how well we can use those summer holidays so that everybody gets the best out of them.

Look at school opening hours. Many years ago, I had to spend four days very happily in Boston. Their children are out on the road waiting for the bus before rush hour, and the bus goes along and picks them all up, so you do not have the rush hour problems of all the parents on the roads at the same time.

We have opened a debate to look at international best practice. There are something like 195 countries in the world, so I do not know how we pick and choose, but let us pick the most relevant ones, and Boston certainly has a good idea. If you could get everybody off the road —

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Member for giving way. Will the Member agree that the primary goal of any review of school opening hours must focus on the benefit of the quality of the education given to children, and not any secondary objectives?

Mr Kinahan: I very much agree with my colleague. We have to remember all the way through that education is what we are looking at. It is so easy to lose our way on that. When you get the children to school, you want to make sure that they are there in the best possible way to learn, and not, like me when I was at school, gazing out the window wondering what I could be doing better — that might be why you have me here.

When you consider holidays and training days, I like the idea of the Baker days. They are the right way forward. I had not appreciated many of the difficulties that were raised today of parents trying to get them so that they all work together. The head of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), commenting on Gove's idea in July, said that we must have a properly coordinated plan for the holidays. That is what is missing at the moment. If we are to have a review, I agree with the proposer of the motion that we need to look at that.

When you get back to the very beginning of this, and we talk about — let me just get there — the current compulsory instruction time, I think there is another angle that we must review. It frightened me when I looked at the taught time document from the EU. To even think that it was setting times and targets of how long we should be teaching each subject —

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

Mr Kinahan: — but there is no harm in learning from it. So I go back to my point: yes to the review, yes to proper consultation and proper agreement, but let us make sure that we choose the best of international best practice.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion and the amendment. As others have indicated, it is a pity that one kind of negates the other in international best practice. I noted Mr Storey's comment about Korea. The number of hours mentioned

was 13, but there are 20 other countries between us and Korea that probably do not force-feed their children education for 13 hours. I absolutely take cognisance of international best practice, particularly in view of what was announced today in the international results, so by all means let us have a review.

If compulsory instruction time refers to the number of days that schools must operate, there is not much evidence that we need to change that drastically. The number of days that our schools open and the number of hours of instruction provided seem fairly typical by global standards in developed countries, if not by Korean standards. I sidetrack slightly and say that if you can look at compulsory instruction time, you could bring in a debate about school starting age, which would fit quite well into the sort of review that the Minister will, I imagine, announce in half an hour's time.

There is no compelling evidence that our starting age of, effectively, four years and two months has been an overwhelming success. Nobody else has adopted it. A review could certainly include examination of that point, particularly around the potential for raising the compulsory starting age to five, perhaps allowing an optional start at four, the potential to leave things as they are or, as was often discussed in the Committee, perhaps the potential for flexibility in individual children being held back for a year.

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) has done some research in that area, which would inform the debate.

5.30 pm

The motion then refers to fixed term dates and school opening hours. On that, I am very much on the side of standardisation across the board. This is a small enough place without confusing matters with differential opening hours. I am unclear, and this is a good example, about why primary and post-primary schools differ in their February midterm arrangements. I see no reason why they should not at least correspond with each other. The failure to manage that, as others said, causes significant difficulty and often cost, not least for childcare, to parents and other carers.

I will go back to holidays in a moment, but I want to divert to training days. As with the poorly aligned February midterm break, exceptional closure days cause difficulty, and I wonder whether schools realise that. Ms Boyle made the point about area cooperation — I nearly said area planning — and that would be a good start.

There is room for significant change around holidays. It seems obvious to me and to many parents I have spoken to that, compared with the rest of the UK, we tend to stack up all our holiday time in the two summer months. There is evidence that this has a negative effect on learning. In particular, children's charities and foster carers indicate that, it is their experience, children from more disadvantaged backgrounds have difficulty maintaining their learning, particularly if, for whatever reason, parents or carers are not around to reinforce it during the summer months. There is a particular difficulty with filling in the time, not least if they cannot afford school trips and so on. Mr Kinahan made the point about summer schools, and there might be some validity in that.

I dare say that there are good reasons why schools in Northern Ireland break for the summer much sooner than those in England and Wales — 12 July comes to mind

— but to be fair, schools in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland break at a similar time. Officially at least, they return from the summer holidays in Scotland and in the Nordic countries — we hear lots about Finland — in mid-August not September. We have, effectively, a nine-week break, and a review should be looking hard at reducing that to six weeks, perhaps starting at the beginning of July to accommodate everybody's holiday plans and finishing in mid-August. If you had to make up those weeks, you could make them up in the run-up to Christmas or around the Easter break, so the number of official days would remain the same.

There is certainly room for a good review. I have absolutely no doubt that the Minister —

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

Mr Lunn: — is going to announce one, otherwise this motion would not have been tabled. So, rather than saying that I look forward to his comments, which I usually say, I will say that I look forward to his announcement.

Mr Newton: Like others, I was confused when I saw the motion, particularly in light of previous answers to questions that had been posed. Then, I thought about it in the context of the Minister recently talking about free school meals without consultation and talking about the schools funding formula with very limited consultation. In that context, many would think that the motion was structured to predetermine an outcome.

When you add the international dimension and give consideration to what Sinn Féin's international connections are and what they have been in the past, and, indeed, the lack of consultation, it points you to the fact that it has an interest in Cuba and an interest in Colombia, or at least some aspects of Colombia that are attractive to it. That suggests that, because of the regimes of those countries, Sinn Féin likes doing unto schools. There is no mention of consultation with schools, apart from in the DUP amendment. That is what schools are and were complaining about.

The ministerial top-down approach is not working, and, indeed, the dictatorial policy is not working. "Best practice", when you think about it, is a phrase that runs off the tongue very easily. It implies that it reaches a point where it can be transferred easily, but that is not the case. We all want better practice in Northern Ireland schools, educational services delivered to the highest possible standard for all pupils in Northern Ireland schools and a good model of education that can be benchmarked favourably against any other system, preferably, but not necessarily, a western education system. It is best that we study the delivery of education here first to see what we can do before benchmarking it against suitable comparable models, because the best —

Mr Lunn: I thank the Member for giving way. Is he really advocating that we do not look at international best practice, particularly in the 25 countries that are outperforming us at the present time, just because one of them happens to be Colombia?

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

Mr Newton: I am happy for us to look at best practice, but I am more determined that we get the best model of education in Northern Ireland before we benchmark it

against other systems of education. An education system is dependent on many factors. It is driven by a country's culture, its investment in education and the structure of its education system; its history; and the nation's economic system and economic well-being. Those factors will drive the best practice of any nation.

I agree with Mr Lunn and others that the Assembly should look at a strategic review of the delivery of education services in Northern Ireland, covering preschool, primary school, secondary-level education, university and adult education, which is becoming more and more important. You never finish your education; you go back to refresh, to do professional qualifications or to take on vocational qualifications. Today, education never finishes. In theory, you never leave school. I want that to be encouraged through the provision of better facilities and by being more open to improving the take-up of education services, because that has a consequential impact on the lives of all our people who are seeking jobs, careers and pursuing interests. So, it is, indeed, my contention that education never finishes. We have debated this in the Chamber on many occasions.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation had an interesting thing to say about education. It stated that research:

"shows that educational deficits emerge early in children's lives, even before entry into school, and widen throughout childhood. Even by the age of 3 there is a considerable gap in cognitive test scores between children in the poorest fifth of the population compared to those from better-off backgrounds, and this gap gets wider as children enter and move through the schooling system, especially in the primary school years."

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

Mr Newton: For that reason, whatever we do, the education of our children has to involve parental education at the same time and parental involvement in the education system.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As usual, the Members opposite are full of conspiracies, hidden agendas and confusion about the intention behind the motion.

If the Members had read the motion, they would have found the agenda hidden within it:

"to review the current compulsory instruction time in schools".

The final line sums it up:

"for delivering the best outcomes for all pupils."

That is the agenda behind the motion.

Mr Storey: It is not that I want to cast aspersions on your Minister, but he has to explain why, in September of this year, he said:

"The Association concluded that there is as much harmonisation of school days as possible at the present time."

It is not we who are confused; it is the Minister. That is why we look forward to him clarifying what he said in September.

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

Mr Sheehan: Thanks very much. I thank the Member for that intervention. This goes beyond just harmonisation. There is a good argument for harmonisation, and I will go into that in a second.

The confusion on the opposite Benches reminds me of the old BT ad, "It's Good to Talk". If some of you had talked to us about the motion, we might have been able to table a joint motion using an agreed form of words. I understand that there is a bit of paranoia about the word "international". That has been articulated by Robin Newton. Maybe we could have inserted something along the lines of, "evidence-based best practice from wherever it comes".

Professor Tony Gallagher was at the Committee last week when we were talking about the common funding formula and what schools would do with any extra funding that they might get. He made the point that whatever interventions schools make, they should be evidence-based. Say, for example, that a principal gets an extra £10,000 of funding for one year and decides on face-painting for the kids on a Friday morning. If there is no evidence to suggest that face-painting improves pupil outcomes, the money should not be used in that way. Similarly, when talking about international best practice, we are really talking about evidence-based best practice from wherever it comes. Does it matter whether it is from England, Korea, Finland or Timbuktu? If it is best practice and might or could be applicable here, why not use it? What difference does it make?

As the Member who has just left mentioned, harmonisation is part of the debate, and that is important. I am fairly loath to criticise the Irish-medium sector because I see myself very much as its champion, but, in my constituency, there is one post-primary Irish-medium school and a number of primary schools — bunscoileanna — that do not coordinate and harmonise their school holidays, particularly midterms. So a family with one child at a bunscoil and another at a meánscoil finds that one child is off one week and the other is off another week, so they have extra expense for childcare, find it difficult to arrange holidays during midterm breaks and so on. There is also a difficulty with school opening times. The home-to-school transport system is much more efficient if opening times are staggered. We also know of instances of friction or conflict between local schools, particularly boys' schools, and they decide to stagger the opening and closing times.

I agree with what Danny Kinahan said about re-examining summer holidays in particular. Are they too long? Instinctively, they seem to be, but let us see some evidence to suggest that. My colleague Michaela Boyle mentioned that, sometimes, when struggling kids go back to school after the summer holidays, teachers spend a lot of time re-instructing them in lessons that they have already done.

Let us be innovative and think about different models during the summer. Danny mentioned that it could be a connection to sport, or why not music? We have the model of the Gaeltacht, where hundreds and maybe thousands of kids leave the North and go to Gweedore, Ranafast,

Glencolmille in the Gaeltacht in Donegal. They go to school and learn Irish in the morning and, in the afternoon, they do activities such as sport, music, singing, dancing, and all of that. It is a fun learning environment. Why could we not do the same in our schools over the summer holidays? Why not do that with science and languages? Why not bring in French or Spanish teachers? Why not use a lot of these —

5.45 pm

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

Mr Sheehan: — young graduates who are coming out of teacher training colleges? I commend the motion to the House. We will also be supporting the amendment.

Mrs Dobson: I also welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. Given time pressures, especially on our teachers, it is crucial that schools focus enough attention on delivering a broad and balanced programme that includes all the curriculum requirements. Although schools provide a wealth of extra-curricular activities as well as shaping and preparing our young people for later life by providing them with all manner of life skills, their fundamental role is still to provide a first-rate education. If improvements can be made to the current arrangements, I would welcome them. Therefore, I support the call for a review.

The 'Learning Environment and Organisation of Schools' report, published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2011, suggests that, as a whole, the United Kingdom is performing well above the OECD average for compulsory education, which, at the time, was 6,497 hours. Unfortunately, news such as today's shows that we are not always on the right side of the OECD averages. I strongly believe, as is referenced in the motion, that Northern Ireland must continue to take best practice from the rest of the United Kingdom and our international counterparts.

The motion raises a number of issues. The issue of fixed term dates is definitely worth consideration, not least following Michael Gove's statement earlier this year. The changes proposed in the Government's Deregulation Bill would allow individual schools to change the timing and duration of terms and holidays. Northern Ireland's young people currently have longer summer breaks. Some parents think that they might be too long.

Teachers and other educationalists point out that students' ability quite often dips after a sustained period out of school. Parents in particular, I am sure, would have something to say about a change to school holidays. Many try to fit some of their own time off work with when the children are at home. A bigger problem, however, would be if Northern Ireland were to go down the route of changing term times, with so much autonomy being given to schools or boards that they may no longer coincide with the neighbouring schools. It would be difficult to reach unanimous agreement on changing term times. Nevertheless, I support the call for a review to at least draw up a list of options.

A review of school opening hours would be interesting and potentially very informative. A change in the starting time for some schools might, for example, provide an opportunity to alleviate some of the volume of traffic on our roads during peak times. It could also help to spread the

rush hour congestion across the public transport network. However, as I raised with my colleague Danny Kinahan earlier, the primary goal of any review of school opening hours must focus on the benefit to the quality of education given to our children, not any secondary objectives.

The Minister has a full in tray, with little of real substance ever being produced. Considering today's PISA maths results, many of the area plans effectively coming to nothing, and given that he is seemingly on the verge of dropping his latest attempt at introducing ESA, there is much that he could be reviewing. My point is that he needs to focus his attention on actually getting things right in his Department. Yes, I support a review as detailed in the motion, but it must be done sensibly, with the right intentions and in collaboration with parents and schools, as mentioned in the amendment.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas le moltóirí an rúin chomh maith. I thank the proposers of the motion and the amendment for tabling them today.

Meeting the needs of pupils, parents and the economy are important considerations for an Education Minister, and he may well need to review whether the current compulsory instruction time in schools, fixed term dates, school opening hours, holidays and training days correspond with what is required to meet those needs. We might add that the Education Minister should make one of those needs a priority when there is a clash between competing needs. Of course, the Minister should keep under constant review whether the policies that his Department pursues and sets guidelines for are:

"in line with international best practice for delivering the best outcomes for all pupils".

In fact, I would have thought that keeping such things under constant review would be considered international best practice in itself. I would be interested to hear from those who tabled the motion the argument that the Department their party colleague presides over has not been in line with international best practice for delivering the best outcomes for all pupils on this issue. Perhaps they could spell out the changes they believe are required to bring his Department into line with international best practice. That would also be useful and informative for other Members too.

It could also mean that other Sinn Féin MLAs who held the post of Northern Ireland's Education Minister previously were not in line with international best practice, perhaps including the deputy First Minister, without realising it. Anyhow, we are where we are. Maybe we will hear more later on.

I believe that the Education Minister is currently considering his options on introducing a degree of flexibility on school starting age here. I look forward to the Minister bringing his decision on that matter to the Assembly for approval.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McGlone: Yes.

Mr Storey: When that issue was discussed by the Education Committee there was no imminent indication from the Department that it was going to come to us. The Department, as always, is dragging its feet and telling us

it could not do that because it could be 2015 before it has any proposals. Things move very slowly in Rathgael.

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

Mr McGlone: Thanks for that. Maybe the Department is adhering to standards for dragging its feet in accordance with international best practice too. I thank the Member for that intervention.

As I understand it, the chief executives' working group on the harmonisation of services is currently responsible for coordinating non-operational days for school transport and catering services for the purpose of achieving efficiencies. School holidays are aligned with those agreed days of non-operation of transport and catering. That working group consists of representatives from all education and library boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Council for Integrated Education, and the Governing Bodies Association.

The Minister, in a reply to a question for written answer, previously informed the Assembly that:

"In December 2012, the Department of Education asked the Association of Chief Executives to explore the possibility for better co-ordination of school days and opening and closing times in a bid to further reduce transport costs."

As the Minister stated:

"The Association concluded that there is as much harmonisation of school days as possible at the present time."

The Minister has also informed the Assembly that:

"The flexibility in place regarding staff training and school development days allows schools to use these days in the most appropriate way to accommodate their school management and training requirements. It would not be possible to align training days as specialist training providers are limited in number and could not service all schools on the same dates."

So, currently, the decisions on these matters are made on practical grounds for improved efficiency and to as much harmonisation as possible. Given the difficulties experienced in Wales as a result of variations in school term dates and school holidays, that would seem to be an appropriate approach to the problem, but I am in favour of the Education Minister keeping in line with international best practice at all times. Perhaps the issues under discussion could best be addressed by the Education and Skills Authority when it finally becomes operational, assuming, of course, that it does become operational.

Those conclude my comments in favour of the motion.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Fáiltím roimh an deis an cheist seo a phlé inniu agus le héisteacht le tuairimí mo chomhghleacaithe sa Tionól. I welcome the chance to debate the issue and hear the views of my Assembly colleagues, some of which were very enlightening, if not amusing.

I am committed to ensuring that we meet the needs of pupils, parents and the economy. We must make sure that we provide the very best education for our young people. That must always be our aim, and to achieve that

— despite the insular, perhaps even paranoid, thinking of some Members — we must look beyond these shores. We have very good practices of looking beyond these shores in such matters. Just last Friday, for example, in the Long Gallery, junior Minister Jennifer McCann, junior Minister Jonathan Bell, the Employment and Learning Minister, Stephen Farry, the First Minister and I gathered to launch a very fine example of international relationships. It was not with a western democracy, Mr Newton, but with the largest communist state in the world — China. Based on the teachings of Chairman Mao, it is a proud communist state.

After listening to Mr Newton today, I am surprised that all those DUP members were there. He tells me that the only place that I should look for best practice is a western democracy. He did not name any western democracies, and there could be a debate on what he defines as a democracy, but I am proud and delighted to say that there was a committed and combined representation from the Executive at the launch of eight Confucius hubs in our schools. I intend to engage further with the Confucius Institute and the Chinese Government to ensure that we can expand that programme.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for giving way. Again, he misrepresents what was said. What we are saying is that every time we have this debate, we look at international best practice. Let us focus on the needs of our children in our schools. The PISA results are a prime example: your Department and you use them as a means of battering our educational system. I need only read some of the comments made this afternoon to feel that our education system deserves an apology from the Department for the way in which it represents schools' performance.

Mr O'Dowd: International best practice should be examined on the basis of how it adapts to your society. Mr Newton made a very valuable contribution in which he said that you have to look at the economy and social background of any state before adopting any of its policies, and, of course, you would do that. The DUP, however, has a difficulty. When it looks outside the Six Counties, its wee insular world starts breaking down. That applies in many matters, but particularly in education. You cannot dismiss PISA. You can debate it and discuss it, but you cannot dismiss it. You cannot dismiss the chief inspector's biannual report, which highlighted the same issues as PISA. I have not said anything today that undermines any of our education workforce. I have been supportive of it, and I do not believe that an apology needs to be issued. We need to carefully examine PISA in the context of all the other evidence and move forward.

I will respond to Mr McGlone's commentary on whether we got it wrong in the past. For years, this Education Minister, the previous Education Minister and, prior to that, Martin McGuinness were the sole voice in the Chamber when they said point-blank that our education system was not world-class but could be. Over the past number of years, we have been adopting policies which will, I believe, pay significant dividends to individuals, the economy and the well-being of our society in years to come. Social change, which is what education policy is, does not happen overnight. You have to deliver it and ensure that it is embedded and moving forward.

It is worth noting that every PISA policy introduced, even by direct rule Ministers, has been objected to by Members

opposite. The DUP believes that its purpose in life is to defend half a dozen schools, and that is education sorted.

So, I do not owe an apology to education because I have not insulted the education world, but I will say this to the Member opposite: average may be good enough for him, but it is not good enough for me and it most certainly is not good enough for the young people we serve. It will not serve this economy or this society and, unless he has evidence to the contrary, he cannot simply dismiss PISA.

6.00 pm

Mr Storey: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will give way later.

I have not signed the motion, which:

"calls on the Minister of Education to review the current compulsory instruction time in schools".

It goes on and on. I am not going to announce a review today, which will disappoint everyone. I believe that the debate should take place, and I agree with the motion. I think that it is disappointing that international best practice has been dismissed from the motion, but that does not stop me as Minister from examining best practice from across the world. However, we would have to prepare any such review carefully. We would need to have proper terms of reference in place, and I would have to examine who would carry that review forward.

The motion calls on us — many in the House, including Mr Kinahan, Mr Lunn and others did go through this process — to look at education differently and to look at how, why and where we should deliver education. It calls on us to think about, debate and discuss that. Our education structures and how we deliver education date back to the early part of the 20th century, which can be seen even in the classroom structure with rows of desks and a teacher standing at the front. I accept that our teaching practices have been through a revolution over the past number of years, but the time our young people spend in school and how that is structured has not really changed since the earlier part of the 20th century. The motion says to me, "Let's think about that. Let's think about all those issues".

I am not promoting the lengthening of the school day, but if we were to do so, what would the children and young adults who are under the charge of the Department be doing? Does it have to involve the three Rs? Does it have to be in the formal setting of a classroom? Could it be out in the sports fields, in industry, working with a local community group, working with a pensioners' group or learning languages in a fun, imaginative and different way? It would be part of their school life.

I accept that there are significant cultural events during the summer, and we are not suggesting that those significant cultural events should be blocked out by restricting holidays. Mr Kinahan referred to the 100 summer schools that OFMDFM is promoting through Delivering Social Change, which, again, is an imaginative way of thinking, but what happens if our children wish to spend four weeks during the summer learning Mandarin, German, French, Spanish or Irish? I think that that would have significant benefits for the well-being of the individual child, their community, the economy and how we move forward. In tailoring holidays to match each other, you would have to

look at the economic consequences for transport, broader communities, families etc. There are obviously positives in that, but there may well be negatives as well.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

What attracts me to the motion is that it asks us collectively to think differently about education. In fairness, the vast majority of people in the Chamber carried out that function today. It withdraws us from the sometimes stagnant debates that we have around education, and it tells society that we should have a debate and conversation about why, how and when we send our children to school and what activities might be involved in a longer school day or, indeed, a shorter school day, perhaps on a Friday. I think it was Chris who told me earlier that, in French schools, they structure their Wednesdays differently from any other day of the week. Should we have Saturday schools? I know that we have Sunday schools, but should we have Saturday schools and what would a child do there? What is the purpose of teacher training days? What is the purpose of teacher development days? How are we using them and are we using them to best effect?

Should we concentrate the focus of our training days more on the delivery of maths, science, numeracy and literacy, and all the areas in which the international reports tell us that we face challenges?

I welcome the motion. As I said, I am not announcing a review today. If the House agrees the motion — and it appears likely that the House will agree the motion and the amendment — I will deliberate on how best to bring the review forward. It is worth noting that I cannot make any change to legislation, first, without consultation, and, secondly, without bringing it back to the House. So, the conspiracy theorists' options are beginning to fall slightly.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for giving way. If our party supports the motion as amended, the Minister should not take that, as he has taken it on previous occasions, as our agreeing to everything and take a coach-and-horses approach.

I go back to PISA. He tells us that we should look at PISA for best practice. However, the progress in maths (PiM) and progress in English (PiE) assessments indicated clearly — the inspection report highlighted it — that we are doing well in mathematics. What does PISA tell us today? It tells us that we are dragging behind in mathematics. Who is right?

Mr O'Dowd: PISA looks at 15-year-olds. PiM and the progress in international reading literacy study (PIRLS) look at our primary schools. Let us look at what is different between our primary schools and post-primary schools. I am not saying that this is the entire answer, but it is certainly a significant answer. Our primary schools are all-ability and socially mixed. Our post-primary schools are not socially mixed or all-ability.

We could also look at the effect of transfer from the primary-school setting to post-primary school, which may fit in with the report as well. Perhaps one of the things that a review should look at is whether there is an option to shorten summer holidays for children in years 8 and 9, who have just moved into post-primary school. Is there a way of looking at how we deliver education differently to children in years 8 and 9 and the correlation between primary school and post-primary school?

We cannot ignore the fact that, of all the countries that are out-achieving us — or that, according to PISA and other reports are significantly ahead of us — none selects on the basis that we select. Perhaps that is where the difficulty comes and why the DUP is concerned about international best practice. It does not suit the DUP's argument. If it does not suit your argument, perhaps you need to change your position. Perhaps you need to think about it slightly differently and tell yourselves this: if all the evidence is pointing to something different, perhaps we need to have a wee think about this. I know that you have changed your policy in the past. Your policy was opposition to academic selection. Then you said, "We'll tell you what: we support academic selection". All parties change policy. It is not a U-turn or anything like that. Debates move on, positions move on, and you have to rely on that.

The Member also asked me why I responded to a number of Ms Boyle's questions in the manner in which I did. Those were factual responses. That is the current position and the evidence that is contained in the Department. The Association of Chief Executives reported back that that is its view. It is a stated position. However, as I said, positions can, and should, change when necessary.

All that I see the motion committing the Assembly to today is a review of school opening hours etc. As I said, any review will have to bring forward its recommendations and, I suspect, a significant amount of legislative change that the Assembly would have to agree to. Therefore, I do not think that there is anything to fear from opening up a well-informed debate on the issues raised during today's debate and in the motion.

Mr Craig: I support our amendment. I listened with great interest to what the proposer of the motion said. It was quite interesting to note what was said about family needs being ignored, rural and urban, and looking at other countries' best practice. I am just not so sure that, when we look at other countries' best practice, we will find the best solution out there.

I have listened with interest to the debate around the Chamber. Somebody tried to say that we support a 13-hour day for schoolchildren. I have good news for the schoolchildren: no, we are not. We do not support 13-hour days for schoolchildren. In some cases, a lot of children do 13-hour days, but that is by choice because of other activities that they do after school.

That having been said, there is always an issue around families needs, schools' needs, teachers' needs and education needs. There is always friction in the system. I can speak with some authority on the subject because, as chairman of a board of governors, I have to make decisions about what holidays you allow the school to take. In doing that, there is always friction between the education needs of the school, the holiday needs of parents, and, ultimately, what is best for the children and school. My experience tells me that those will not always gel. That lies at the heart of what we are saying. We already have a report that states that we are as good as we can get with the system that we have in Northern Ireland, and I have heard nothing yet that tells me that we can radically improve it.

I want to raise with the Minister one issue that I find fascinating. The boards unilaterally took a decision on transport. It was an interesting decision, because they

decided to set a date-based system for when transport is paid in Northern Ireland. What I find interesting is that we pay here for a number of days' transport. Say, for instance, we pay for 200 days' transport: there is now an artificial cut-off date at the start and end of those 200 days. Some schools, for very good reasons, work outside those artificial dates, and, at the minute, parents are out of pocket. I challenge the Minister on this one: has the Department looked at the legality of what it is doing? At the end of the day, no one has yet challenged it. However, I doubt that it is legal, because those schools carry out the same number of days' education as all others. Therefore, if the number of days has already been paid for, why is there not some flexibility in our transport arrangements?

I listened with interest to what my colleague Robin Newton had to say. Thankfully, we got the PISA scores. I have good news for him: Colombia and Cuba are not better than Northern Ireland. In fact, they are not even on the list, to be quite honest about it. That is good news for all of us. We will not be following the examples of Colombia and Cuba. I listened with interest to what was said about best practice in other countries. As an Assembly, are we starting to follow the best examples of what was professed to be the largest communist country in the world?

I sit on the Policing Board and listen with interest to what the party opposite has to say about human rights. It goes on and on about human rights. I challenge the Minister to look at the human rights record of China. He will not be a very happy person by the time that he has finished.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr Craig: I will.

Mr O'Dowd: I suggest that the Member talk to his party's junior Minister and to the First Minister. Quite rightly, in my opinion, they, along with the deputy First Minister and other Ministers, are promoting economic and educational ties with China. I think that they are correct to do so.

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

Mr Craig: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Minister will not be at all surprised to know that I agree with that. Any good influence that we can bring to bear on China is a good thing. Any economic ties that we can have with China are for the good. Any influence for the good that we can put in there is to be welcomed. However, what I say to the Minister is that not everything in China is brilliant, and we should not copy everything that is there.

What I will say goes back to the reign of the present deputy First Minister as Minister of Education. We have had, time and again, edicts from the Department and the Minister come down on schools. Nobody seems to listen to them. In my experience, the top-down approach never works.

6.15 pm

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

Mr Craig: I support our amendment. Listen to those at the coalface and you will find that things very easily improve.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Members who engaged in the debate and my colleague Michaela Boyle for proposing this hugely important motion. As outlined by my party colleagues, I

am content to accept the DUP amendment. Indeed, I take it for granted that any changes or conversation will involve appropriate consultation with schools and authorities to ensure that we agree an approach on the way forward. That is exactly what this motion is calling for: the opening up of a conversation within and throughout the educational and wider community.

I would, however, like to stress that it is very important that we explore international best practice and look to international examples for ideas and lessons that may be applicable here in the North. That is not to say that what is necessarily good practice for Singapore or Finland is the best way forward for us. Exact replicas are rarely transferable across continents, countries and cultures, but they offer insight and experience that we should always acknowledge and bear in mind. Indeed, Danny Kinahan and Trevor Lunn seemed to recognise that today. Danny made a suggestion about summer schools and the best way to utilise summer holidays, which was very pertinent.

Unfortunately, however, the DUP again proved to be incorrigible and unable to remove itself from the notion of the Plato's cave, where it sees what is going on in the world only by watching the dancing shadows on the wall behind it. If international best practice is not worth looking at, why was the Chair of the Education Committee with us in Edinburgh on an educational visit when we were looking at best practice?

It is important that we look at best practice, and I want to give a couple of examples. In the mid-1990s, an experimental public school called the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) Academy opened in the south Bronx, which is one of the most socially disadvantaged areas in New York. There are no entrance exams or admissions requirements. Roughly half the students are African American and the rest are Hispanic. Three quarters of the children come from single-parent homes, and 90% qualify for free school meals. KIPP is famous for mathematics. By the end of the eighth grade, 84% of students are performing above the expected grade level. The Bronx average, including the wealthy suburbs, is a mere 16%. Amazingly, more than 80% of KIPP graduates go on to college, with most kids being the first in their family ever to do so.

Mr Storey: If the Member's logic is right, and if PISA is to be believed, why is Northern Ireland performing better in mathematics than the United States, which has a mean score of 481, when Northern Ireland has a mean score of 487? Does that not prove the point that we are trying to make?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his comment, but I am referring specifically to one particular part of one particular state of the entire United States. The KIPP programme represents one of the most promising new educational philosophies in the United States, but its success is best understood not in its resources or institutional innovation but in that it is an organisation that has succeeded by taking the idea of cultural legacy seriously. It has revolutionised the way in which a school day is organised and viewed. No longer the prisoner of past expediency, KIPP schools do what is right for their pupils today, not what was deemed suitable when public schooling was first introduced many years ago.

In the era of the industrial revolution, the first educationalists were mindful of the rhythms of agricultural seasons. A mind must be cultivated but not too much,

lest it become exhausted. What was the remedy for the dangers of exhaustion? The long summer holiday. It is a peculiar legacy that has had profound consequences for the learning patterns of the students of today.

In recent times, the esteemed sociologist Karl Alexander has explored the effects of a prolonged summer vacation on the learning process, and the findings have identified an achievement gap that has been allowed to develop and fester annually throughout much of the western world — to Mr Newton's dismay. Looking at the achievement test scores of pupils in June and September, Alexander was able to examine how much of the gap is the result of things that happen during the school year, and how much was to do with what happens during the summer vacation. The results were remarkable. Pupils from affluent backgrounds returned to school in September, and their reading scores had jumped through the roof. The poorest kids came back from their holidays, and their reading scores had regressed by similar margins. Alexander noted that, although poorer children may out-learn rich kids during the school year, during the summer they fall considerably behind. Furthermore, when it comes to reading skills, poorer kids learn nothing when school is not in session. By contrast, the reading scores of the richer kids rocket. Virtually all the advantages that wealthy students have over poor kids are the result of differences in the way that privileged kids learn while they are not in school.

Very often, we spend time discussing how we need to change the schooling institutions — the system — but that is arguably only rearranging the deck chairs, if we do not explore the wider context of cultural legacy and educational environment. Like parts of the USA, European education systems have, for some time, been exploring ways in which the educational environment can be adapted to the challenges of a modern and global economy. In the mid-1990s, Poland began to look seriously at the organisation of the school day and, indeed, the entire learning process. Reforms introduced included the reduction of school instruction time, the enhancement of extra-curricular activities and the introduction of a wide availability of global business skills and training, including in modern languages, for those who wanted to make use of those in the evenings. The improvement in Poland's performance over the past decade is due, in no short measure, to those contextual reforms.

In Germany, where youth unemployment is virtually non-existent, a long-established educational culture that combines academic excellence with business and industrial apprenticeships is empowering entire generations of young Germans with the skills and confidence to make it in the global economy. Like Poland, Germany places huge emphasis on the need to equip their young people with the ability to speak more than one modern language, done not merely through school instruction, but in after-school clubs and through cross-border exchanges.

I want to emphasise the distinction between teaching time and time spent at school each day. In some European schools, children arrive as early as 7:30 am and do not return home until after 5:00 pm, but they have only a small amount of daily instruction, which is crucially combined with effective breakfast clubs, music clubs, art tutorials and sports etc. For too long, education and the educational institutions have sat outside the sphere of the real world,

with the relationship being characterised by a sense of disconnection and interruption, with too many parts of the process standing with their back to each other. This review would be aimed at making a serious attempt to embed a culture of cooperation and a collaborative learning experience between schools and the outside world. We should be exploring ways in which the school day and term are harmonised in the interests of the pupil, the family and needs of our economy.

In conclusion, I call on the Minister to look seriously at the opportunities that would be afforded if he were to announce a review of some of the issues outlined here today. However, the review must represent a conversation between, and throughout, society as a whole and our education system. We should not merely examine the reform of educational institutions, but explore how we can embed a more productive educational culture throughout society.

Throughout the world, politicians tinker and tweak with the systems and the institutions. They rarely take the time to zoom out for just a moment and take cognisance of the educational culture of their society. When they do, remarkable results often follow, such as what happened in Poland and in the Bronx.

It is often cited that 80% of a child's learning experience is outside the classroom. As I outlined when I mentioned Karl Alexander previously, often it is not that our schools are not working, but that, for the kids who need them most, there simply is not enough time in the day.

Many progressive education systems have a shorter teaching school day and a shorter summer holiday. That leaves more time for extra-curricular activities for children and, crucially, planning and evaluation for staff on a daily basis. A review of all those issues would help to kick-start a necessary conversation. Indeed, with youth unemployment and educational underachievement ever present in our society, we owe it to our young people to continue to build an education system that is fit for purpose and conducive to the world around us today. I commend the motion to the House.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to review the current compulsory instruction time in schools; and to examine whether current fixed term dates, school opening hours, holidays and training days correspond with what is required to meet the needs of pupils, parents and the economy, and that appropriate consultation is undertaken with schools and managing authorities to ensure an agreed approach to deliver the best outcomes for pupils.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Speaker.]

Adjournment

Tourism: East Belfast

Mr Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, and all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately eight minutes.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for being here this evening, and I do so in the knowledge that she has a long journey to make when she leaves the House. I also pay tribute to her for the work that she has already done for tourism, as she promotes Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland tourism product across the globe.

Many of us recognise the work that has started, and I particularly want to focus on Belfast and to move towards east Belfast. Belfast has been looking at and promoting tourism as an area, along with its counterparts in the Tourist Board. It welcomed nearly eight million visitors in 2011. The value of direct tourism spend is estimated at £401 million. Overseas tourism accounts for £207 million of all tourism spend each year. It contributes in excess of 4.9% of GDP and supports approximately 40,000 jobs across Northern Ireland.

Titanic Belfast, one of our major achievements, has welcomed over one million visitors since 2012. It is a major draw to the city for many visitors, with half of them visiting attractions that relate to the Titanic or Belfast's maritime history. Titanic Belfast is also tipped to be a must-see attraction internationally. Given the fact that it officially resides in east Belfast, there is a huge opportunity for the area to use Titanic Belfast as a hook and capitalise on those visitor numbers. From an east Belfast perspective, it is important to benefit from the success of the Titanic project by educating tourists and, indeed, locals alike on the proximity of the building to other attractions in the east of the city.

There are a number of things that need to be done to enhance the potential of tourism in east Belfast and realise fully the benefits of tourism in this part of the city. Some work has already started on that. I pay tribute to the work of the East Belfast Partnership as it promotes tourism and, indeed, to the dedication, vision and hard work of its staff as they seek to implement a plan that will see improved links between the Titanic Quarter and the east of the city; the inclusion of east Belfast in all tourism maps; and the inclusion of the Newtownards Road on tour bus routes. Many visitors actually bypass east Belfast as they travel down the Sydenham bypass from the Titanic Quarter to this fine Building. They cut around the east of the city.

The work that the East Belfast Partnership is doing, along with other agencies, in branding of the east of the city to make it a more attractive place to visit is vital in enticing visitors to the area. We need to see improved connections from the George Best Belfast City Airport into east Belfast. Again, many people arrive at the airport and drive straight into the city. Indeed, there is potential to promote east Belfast on cruise liners as an area that is worth visiting, as other attractions in the city of Belfast and, indeed, Northern Ireland as a whole are promoted.

A short time ago, the House paid tribute to the festival that took place that had the C S Lewis name attached to it. As part of the strategy for east Belfast, we seek a funded festival for the area — a long-term funding arrangement that will allow east Belfast to build skills and infrastructure and, indeed, a history of festivals that are successful and will act to attract visitors to the area.

A simple one is an opportunity to pilot and be linked with the Belfast city bike scheme and, perhaps, use a hub in the east of the city that would allow the bicycles to be used for some of the attractions that I will talk about in a few minutes.

6.30 pm

It is about being included in city-wide tourism opportunities as a distinctive brand of east Belfast and seeking also, through the work of the partnership, funding for a company to carry out a baseline study on current visitor numbers in the east that will help with the future monitoring and evaluation of the success of tourism.

I can outline a number of projects that are contributing to the betterment of this part of the city for local people and that have the potential to do the same for city visitors. We need to attract those people in so that they get the benefit of it, with greater numbers of those who visit Belfast and Northern Ireland coming to east Belfast.

Let me dwell for a few moments on the potential of the Harland and Wolff shipyard, its history and that of the men who worked there. A small but important tribute to the men who built such great liners is located on the Newtownards Road. The popularity of what is referred to as the Yardmen statue is evidenced by the number of people who stop their car to get their photograph taken at the statue before moving on to somewhere else. The fact is that you have to find that statue and you have to be made aware of it.

I mentioned the feature that is C S Lewis. Just last week, we debated C S Lewis and the role that he has played in our society and his connection with the east of the city. I know that the Minister has acknowledged and glowingly paid tribute to the significant figure that is C S Lewis. She paid tribute to the C S Lewis festival, which was organised with some funding from Belfast City Council and some private funding that was put in by local east Belfast businesses to support it. It was organised by the East Belfast Partnership.

That was a good start, but if the festival is to be successful, it needs to be turned into a major festival, as has happened in other parts of Belfast and other parts of Northern Ireland, and it could become a hook to attract people from across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and GB. Indeed, it is not too ambitious to say that it could attract international visitors. That is not some form of airy-fairy wish list; it can be turned into a reality.

The potential to do that is there, because C S Lewis is an international figure with followers across the globe. His writings cover a wide spectrum and age range. His family home is just about a mile from this Building and the school that he attended is about half a mile away as the crow flies. He records in his writings his love for this part of Northern Ireland, and his fond and frequent holiday visits home are testament to the fondness that he had for his homeland. The local places where he played as a child and later visited as a young man are all well documented and they are here. His reputation was further enhanced by

his inclusion in Poets' Corner just a few days ago. That is a rich heritage, and we need to claim him as a famous son and enhance and preserve his reputation as a famous son in the city of his birth. There is great potential to do so.

There are other features, such as the Connswater Community Greenway, which is a £32 million project. It is recognised as a local tourism project by Belfast City Council. It has the potential to bring those seeking recreation into an area through walking and cycling routes along the three rivers, the Connswater, Knock and Loop, and, when finished, will have 17 miles of traffic-free paths. It will include a C S Lewis square — a community square offering opportunities to be used for celebrations, outdoor performances and events over coming years.

Also planned around that area is a "best of East" centre at Holywood Arches — the creation of a hub, an innovation centre, an information point, a visitor reception area, an exhibition space and meeting facilities. At that point, it would be advantageous to have a pilot programme around the Belfast bike scheme and the use of that for the 17 miles of walking and cycling space.

We know that Van Morrison's reputation is international. He lived along the route of the Connswater greenway project, and many of his songs make reference to the areas along that route. I know that the Minister is well aware of the East Belfast Festival that happened, which, again, operated on a shoestring, but which Van Morrison headlined. Indeed, Van Morrison was recently awarded the freedom of the city of Belfast, and we now hear rumours that he may be awarded a further honour.

There are other projects that need to be fully explored and their potential enhanced. They may not be of the scale of the Titanic signature project, but they include the shipyard church, Westbourne Presbyterian Church, just across the road from the Yardmen statue that I mentioned. That church has a rich history associated with the men and women of the shipyard and their families. There are plans to develop that.

Schomberg House, the headquarters of the Orange Order, is on the Cregagh Road. Some might argue that that is a bit far out, but it is not if you are interested in the history aspect. It includes a small museum, and there has been refurbishment to make it a more attractive place to visit as a local or as a tourist who is interested in local history. We know the reputation of Dundonald International Ice Bowl. Craigavon House is a feature and has huge potential. It is where Home Rule was opposed and where Carson, Craigavon, the men and women of Ulster and the history of this Province were shaped. It could become a feature of tourism in east Belfast.

Belmont Tower, which is about three quarters of a mile from this building, is a Victorian Gothic building with a permanent C S Lewis exhibition in it, along with conference space and a cafe. It is now owned by the National Trust and is an asset for east Belfast. Stormont, the Building that we stand in every day and its grounds, can be and is an attraction for people to visit. We see that every day and every week, either out in the Great Hall or, indeed, on the buses that drive up to park at our front door.

In conclusion, I know that the Minister recognises that tourism has been and will continue to be a feature of what we do for the economic activity of Northern Ireland. I speak on behalf of east Belfast as an area where there is

the potential to enhance tourism for the betterment of all who live there.

Mr Copeland: I congratulate Robin for bringing the debate this evening. I was born, made, bred and raised in this part of the city, although I must confess that "east Belfast" is a term that did not come into common parlance until about a century ago. It was always viewed as a different place called Ballymacarret, and it did not actually become part of the city until after the city's incorporation. My grandmother Spence, having lived for 97 years on the Beersbridge Road, still steadfastly referred to "going to Belfast", despite the fact that it was about half a mile down the road.

A sense of place is tremendously important, and I do not intend to try to compete with Robin to establish which of our researchers found out more about east Belfast. It is safe to say that there is a fair amount there to whet the appetite of anyone interested in the history of this city and, indeed, this island.

I do have a bee in my bonnet about one aspect, however. Although Schomberg House is in Castlereagh, I am sure that Robin will not mind me stretching another half a mile up the hill to Lisnabreeny, which has a United States military cemetery that was once the only such cemetery on the island of Ireland. The United States has a long connection with Belfast and the north-east corner of the island of Ireland, evidenced by the fact that the longest continuous American diplomatic post is consul to the city of Belfast. That comes as rather strange, but I suppose that it goes back to our part in the birth of that great nation.

Almost one third of a million Americans spent time here before departing from Belfast lough in one of the largest fleets ever assembled to take part in the invasion of Europe in the latter half of the 1940s. That gives us a marketing tool that could be used in conjunction with the facility at Carrickfergus that was the birthplace of the American Rangers, a unit of the American military that continues to this day. We also have a number of municipal and privately owned golf courses.

The key thing in some respects is to recognise that our past, troubled as it was, is a matter of some interest. I do not mean the civil disorder of our immediate past but our industrial past. An earlier tourist called Gustavus Wolff once stated proudly that he had gazed on the finest vistas in Europe across the Danube and the Rhine yet could think of no finer sight than his cathedrals of industry in the city of Belfast situated on the River Lagan as viewed from the salon of his villa at Strandtown. Strandtown has changed and his villa is gone, but there are a fair number of cafes, retail units, shops and points of interest in the area. Of course, we then have, on a slightly more contentious note, Glentoran, the first football team to win a European title. We have much to be proud of and much to exploit, but our knowing it and selling it are entirely different things.

Tourism does not necessarily mean a fortnight with a packed suitcase and a tin of suntan oil. It can mean an overnight stay, a visit or part of an overall wider journey. To market east Belfast sensibly, it has to be done with several issues in mind. First, there is niche tourism — those who come here for a specific reason. Robin sensibly mentioned the Titanic. The *Nomadic* was connected to the Titanic and, indeed, still floats not very far from where she was launched. Another fascinating potential would be HMS *Caroline*, the last surviving ship from the

Grand Fleet, which has been on the east side of the river, thank goodness, for quite some time. She awaits tender, loving care, but given any sort of investment and proper marketing, she could become to Belfast what HMS Belfast is to London.

When you bring people here, the issues are largely whether they have somewhere to stay, somewhere to see and somewhere to spend money. Tourist income is primarily what tourism is about. I often wonder about and watch the West Belfast Festival, for example. It does not last for the entire year, but the preparations, marketing, planning and research for it do. Lessons could be learned from the way in which that festival has been promoted, from which we in east Belfast could derive some benefit.

East Belfast is a great place no matter what anybody says. It has an awful lot to offer, an awful lot of unseen things, many of which Robin mentioned and that people would, I have no doubt, be prepared to travel to visit and see. We have to ensure that people have the information that will guide them there, that they have a proper place to stay and that they stay safe and enjoy themselves. On safety, it will still come as a surprise to many across the world that Belfast is and always has been an extremely safe city. We should all be proud of that, particularly those of us in Ballymacarret.

6.45 pm

Mrs Cochrane: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, and I am grateful to Mr Newton for bringing the issue to the Assembly. He has already covered a number of issues, but I am sure he will not mind if I repeat some of them. I am glad to see the Minister in attendance, and I look forward to hearing her thoughts on the challenges and opportunities for tourism in east Belfast.

When I meet people from all over the world, it is always with great pride that I tell them that I am from glorious east Belfast. My grandmother worked in the rope works, my grandfather worked in the shipyard, and my dad grew up in Memel Street and was known to have kicked a ball for Glentoran seconds. East Belfast has been home to my family, but it is also the spiritual home to many a story, hero and landmark, which all have helped to set it apart on the international stage.

In addition to being home to this very Assembly, we can also boast about Titanic Belfast as a must-see during any visit to Northern Ireland. As a brown-eyed girl who grew up in Cyprus Avenue, the legacy of Van Morrison is one that I and all of us will be familiar. He is a singer-songwriter, a musician, a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee, a Grammy winner, a household name the world over, and, more simply, a son of east Belfast.

Then there is C S Lewis, an academic, poet and novelist known for his literary works and enshrined in popular culture through the numerous adaptations of 'The Chronicles of Narnia'. He is also a son of east Belfast.

Then, of course, there is George Best, renowned as one of the greatest footballers ever to grace the global stage and who is compared with the likes of Pelé and Maradona. He was a Manchester United and Northern Ireland stalwart, and a Ballon d'Or recipient. However, perhaps he was not always the best judge of character — apparently, he donated money to the fledgling Democratic Unionist Party

back in 1971. George will forever be fondly remembered as a son of east Belfast.

While east Belfast is proud to be home to each of those three iconic figures, it also boasts a rich and diverse cultural and artistic heritage. East Belfast is home to the oldest operating cinema in Ireland, the Strand Cinema on the Hollywood Road, which opened in 1935. Its original design was influenced by its proximity to the Harland and Wolff shipyard, featuring curved walls and a portholed foyer. I am sure that others in the Chamber tonight will have enjoyed many a date night at that great venue.

In recent years, we have also seen that there is a sincere thirst for new and exciting arts ventures in that part of the city, and the Strand is beginning to offer live theatre, as it did in the past. That is all part of its development into the Strand Arts Centre, which will establish it as the home of the arts in east Belfast. No doubt, that will help to strengthen the East Belfast Arts Festival. Add to that Belmont Tower, the Dundonald Ice Bowl, Schomberg House and the many outstanding restaurants and cafes that are opening in the east and you can start to see the opportunities that we have to attract visitors.

We have had many a debate in this Chamber about the significance of tourism to the local economy. If we wish to be serious about developing our long-term prospects and building on our successes, we must be proactive in adapting our local tourism infrastructure to accommodate our goals. We need to continue to grow and develop the east Belfast brand and, if we are to truly capitalise on our cultural appeal, we need to continue to develop and build on each unique opportunity. For example, in the coming years, we will see the 10-year anniversary of George Best's passing, the eightieth anniversary of the creation of the Strand and the seventieth birthday of Van Morrison. In a society that is all too often characterised by its solemn and contentious anniversaries, we must not overlook those alternative celebrations as an opportunity not only to instil shared civic pride but to attract new visitors.

There are many great initiatives being pioneered across the east of the city, each with its own degree of merit and respective plan for the future. We must ensure that those efforts are not just progressed in isolation, but that each of them complement and support the next. A holistic vision is integral to ensuring the sustained growth and success of tourism in east Belfast. Although that will undoubtedly require buy-in from all who are already engaged with the sector, it will also require the support and cooperation of this Assembly to make it a reality.

Mr Douglas: I thank my colleague Robin Newton for bringing this topic to the House. I have a bit of a sore throat but, hopefully, I will get through this. I also thank the Minister for being here tonight, and, like the previous Member, I am looking forward to what she has to say about tourism in east Belfast.

It has been a great year for tourism, and not just in County Fermanagh. We have great memories of the G8 in June. What a wonderful time that was, and I will say a wee bit about that later. It has also been a great year for tourism in east Belfast. I know that my colleague Robin Newton mentioned this Building, which is in the heart of east Belfast. This wonderful Building is a superb tourist attraction, and you know yourself, Mr Speaker, that the numbers have been increasing year after year.

I will keep this short and mention just a few projects. I asked the Northern Ireland Tourist Board for some information, and I want to thank it for sending that information. It sent me a list of something like 18 different projects, some of which are major, and some of which are not as big. In fact, some of my colleagues mentioned some other projects as well. So, east Belfast is certainly at the heart of tourism. Projects in east Belfast are Northern Ireland-wide projects, and I think that it is important to remember that.

Going back to the G8, I remember that the doom-and-gloom brigade was out in force, saying that it was going to be the worst ever and that there were going to be riots by all these strange people who were coming from all over the world. We have had the doom-and-gloom brigade in east Belfast as well. Let me give you one example.

I am a member of Titanic Foundation Limited, which developed and now manages the Titanic building, and I want to say a few words about it. For me, Titanic Belfast is a great example of initiative, drive, vision and leadership, and it is the sort of project that the Assembly needs to continue to support. Who can remember the Audit Office report that questioned the viability of the project before it even opened its doors? Doom and gloom. However, since opening on 31 March 2012, Titanic Belfast has welcomed almost 1.3 million visitors — stunning. It is interesting — I am glad to say this — that it is the most popular visitor attraction in Northern Ireland. That is something that we did not have a couple of years ago. For a hundred years, we put Titanic out of the way for a whole range of reasons, and now we have the biggest Titanic visitor attraction in the world and the most popular tourist attraction in Northern Ireland. It has received many accolades during the year and obtained a five-star award in the new Northern Ireland Tourist Board quality grading scheme for visitor attractions.

I can think of other attractions including — Members alluded to this already — the likes of C S Lewis. Fifty years after his death, he has been honoured not just in his native Belfast but in Westminster Abbey with a memorial stone, which we talked about. I was delighted that the Minister, who has a busy schedule and had just returned from Dubai that morning, came to the C S Lewis lecture in the Senate, which I must say was excellent, and which she spoke at as well.

Yesterday, in the Chamber, the Minister said:

“C S Lewis was one of our literary stars. In the past, he has not received the attention that he deserves.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 90, p23, col 2].

I think that we need to talk about that important factor tonight. C S Lewis certainly has not been as popular as Seamus Heaney, but I think that the C S Lewis festival over the past number of weeks has been excellent. I have a wee booklet here that lists a whole range of events. It is great for local people, for people in Northern Ireland and for tourists who come to Northern Ireland.

If you think of all those projects that we talked about — SS Nomadic; HMS Caroline; Titanic; the dock and pump house; the slipways; the drawing offices; and even the Woodstock blues festival this year — you realise that they have been excellent for east Belfast, for Belfast and, indeed, for Northern Ireland.

When we look to the future for Northern Ireland, we think of the Giro d'Italia Grande Partenza — that is Ulster Scots; I am only joking — in 2014. I just want to remind Members that that is a great opportunity to showcase Belfast, Titanic Belfast and Parliament Buildings. Last year, the race was broadcast to 165 countries. It reached 125 million households. It has the potential for a global audience of 775 million people. What an opportunity.

As you can see, I have about 15 pages here. I could talk for the rest of the night about tourism, not just in east Belfast but in our beloved Belfast and our beloved Northern Ireland. I am delighted that my friend Robin has brought this topic to the House tonight.

Mr McKinney: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the tourism potential of east Belfast. This part of the city has overcome some significant challenges over the past number of years. It has much to commend it to tourists. Maximising tourism in east Belfast has the potential to boost the local economy. We have heard quite a lot about that this evening.

As well as having many historic landmarks, including the famous Harland and Wolff shipyard, it has famous people. It is worth repeating the list: Van Morrison, who was recently given the freedom of the city; George Best, who was one of the greatest footballers ever; and C S Lewis, who is considered to be one of the greatest Christian writers of the second half of the 20th century. That is a bit of a list, but you have to think of them as much more than that because, in life or death, they have enormous profile and pulling power.

As a child, I, like millions of others, devoured the works of C S Lewis. Like millions of others, I marvelled at the footballing skills of George Best. I cried at his death. I am continually inspired, like millions of others, by Van Morrison. Nothing beats an open drive in a car listening to Van Morrison.

Only a couple of weeks ago, a statue of C S Lewis was unveiled in east Belfast. The recent C S Lewis festival, which was funded by the city council, proved to be a real success. I agree with Mr Newton: it should have greater ambition. The new C S Lewis trail was also launched during the festival. It takes people through east Belfast and the landmarks that helped to shape the young writer's life and work.

It must be said, however, that the past year has proved to be particularly difficult, with a number of people engaging in civil disobedience. While a minority of people have been involved in that behaviour, it has had an adverse impact on the area. We must take cognisance of that and recognise it. Many visitors contemplating visiting the east Belfast area will have been put off by the scenes of chaos and disorder. We should do all that we can to try to prevent that.

East Belfast has a great deal to offer visitors. We must capitalise on all its attributes. It is important to recognise the good work done by many people on the ground, and — I will repeat it as well — the East Belfast Partnership, which is made up of community, statutory, political and business members. It is dedicated to the regeneration of east Belfast. It was formed in June 1995, with the responsibility of getting stakeholder organisations to work together to develop and implement plans for the social, economic, environmental and cultural regeneration of the area.

From the birthplace of Titanic and the famous skyline of Harland and Wolff to the iconic trails along the river Lagan and the Connswater greenway, east Belfast has much to offer. Given the level of investment — we have been hearing about that this evening — in improving the area over the past decade or so, we must not accept anything that will interfere with it reaching its full tourism potential.

However, I have a question: what themes will underpin what east Belfast has to offer? Over and above the specific things that we have heard about tonight, what themes will underpin what east Belfast has to sell? Look at the history of east Belfast: the themes of quality and innovation, hope and ambition, and endeavour and prosperity run strong through the work of the early shipping pioneers and C S Lewis.

The author famously wrote stories about a magical door that accessed a world of considerable beauty. His was a challenge — it is a modern challenge, as well as being a historical challenge — to look to the other side. It is a powerful theme. I question whether we can fully achieve that if we do not unlock some doors in our own minds, between people and between communities, and, ultimately, restore some of that ambition, hope, endeavour and prosperity.

It is a prize that extends way beyond a simple tourism product, and it contains themes and lessons for us all. In that regard, I suggest that it is a real prize worth reaching for.

7.00 pm

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I am delighted to respond to this debate.

There is much to be said, and I commend the Members for their sometimes poetical utterances. It is a very pleasant debate to respond to. It is a very important time for tourism, and as Members said, for the whole of Northern Ireland but particularly for east Belfast. There is so much, and we have heard a list of people and a list of buildings. We have had places mentioned, including Ballymacarret and Ballymiscaw, which is where we are at the moment. I laughed when Mr Copeland talked about going into Belfast. My grandmother lived in Sandy Row, and she used to say the same thing about going into Belfast. That has the mindset of the city centre, and, even now, I sometimes see that displaying itself.

We mentioned a couple of very significant people. Mr McKinney asked what the themes are. I think that the themes, particularly for east Belfast, are people and places. People, in particular, are very important to the history, heritage and culture of east Belfast, none more so than C S Lewis. Mr McKinney joined me at that very important lecture by Professor Lennox in the Senate Chamber a couple of weeks ago. It is fitting that east Belfast is reclaiming him as one of its own and is celebrating his life and, importantly, his work. So many people around the world celebrate and enjoy his work, either his Christian pieces or, indeed, his fiction pieces. It is sad that we have not made more of C S Lewis, and I hope that we will continue to build on that initial festival because I think that there is much more that we can do in respect of the great man. In that respect, I commend the fact that he is remembered in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey as of 22 November. I also commend a recent documentary that I watched on BBC Four by A

N Wilson, that great historian. That documentary, which I think you can still get on the iPlayer, gave an excellent insight into his life and his work, and also to the importance of the women in his life, including his mother and Minto and, of course, Joy Gresham. It is a beautiful piece of work, and I commend it to you.

The legacy of C S Lewis to the cultural tourism agenda will, I believe, continue to grow. As Members may know, we supported the PR and social media in and around that festival. Indeed, Tourism Ireland helped to promote the festival overseas. There is more to do, of course, in that respect. We have received and, indeed, are supporting a proposal by East Belfast Partnership, which Mr Newton mentioned. It is a very worthwhile partnership that is doing very good work on the ground, and it is hoping to develop a C S Lewis centre, Best of East, at the C S Lewis square, close to the intersection of the Connswater and Comber greenways. It has been successful in gaining funding under the tourism development scheme, and I am pleased to say that that project is progressing through the procurement process, with contractors due on site in early 2014.

I also want to mention that other great man, who, thankfully, is very much still with us, Van Morrison. Again, he is internationally renowned. It is true what the good book says: sometimes we are not prophets in our own land. Certainly Van Morrison is of international acclaim, and I hope that we in this great city and right across Northern Ireland value Van Morrison in a very meaningful way and do not leave it until after he leaves us to recognise his greatness, because he certainly adds a lot to what Belfast has to offer.

In respect of C S Lewis, we mentioned a number of churches. I want to mention the beautiful St Mark's, Dundela, which is, of course, a Church of Ireland church. I mention it because I was to be at a book launch there tonight — this is me explaining tangentially to the Church of Ireland why I could not be with them tonight at a book launch that is taking place in all the parishes across the island of Ireland. I am sure that St Mark's, Dundela will do as well as the other parishes across Northern Ireland.

There is a long list of places to go to, and be seen, in east Belfast; no more so than our beautiful Titanic Belfast. It is important to recognise that for many years it was difficult to even talk about Titanic in east Belfast because it left such a huge mark on the community when the disaster occurred. Now that we have commemorated and celebrated what went on in that shipyard a hundred years ago, we are now seeing that tourists recognise Titanic as a global brand — it is a global brand — and, as result, we have welcomed 1.3 million people to east Belfast and to Northern Ireland to have a look at our fabulous Titanic centre. That has proven to be a very good investment for government. It has been a very wise investment for government, and is indicative of the vision we have for attracting people to visit Northern Ireland. It has provided a catalyst, and we have seen more visitors coming now to visit us because we have Titanic Belfast.

Mr Speaker, the way in which you have opened up this place has been a great credit to you. When the many international visitors come to this place, they cannot fail to be impressed by its stature and its beauty, and I often say that we have the best Parliament building in the UK, as it is of its time, very grand but very beautiful. That says a lot

about the people who built it at that time and their vision for Northern Ireland and its people.

I could mention a lot of other things that have happened in east Belfast, such as the Yardmen workers statue, which Mr Newton mentioned, a beautiful sculpture and one that adds a lot to the Newtownards Road. However, what you want to hear about from me are the plans for the future. We will continue to push very hard on Titanic Belfast because it is a global brand and will bring people in. We are adding to that product all the time, and I thank my colleagues for supporting me in that with the SS Nomadic, which has been a great addition to what is going on down there, the Titanic dock and pump house, and the Harland and Wolff drawing offices, which we would like to see developed in a meaningful way and which have been awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £5 million to progress that. We are very excited about the prospects for that.

When people come through that great gateway of the George Best Belfast City Airport — he was a great man indeed, and we all remember him tonight — we want more of them not just to go through east Belfast but to stop there. We will have to give offerings to them to make sure that they know what is happening in east Belfast.

Business tourism is important as well, and we have seen 'Visit Belfast', along with the Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland, target conference organisers to come to Belfast. We all know that the facilities at the Waterfront Hall are going to be upgraded, and we look forward to that, as it will have a knock-on effect for the hotels and accommodation providers across the city, and not just in the city centre but in east Belfast as well.

Mr Newton referred to the fact that Belfast is now a cruise destination, and I very much welcome that Belfast Harbour is putting in its own purpose-built cruise facility. It is important that, when people reach Belfast, they get a very good impression of our city. Also, because of where it is located, in Titanic Quarter, people will be able to walk into east Belfast, and we will have to make sure that we attract them to all the different areas in the city, not least to east Belfast and HMS Caroline, which has been mentioned. Working with the Royal Navy, we intend to get HMS Caroline back into very good shape and hope that, as Mr Copeland said, it will become as successful as HMS Belfast has been in London.

I want to finish with the Giro d'Italia, and I commend Mr Douglas for his Italian — Grande Partenza. We look forward to the Giro coming to Northern Ireland. Its first stage will take in many of our iconic landmarks and landscapes. Starting at Titanic Quarter, it will pass through east Belfast via the Newtownards Road and Stormont estate before concluding, via a number of other locations, at the City Hall. The Giro d'Italia will open up the world to east Belfast, so everybody needs to be ready for that. I do not think that people have grasped its importance or the fact that it will be such a huge event for us in Northern Ireland. I know that east Belfast will rise to the challenge and ensure that everyone there is wearing pink for the occasion, because pink is, of course, the colour of the Giro d'Italia. Perhaps even you, Mr Speaker, might get a pink tie.

Adjourned at 7.11 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 9 December 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statement

Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services

Mr Speaker: As the Minister needs to leave for official business abroad, I have agreed that, in the circumstances and because of the importance of the subject matter in the statement, I will allow it to be taken before the matters of the day.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I sincerely thank you and your office, Mr Speaker, for facilitating us in this respect. This is a hugely important statement, and I appreciate the opportunity to respond to all the questions that come forward thereafter.

The statement concerns the future delivery of paediatric congenital cardiac and interventional cardiac services for the population of Northern Ireland. At the outset, I reiterate that my key priority throughout this process has been and remains to ensure the delivery of a safe, durable and high-quality service for vulnerable children. In that context, I have also sought to ensure that the concerns that have been raised with me by parents and clinicians have been fully and effectively explored.

Members will recall that, on 7 May 2013, the Assembly resolved that it noted the publication of the preferred option document by the paediatric congenital cardiac services (PCCS) working group and the related Children's Heartbeat Trust report and called on me to reject the recommendation of a Dublin-only service for the future commissioning of regional paediatric cardiac surgery and interventional cardiology and to select a model which retains primary provision and the ability to operate on emergency admissions in Belfast. In responding to the motion, I said that there was no easy solution to all of this. I hear from one side that, if you take a decision to remove services from Belfast and have surgical services provided outside Belfast, children will lose their life; I hear people from the other side say that, given the complexity of paediatric congenital cardiac surgery, children will lose their life if the service is not based at a larger centre. I remarked that you would need the wisdom of Solomon and a whole lot more to get this right. It is a hugely challenging and emotive issue that never strays far from my mind. It is incredibly difficult to square this circle.

From the outset, I have been clear that, if at all possible, I want to avoid the need for children from Northern Ireland to travel to Great Britain for heart surgery, except in the most complex cases that require highly specialised treatment. I believe that that is right for two reasons. First, parents should not be placed in a position of having

to travel overseas with their child because of the strain that that can place on family life at a time when they wish to be close to their vulnerable child but may have other children at home to care for and jobs to hold down. Secondly, I have made it clear that I wish to see children's heart surgery retained in Belfast, if possible, so that we can respond to the relatively few emergency situations in which the child's chances of survival might be increased if they were operated on in Belfast. I also believe that, by retaining a surgical capability in Belfast, our capacity to maintain associated paediatric services, primarily interventional cardiology, would be strengthened over the long term.

The recommendation of the PCCS working group that children's heart surgery should in future be commissioned primarily from Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Dublin marked a step forward in that that recommendation holds the prospect that the majority of children and their parents would not have to travel to GB for surgery, whatever long-term model emerges.

I recognise the significant efforts made by the working group, the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency to find a solution to this challenging issue. I understand fully and agree with its position that safety considerations in the delivery of this service are of paramount importance. At the centre of this is the question of how to run a 24/7 service that meets all the standards. Clinical advice tells us that surgeons doing interventional work should individually carry out in the order of 100 of these procedures each year to maintain skills and expertise. Our patient numbers in Northern Ireland are so small that we would never be able to reach the recommended capacity levels on our own. The recommendation that was put to me by the working group is based on the fact that Dublin is a centre with a potential capacity to deliver a sufficient volume of procedures to meet clinical standards. However, that would mean the ending of surgery in Belfast. Before I could consider that, I have to be fully assured that there is no feasible available option to retain surgery in Belfast. Therefore, I wanted to look at other potential options before making a final decision on this important matter.

Having considered all of the advice that has been put to me, I take the view that the only prospect for retaining children's heart surgery in Belfast on a long-term basis is to forge a children's heart services integrated network arrangement between the Belfast Trust and the Dublin children's heart centre. This network offers the prospect of a single service, providing surgery in both Belfast and Dublin. I cannot guarantee that such a model would

necessarily provide a solution in the longer term, but it is only right that I should exhaust every avenue to find out if it would be possible to deliver a model such as that. It is also only right that I am guided by the best possible expert professional advice in considering this. Such decisions matter too much to get wrong.

With that in mind, I have worked closely with my counterpart in the Republic of Ireland, Dr James Reilly TD, to establish whether we could create the conditions to allow for a fuller assessment of possible options for the delivery of cardiology and cardiac surgery for congenital heart disease on the island of Ireland. Such an all-island approach represents a much broader consideration of potential service models than previous reviews were at liberty to consider. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that Dr Reilly and I have been able to create those conditions. I will now relay to Members a joint statement that Dr Reilly and I have agreed, which will be issued today by our respective Departments:

“Minister James Reilly TD and Minister Edwin Poots MLA today together announced that a team of three international clinicians will carry out an independent assessment of current and future needs for cardiology and cardiac surgery for congenital heart disease in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The assessment team will describe the existing hospital services in both jurisdictions, outline options for service configuration and governance arrangements and report to both Ministers, jointly, recommending the most appropriate model that meets the population health needs and other requirements of both jurisdictions.

The assessment will in this way address the needs of children and adults in relation to congenital cardiac surgery on the whole island. It is due to start in January 2014 and be completed in six months. When the Ministers receive this independent assessment, decisions can then be made on the optimal service provision which it is intended will be implemented for these services as soon as possible.

The Ministers recognise that the development and implementation of any safe and sustainable model of care requires careful planning, effective engagement and buy-in of all stakeholders, in particular family representatives and professionals, and this assessment is seen as essential to the achievement of that shared goal.

In the interim, pending the completion of the assessment in June 2014, health service management and clinicians in the Republic of Ireland will continue to work with their colleagues in Belfast to provide and develop support to the services in Northern Ireland”.

The team will be chaired by Dr John Mayer, consultant cardiac surgeon at Boston Children’s Hospital. The cardiology expertise will be provided by Dr Adrian Moran, consultant cardiologist at Maine Medical Center, Portland. An anaesthetics expert will be confirmed to complete the team before it commences work in January 2014. The team will be supported by specialist professional nursing representation and other expertise as necessary. The terms of reference for the team are set out in the annex

circulated to Members with my statement. I want to thank Dr Mayer and Dr Moran for agreeing to take forward this assessment and look forward to receiving their report.

I would like to record my thanks to Minister Reilly for his efforts in working with me to secure the short-term arrangements and the assessment to be carried out by the external experts. I believe that the assessment by this external team will bring international best practice and fresh thinking to bear on this challenging issue. It provides a means of addressing the need for cardiology and cardiac surgery for congenital heart disease on the island of Ireland and to identify the most appropriate model that meets the population health needs and other requirements of both jurisdictions.

While the assessment by the international team of experts will address the long-term future of children’s heart surgery in Belfast, there is a more immediate situation to be addressed in respect of the short-term delivery of this service following Professor Wood’s retirement later this month. As the work of the international expert team on a long-term solution is taking place, Minister Reilly and I have agreed that health service management and clinicians in the Republic of Ireland will continue to work with their colleagues in Belfast to provide and develop support to the services in Northern Ireland. I very much welcome this commitment. Detailed arrangements will be finalised by health service management and clinicians, North and South, in the days ahead. As this is an operational matter, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on this at this moment. However, I wish to make it clear that some children whose procedure is considered to be of a high risk will continue to be transferred to centres in England for surgery in line with risk management arrangements. An important point in all of this is that each and every case will be given individual consideration, and the most appropriate location for the procedure to be carried out will be determined on the basis of clinical judgement.

I also wish to inform the Assembly that I have been assured that the current PCCS service in the Belfast Trust is safe and will continue to be safe. It is, nonetheless, a fragile service, and we should not underestimate the challenges that low patient volumes present to sustaining such services. I therefore intend to take every available measure to ensure that the service in Belfast is as robust as possible, and, in the weeks ahead, children’s heart surgery will transfer from the Royal Victoria Hospital to the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children. Staff will also receive training in the use of ECMO to support very sick children who require support for their heart and lungs following surgery. Both these developments have been requested by the cardiac team in the Belfast Trust as a means of further strengthening the service.

12.15 pm

None of us should be in any doubt of the expertise, skills and dedication of the staff providing these services nor, indeed, of their care and compassion in supporting parents in extremely difficult circumstances. Those considerations and the safety of these children have remained to the forefront of my mind. I believe that it is appropriate that, at this point, I should pay tribute to Professor Freddie Wood for the service and dedication that he has given to cardiac patients from Northern Ireland. Indeed, the

entire paediatric congenital cardiac team at the Belfast Trust provides a first-class service for the children of Northern Ireland.

In concluding, I hope that the arrangements that I have outlined and the assessment by the external experts will go some way to assuaging the concerns of all those who have expressed concern about the future of children's heart surgery and interventional cardiology in Belfast. We have come a long way from the original reports, which would have removed surgical services and potentially undermined cardiology services as well. I have, on many occasions, met parents, surgeons and cardiologists. I have also visited the Clark clinic and paediatric intensive care and witnessed the care provided by clinical and nursing teams and the support provided by parents to very sick children. I wish to express my thanks for their patience in what has been a long, drawn-out process. It has been protracted because the solutions are complex and will potentially cause considerable upheaval. It will be some months before I will be in a position to reach a final decision on the long-term future of the service, but I believe that, when that time comes, I will have the benefit of having explored every possible option for securing a high-quality paediatric congenital cardiac service for the children of Northern Ireland. That has always been my clear aim and continues to be my goal. I trust that the Assembly, parents, families, clinicians and the public recognise that my only desire is to act in the best interests of everyone involved. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I call the Chair of the Health Committee, Maeve McMcLaughlin, I say that there are quite a number of Members who want to ask a question to the Minister on the statement. I ask Members to be brief, and, hopefully, all Members who want in will be able to make a contribution to the statement.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. While this is an interim arrangement, I think this is a good day. It is a good day for the children and their families, and I welcome that. I specifically want to acknowledge the need to secure the heart services integrated network on the island of Ireland. That is an important message, and I welcome the Minister's leadership on that. I welcome the fact that some surgery will be maintained in Belfast. That is good news for the island as a whole, and it is good news for families.

I note that the Minister talked about the detailed arrangements in the short term that will be required between the Belfast Trust and the support from Dublin. Will the Minister give guarantees that, in the short term, there will be no gaps in this vital service and that children who need surgery here and can access surgery here in Belfast will have that surgery here in Belfast?

Mr Poots: First of all, we need to recognise that Dublin is willing to support us in this, and Dublin clinicians are willing to support us in this. I trust that the short-term support that they will give will develop into the future, but it is a very important step that is being made: we will have people with expertise on this island who will be able to travel to Belfast to provide that support for us, and our clinical team will be able to confer with, work with and develop their skills with others of real expertise on these issues. That is of considerable importance.

We want to secure as much surgery as possible in Belfast, but, in all of this, we have to take a step back and allow the clinicians, whether that be the cardiologists or the surgeons, to do their job, in conjunction with the parents. We must allow them to give the best possible clinical advice to parents on what can achieve the best outcomes for their children. We want to support parents in supporting their children, and the best means of doing that is creating the opportunity to provide this care in Belfast, as well as in Dublin and in England, and for the clinicians, in conjunction with parents, to decide where the most appropriate place is for children to receive such surgery.

Mr Speaker: As Members know, the Chair of any Committee has some latitude when asking a question to the Minister, but that is where the latitude ends. I understand that, because of the importance of the statement to the House this afternoon, Members may be tempted to add further statements, but let us have questions to the statement.

Mr Wells: I thank the Minister for his statement on what we all agree is one of the most complex and difficult issues that any Minister could face. He has outlined the way forward as far as the assessment team is concerned, but, as he knows, and I think that he referred to it, the lead surgeon in the Clark clinic in the Royal retires today.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member come to his question?

Mr Wells: Will the Minister reassure us that that person will be replaced? How confident is he about that, and what will happen in the interim?

Mr Poots: The Belfast Trust is seeking a replacement for Professor Wood. There has been interest in the position, which I am very pleased about, and I think that the work that we are doing will be instrumental in its delivery. If a surgeon is to come to Belfast and commit to working in conjunction with the other surgeon in Belfast, being part of a larger team, having the support of that team and having the ability to develop their expertise will be very important at a personal level. It will also be very important for the people for whom the surgeon will provide care, because you want that surgeon to be maximising their skill base and ensuring that they are well equipped to deal with the eventualities that will come before them.

Mr McKinney: This morning, we met some of the families directly involved. Of course, delay and indecision form part of their consideration. We might have some concerns about how this would inject further delay. As well as the quality thresholds demanded by the commissioners, at least part of the consideration here is the general weakening of the team. Mr Wells has referred specifically, but, in a general sense, what guarantees can the Minister give that this six months will not lead to a further weakening of the team in Belfast?

Mr Poots: We have a very strong cardiology team in Belfast. I pay tribute to the team because it carries out amazing work and has the confidence of patients and parents in that work. I believe that the decisions that we are taking today will help to ensure that the cardiology team has confidence that we are listening to it and that we are seeking to arrive at the right solution, not the rushed solution.

We have a commitment from the existing surgeon that he wishes to continue to serve in Belfast. We are attempting to get to the point at which he will have the necessary

support to allow him to continue to practise in Belfast, performing surgery on children in Belfast, and to develop his skills. So everything that we are doing is about ensuring the sustainability of the service, but we also need to ensure the safety of the children. Those two elements are absolutely key. I cannot do this without the assistance of others, and I greatly appreciate the assistance being provided to us by others.

Mr Swann: I sincerely thank the Minister for his statement. He knows that that is well meant. I declare an interest, in that I have a 10-month-old son who recently underwent cardiac surgery, and I am the chair of the all-party group on congenital heart disease. I congratulate the Minister on setting up an expert team of clinicians, rather than administrators and managers, to give that advice because that is crucial.

I want to ask specifically about sustainability, which is at point iv(b) in the terms of reference and which the Minister mentioned in his previous answer. Can he assure the House that the criteria for sustainability used in the previous review, 'Safe and Sustainable Review of Children's Congenital Cardiac Services in England', which was discredited in England and Wales, will not be used? That is what put the Belfast surgery under pressure and threat.

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his question. I wish him, his wife and young Evan all the best for the future. I know that Evan has received excellent care. There really is fantastic care available for children with congenital cardiac problems. As well as that, I have to say that what is provided for us in England by way of skills, and what they bring to the table there, is fantastic.

Sustainability is about how we can actually provide a service that is robust and ensures we have that safety and that continuum of expertise on site, and that we do not provide something that is second rate. I know that the Member and, indeed, all of the other families do not want a service in Belfast that is not as good as services elsewhere. That is where we fall into a problem: we just do not have the numbers to sustain the service in that way. That is why we have to look to others to provide support. Working in a team with another institution is necessary.

This report will not be on the same basis as the Kennedy report; it will be based on how best we can provide services for the children of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and how we can work together to do so. I hope that we will be able to provide more and more surgery, both in Belfast and Dublin, as the years pass by. Indeed, the skills that are developed on both sites will ensure that, potentially, fewer children will have to travel to England to receive surgery, albeit that that will be there for us when it is absolutely necessary.

Mr McCarthy: During this further six-month delay, there will need to be safe and sustainable services for children who are born while the Minister is waiting for the group to report. How does he plan to monitor that those services and training provide adequate services now that Professor Wood is retiring?

Mr Poots: In respect of all of that, the Public Health Agency and the Health and Social Care Board have very important roles to ensure that standards are met. They will continue to do that. Professor Wood's absence will be filled and supported by clinicians of standing from Dublin. They will provide that support. We should not underestimate the

effort involved on their part and the challenges they face. We need to appreciate their offer to us in that respect, and we will be able to sustain a service in Belfast during the six-month intervening period while we work towards a final solution. It is very important that we get the right solution. I have confidence that the team that is looking at this has the requisite skills and understands families' needs. That came through to me very clearly when I met Professor Mayer earlier this year.

Ms Brown: I, too, welcome the very positive statement. It is very welcome news to the House this morning. Does the Minister consider that cardiac surgery could serve as a positive example of common-sense collaboration between the two jurisdictions?

Mr Poots: I suppose that others have looked at North/South issues and they have always had a political dimension. Let me be absolutely clear: there is no political dimension here. This is about children, their healthcare and saving their lives. To anybody who says that Poots is a traitor because he has gone down this particular route, I say that I would be a traitor to the children of Northern Ireland if I did not go down this particular route.

12.30 pm

It is absolutely critical that on such issues, particularly where there are rare diseases and less common illnesses involved, we work very closely together. I know that the folks in the Republic of Ireland will be delighted to work with people in GB when it comes to other rare illnesses. Indeed, on this issue, they are very happy to have children treated in England. There is absolutely nothing political in the nature of this; it is purely about children's healthcare and providing the best possible healthcare for children. If we cannot collaborate on something such as that, there is no hope for us at all.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. He has advised that Dr Mayer and his review team will recommend:

"the most appropriate model that meets the population health needs and other requirements of both jurisdictions."

Can he give us some idea of the issues that might come under the heading of "other requirements of both jurisdictions"?

Mr Poots: Clinicians will need to have confidence that the service that they are providing is the best possible service. Whether they are cardiologists or surgeons, they will not want to compromise the safety of any child for whom they are providing care. Therefore, it is very important that that aspect be given full consideration.

When I met Dr Mayer, it struck me that his team carries out around 1,000 surgeries a year, which is twice as many as are carried out on the island of Ireland. He indicated that they perform surgery at a number of sites, including at one site that is just four miles away because the parents had confidence in the hospital to which they were used to going. Dr Mayer made it very clear that huge consideration had to be given to the needs of parents and families. This is not purely an issue about what clinicians want but about how they can provide the best possible safe service while meeting the needs of parents, and, indeed, those of

children, who need their parents at their bedside as much as possible over their period of care.

I cannot guarantee any outcomes, but we have established a team that will take all the issues into account and hear them fairly. It will not be a rushed report, nor will it simply suggest that we should do what follows in an offhand way. It will be something that will have huge consideration applied to it. Whatever comes out of it, we will know that all the issues involved were fully and properly assessed.

Mr D McIlveen: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. He mentioned the international team that has been set up to help with the review. Can he assure local parents, who are obviously those whom we want to support, that they will be included in the process, brought along with the review and kept fully informed?

Mr Poots: Yes. There has been a very strong lobby from parents, and I appreciate that. They will certainly be kept involved in the process. At the outset, David Simpson MP brought two families, the McKee family and the Flaherty family, to meet me. Little Grace McKee and little Jake Flaherty were with us that day, and it was obvious that they were quite unwell. Consequently, I received an invitation from Julie Flaherty to visit the family in hospital, which I did. Jake was very unwell at that point, and he went on for a number of weeks, celebrating his birthday shortly after that visit, but he passed away only a couple of days later. I made a promise to myself that I would do my darnedest to ensure that we sought to deliver a service for such children in Belfast. That was always pre-eminent for me. I wanted to do it for wee Jake.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister. Indeed, I congratulate him and welcome the progress that he has made on this highly sensitive issue. Could I put on the record the debt of gratitude that the House and the community owe to Freddie Wood, who came out of retirement to help us to sustain a service in Belfast over the past number of years? He is a quiet, unassuming man who has done us a powerful service in keeping going.

My colleague Fearghal McKinney spoke about the parents. Indeed, I joined him this morning with those parents outside Linenhall Street in a discussion of their concerns. I ask the Minister whether deskilling will be an issue for the sustainability of this, because it is a big concern for many of the staff involved. Can he reassure us that deskilling will be on the agenda and that contracts going forward for Belfast-based staff will perhaps be arranged in such a way that means that those staff will rotate through any main centre that is created in Dublin, with the result that high-quality skills will be preserved and the Belfast-based staff will not be allowed to deskilling or fragment?

Mr Poots: It is not for me to dictate to the people who are carrying out the report what they need to put in it, but I think that that is a very obvious area that will have to be assessed. I do not want there to be surgeons in Belfast who are not maintaining their skills and developing whilst others are, because the service will quickly become second-rate. So, the opportunity to serve as part of a larger team and to be integral members of that team strikes me as absolutely necessary. We will wait and see what the report recommends, but I would be very surprised if a report recommended basing surgery in Belfast that did not have that type of integral working with the larger team in Dublin.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for his statement. Under the evaluation and scoring models, he indicated that safety and a relationship to primary, secondary and emergency transport services will be considered. He also indicated that clinicians wish to ensure the safety of the children who are under their care. Can the Minister assure the families that the health and well-being of those children who need urgent care, who may not be fit to travel and who may be affected by delay are given appropriate weighting in the review so that they are able —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to finish.

Mr Beggs: — to reach the surgeons and receive the care that is needed?

Mr Poots: Our Lady's Children's Hospital has advised Belfast trusts that it cannot guarantee at this time that it can continue to take the transfer of 20 to 30 emergency cases during 2014. Therefore, it is essential that we retain a surgical service in Belfast that can provide support if necessary. Some of those children would have to travel to England as well. So, given the nature and complexities of all those things, it has to be left entirely to the surgical teams and the clinicians to make those difficult decisions in conjunction with talking to the parents so that they fully understand all the issues.

So, in that respect, yes, we will have an ambulance service that can support the transfer of children, and we will take whatever steps we need to support children in those circumstances. It is a relatively small number of circumstances vis-à-vis the elective model that is provided, but, nonetheless, it is critical to parents that we can guarantee them that support, and it will be guaranteed. We will get them to the place that is most appropriate to carry out that surgery as quickly as possible.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister explain why he is so defensive about the announcement? Who is going to call him "Traitor Poots", and why do you think that would happen?

Mr Poots: I am not in the least defensive. I outlined that this was purely a health issue and that it should not be seen as anything else. My priority is children in Northern Ireland, including children with congenital cardiac problems. That has been my priority throughout, and it will be my priority when we arrive at the conclusion of this process with the qualified recommendations that will come from people of real expertise and knowledge who have provided care for children for many years.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the Minister for his statement. As one who has suffered adult heart problems, I ask the Minister to outline how challenging it has been to get to this welcome point for children with heart problems.

Mr Poots: The challenges were huge. A number of times, it appeared that we were at almost the end of the road when massive pressure was applied. We resisted that pressure. I recognise the support of Dr Reilly throughout the process. He was never anything other than helpful. It will, and did, involve challenging. It involved pushing others, and I thank him for that. I greatly appreciate that others are prepared to come to the table and offer their support to us to ensure that we are able to provide a safe and sustainable service regarding congenital cardiac care for children in Northern Ireland.

Mr I McCrea: I commend the Minister for his statement and the families of the children who lobbied MLAs for the

excellent work that they did to keep this matter to the fore. The Minister mentioned work with the Dublin hospital. How many operations take place in Dublin? Is there evidence that the quality and expertise are there?

Mr Poots: Dublin has between 400 and 500 surgeries each year, which is a high number that enables them to have a full-time service. It submits its data to the Central Cardiac Audit Database (CCAD) to be audited and validated for quality, though I would not be suggesting that we use a service in Dublin if I did not believe that it was of the standard that we would get in Great Britain. However, clearly it is more convenient to use services in Dublin than in Great Britain. Therefore, where we have that quality validated, it would make sense for parents to be able to avail themselves of that service without having to fly to Scotland or England.

I recognise that it is less of an issue for parents in the south and east of the Province than for parents in the north and west. Travelling from Belfast to Dublin takes less than two hours, but if you have to add a journey from, for example, Ballycastle, Londonderry or Castlederg, it adds considerably to the journey. That is one reason why we want to ensure that we can provide support in Belfast for parents, and not just support around cardiology but surgical support.

We want to retain as much service as possible in Belfast. That is not guaranteed at this moment in time but neither is it lost. Had we made a decision at this point, it would have been a negative decision, but I am glad that we are in the position to fully test the opportunities that there will be to continue to provide such a service in Belfast.

Mr Newton: I welcome the Minister's statement and, like others, congratulate him on it. Minister, you appointed Dr Mayer, consultant cardiac surgeon at Boston Children's Hospital, to head up the external group. How do you address the accusations that the outcomes of his work are predetermined?

Mr Poots: Dr Mayer comes with huge skills and experience. He trained at Yale University and was a professor of surgery at Harvard Medical School. That is the standard of person who we are bringing in. He leads on over 1,000 surgeries a year, so he has all the clinical expertise that anybody could ask for, but he also has a clear knowledge of the needs of families. When we met, he identified clearly and directly to me that parental support and parents having confidence in the facility that they have become used to using, and their ability to meet the needs of other members of the family who may be at home, are important issues. He was very clear that it is not just about what needs to be done on the clinical side but about the needs of families. Although I cannot guarantee what the outcome will be, I have confidence that he will give due consideration to all those issues and ensure that the families' views, as well as those of the clinicians, are heard.

12.45 pm

Mr Allister: I think that the Minister is well aware of the genuine concern that, in the interim period, there should not be any further weakening of the Belfast service. Given that Professor Wood is retiring, and given the inference from the Minister's answer to Mr Wells that recruitment may wait out the stability that will come from the review, how does he guarantee to all and sundry that, in the

interim, there will be surgery and the interventions that people are looking for and need in Belfast? How can that be guaranteed?

Mr Poots: The surgical support needs to come from Dublin in this instance. We have the theatre capacity, the anaesthetists, the nursing team and the cardiologists. Where we lack capacity is in the actual surgeons. That is a matter for the clinical teams to work out as they work together. I think that it is important that we recognise that they have expressed a willingness to support our service, that the final issues will be tied down over the next number of days and that surgery will continue in Belfast in a safe and sustainable way whilst we arrive at a final solution to the issue. So, again, we should view positively any support that we are being given here. I think that it is excellent news that surgeons in Dublin are prepared to support the Belfast service whilst the review is being carried out.

Mr Agnew: I welcome today's statement and congratulate the Children's Heartbeat Trust and the parents on their campaign and on keeping this high on our agenda. The Minister stated quite clearly that parents should not be placed in the position of having to travel overseas with their child, but, later on, he acknowledged that, in some cases, parents will be required to travel to England for their children's surgery. What priority is being given to reducing or, indeed, eradicating the need to transfer children to England for services?

Mr Poots: I think that Mr Agnew needs to recognise the complexity. In 2010-11, 42 children travelled to England; in 2011-12, there were 36; and in 2012-13, there were 34. I would like to see the capacity in Dublin and Belfast being developed, as far as possible, for as many surgeries as possible. However, Members need to understand that the complexity of surgery on a little heart the size of an acorn is absolutely massive and that the skills required to repair those hearts are very extensive, so we need people who do that at a particular level day and daily. In some instances, only surgeons in England will be able to provide that service, and it is really good that we have them to provide that service for us. We should not be disparaging of that in any way, shape or form, because they are providing the best possible service to families. I have to say that the safety that is being delivered is excellent, and the numbers of children who are coming through those complex surgical procedures is really remarkable. I cannot praise highly enough all those who are engaged in that kind of work, whether they are based in Belfast, Dublin or, indeed, mainland Britain.

Mr Givan: I commend the Minister on his determination to resist the pressure placed on him by officialdom by withholding a rushed decision. It may not have been the right one. Will he assure us that officials in his Department and those supporting Minister Reilly will be working to get the solution that we all want in Northern Ireland and the best care for patients?

Mr Poots: I am confident that that will be the case, and I am confident that officials recognise that we will not be pushed around on this issue. It is one thing parents telling you that they would like something to happen. The cardiologists have always been confident that a service could be provided in Belfast. I met Professor Wood and Mr Austin, who were the surgeons, and they were confident that it could be provided in Belfast. I was getting the right messages from not just parents but the clinical teams

that it is achievable. It might be difficult to achieve — that is a different matter — but it is achievable. Therefore, we must do our best to ensure that that is the case and we move heaven and earth to achieve something for our children if at all possible. Everything that we can do to make it happen will be done. That does not guarantee that it will happen, but at least people will have the confidence that some administrator will not say, “We don’t need that service any more; we can provide that elsewhere”. Everything that can be done to maintain the service in Belfast will be done. If we come here in six or seven months’ time and say that the service cannot be provided in Belfast, it will not be because people have not tried their very best to make sure that that is the case.

Matters of the Day

Nelson Mandela

Mr Speaker: Mr Martin McGuinness has been given leave to make a statement on the death of Nelson Mandela, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. If other Members wish to be called, they should do so by continually rising in their places. All Members who wish to make a contribution will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject. Members will know that there will be no points of order and that no other subject will be discussed in the House until this item of business is dealt with. If that is clear, I call Mr Martin McGuinness.

Mr M McGuinness: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Just a short time ago, I rose to say a few words in thanksgiving and appreciation for the life of Father Alec Reid — a man who made an enormous contribution to the success of our peace process. Today, we speak of another individual, who was a world and iconic figure: Nelson Mandela. He was a freedom fighter, a peacemaker and a reconciler. I take this opportunity to express our deepest sympathy and condolences to the people of South Africa, his family, the Government of South Africa and the African National Congress (ANC).

This was a man who, when he left prison, was totally and absolutely devoid of bitterness and hatred. He understood his responsibilities to unite his people against the backdrop of the incredible change that occurred with the ending of apartheid in his country. He was also a man who understood the importance of world peace and wanted to make his own ongoing contribution to the resolution of conflict throughout the world, and that he did in the context of our peace process. I was very privileged to lead a Sinn Féin delegation to Arniston in the Western Cape. An all-party invitation had come from Nelson Mandela. It was the first time that all the parties had been assembled together. I think that all of us benefited from the conversations that took place there, particularly the conversations with him and some of his key negotiators.

He followed that up with continuing support. We had regular visits here from people of the calibre of Cyril Ramaphosa, Valli Moosa and Mac Maharaj. Those people played instrumental and key roles in the evolution of the new South Africa. Cyril had come several times and played a very important role with Father Alec Reid, Reverend Harold Good and former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari in dealing — to the satisfaction, I think, of the overwhelming majority of people — with the whole issue of how the IRA would put arms beyond use.

This was a man who was an incredible supporter of our peace process, and I will be very honoured to represent our Executive and this Assembly at tomorrow’s memorial in South Africa, as is my intention.

Mr Campbell: The people and the nation of South Africa are in mourning as a result of the passing of their first democratically elected president, Nelson Mandela. I had the pleasure of meeting Nelson Mandela on several occasions, and, on a personal level, he was exceptionally friendly, charismatic and helpful as a facilitator, as were all of those whom he put at our disposal. There are some people in Northern Ireland who attempt to equate the issues in South Africa of the past with Northern Ireland of the past. Of course, there has been no comparison

whatsoever. People in Northern Ireland had a vote. The black population in South Africa had no vote. When Nelson Mandela presented himself to the electorate following the new constitution, he received the mandate of over 60% of the population, so he could argue that he did have a mandate from the majority of his population. No one in Northern Ireland who was advocating violence could argue or advocate that that was the case.

There is a danger of trying to gild the lily on Nelson Mandela's passing. We should pay tribute to the man, who, undoubtedly, was an international statesman who rose above the divisions of his homeland. However, in an earlier life, Nelson Mandela, unfortunately, despite the difficulties that there were — and there were horrendously difficult problems in his nation — did engage in acts of terror. When a man moves from terror to peace and from violence to democracy, we should recognise that. We should acknowledge that. The one thing that we should not do is to eulogise his former activities. We have no intention of doing so today, but we acknowledge the man, his presence, his charisma and his attitude to Northern Ireland, where he was prepared to offer the hand of friendship, help and assistance — and he did. We acknowledge his latter-day endeavours in that regard.

Dr McDonnell: From my perspective, Nelson Mandela was one of the world's greatest peacemakers, and he will always be remembered for his great example and enduring spirit of forgiveness and hope. His death has caused global sadness, and there is no doubt that the world has lost a great champion for the rights of the oppressed and an advocate for those without a voice. He did both of those tasks with splendour. He was also a man who influenced change far beyond the confines that others attempted to impose on him.

To my mind, Nelson Mandela was one of the greatest men of the 20th century, and, despite the abuse that he and those associated with him had suffered, he turned the other cheek and continuously sought peace and a peaceful and prosperous future for South Africa when apartheid was ended. As president, he set an example to the world through his tolerance and his efforts to reach out to opponents and former enemies. His powerful gestures around rugby, cricket and football were examples to us all of how to build reconciliation and create trust. After his presidency, well into his 90s, he maintained a dignity, a compassion and a tolerance that we could all learn from.

Nelson Mandela will long be remembered as one of the world's greatest statesmen and he fully deserves that honour. His enduring legacy will be one of hope, even in the most difficult of circumstances, and we should all unite around that sentiment.

1.00 pm

There is so much that I could say in wider tribute to one of the world's greatest statesmen. He did so much for South Africa, for us in Northern Ireland and for the wider world. Suffice it to say that, on behalf of my colleagues and the wider SDLP, I wish to extend heartfelt sympathy and condolences to his family and all the people of South Africa.

Mr Kinahan: It is an honour to be able to speak in memory of Nelson Mandela. When I heard of his death last week, I thought that the very minimum the Assembly would do

was a joint tribute from the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

If you are as young as me, you will remember the Cold War, South Africa and the apartheid that is relevant today and, of course, the Troubles. Few stand out as an icon in the way that Nelson Mandela has.

I have always had a deep interest in Africa: its history, its people and its beauty. However, sadly, I have never had the chance to go to South Africa.

I would like to borrow from 'The Spectator':

"There are three categories of great men: the great and the good, such as ... Churchill and ... Lincoln; the great and the bad, such as Stalin and Hitler; and a third category ... the stuff of folklore. Men in this category are born with a ... grace that transcends the politics of their age."

One of those greats is Nelson Mandela. He was a man with such intelligence and generosity, and with no sign of malice or spite, that he was able to put behind him 27 years of imprisonment and a past in which his people lived in utter poverty with no vote and, in later years, under a tyrannical oppressor.

I do not condone terrorism in any form. Nelson Mandela was a man who was able to resolve the differences between whites and blacks, to pacify armed forces and police and resolve his party's conflicts and other tribal disputes. Importantly, he was a man who was able to forgive, and he was able to lead in a period of national reconciliation, which should be an example to us all. Let us all consider how much better we could conduct ourselves, and let there be national conciliation with no rewriting of history but with generosity and forgiveness. Let us work at the consensus that we envisaged.

I hope that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, in attending the funeral together, will show the world that they intend to follow his example. Nelson Mandela, thank you.

Mr Ford: On behalf of my party colleagues, I send our sympathy to the people of South Africa and, most particularly, to the family and friends of the man they called Madiba.

There is absolutely no doubt that Nelson Mandela stood far beyond most of us who attain political office. He was not just a South African statesman, he was a world statesman and one of the defining figures of the 20th century. His roots were those of an ordinary South African. Born in a small hut, he used his abilities to train as a lawyer, and he was able to carry through a vision for a different kind of South Africa. Indeed, when he stood trial for treason, his speech from the dock, whatever one might think of the circumstances in which he was there, was one of the most powerful statements of the rights of man that has been heard in any quarter in any part of the world in the past half century. It was a fantastic statement of the right, not just of his people but of all people, to live in peace.

After 27 years of incarceration, which included the dreadful conditions of Robben Island, Nelson Mandela was able to come out as a man whose every subsequent word and action was a commitment to peace, reconciliation and the foundation of the rainbow nation. It is doubtful whether South African would have gone through that transition as well as it has without his leadership.

The sporting analogy has been referred to already, and, for some of us, one of the iconic images was the rather diminutive figure of the president hugging the large Afrikaners, all wearing Springbok shirts after they won the rugby World Cup. If ever there was a great display of reconciliation and practicality between those who had been the oppressor and the leader of the oppressed, that was it.

I will read one quote from him that I picked up recently:

“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

Perhaps that is a lesson for this society today given the talks that are going on at the moment.

Mr McCallister: At the outset, on behalf of my party and party colleague, I want to express our sympathies and say that our thoughts are with the family, friends and, indeed, all who knew Nelson Mandela personally. All of us have grown up watching, effectively, someone who has become an iconic figure and the work that he has been involved in. As a fairly young man, I remember watching, on a Sunday afternoon on 11 February 1990, the images of Nelson Mandela walking free from prison, and I was almost waiting expectantly to see what he even looked like as we had only been fit to view an image from the 1960s or a photo from some 27 years earlier.

Nelson Mandela said:

“As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison.”

The key things when looking at Nelson Mandela’s life are that he did not deny all his past and what he was involved in, and he did not hold any bitterness or rancour against anyone because of what he suffered and endured during the 27 years in prison. While on holiday in South Africa a number of years ago, I had the privilege of visiting Robben Island, and it is a huge example to us all that he could spend so long in a very small cell doing very hard labour for such a lengthy period of time yet leave all the bitterness and rancour behind when he left those conditions.

The legacy that Mr Mandela has left us is particularly applicable here in Northern Ireland, and the challenge for all of us in the Chamber is this: do we genuinely want to leave the bitterness and hatred behind or are we content to live in the past and condemn the people of Northern Ireland to do the same?

Mr Allister: Every death is sad, and grieving families are entitled to expect our condolences. Nelson Mandela was blessed with a very long life that was drawn to a close by natural causes, something that cannot be said about the many victims of his ANC or about the many victims of the IRA that his ANC so avidly supported. That is a perspective and reality that needs to be spoken and remembered, particularly given the uncritical tsunami of hysteria that there has been following the death of Nelson Mandela.

Mr McNarry: UKIP’s leader Nigel Farage said:

“Mandela’s ability to forgive those who did him harm and fight for freedom will ensure he remains in our hearts and with future generations.”

In adding to that, I would say that Nelson Mandela belongs to South Africa. He is their son whom they mourn with a deep sense of loss mixed with pride in the man who gave them and that country a place in democratic society. Apartheid was and is the worst form of racial and cultural discrimination. Playing any role in its outworkings demonstrated the appalling contours of man’s inhumanity to man. Mandela gave the world the best of reasons to outlaw apartheid and gave South Africa a way of practising that. Freedom in the form of dignity, free speech and free access to celebrate a tradition and a culture has a place in South Africa and does so here. However, toleration and respect has not in all cases or all places, including this one, been secured. Mandela’s role as a freedom fighter was unique to him and South Africa. There are not and there cannot be comparisons to be made elsewhere, especially in this place.

To Mandela, I say this on behalf of UKIP: may he rest in peace. To Martin McGuinness, who has since left the Chamber, I say this: you do not represent me. Mr Speaker, I do not want him representing me at Nelson Mandela’s funeral.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is a great honour to be able to pay tribute to one of the most remarkable and inspiring leaders of our time. I want to bring a different perspective to the tributes that have been paid today, given that I am the only person here who was not born when Mandela was finally released from prison.

I have no memories of the “Free Mandela” movement or the agitation around apartheid. For as long as I have been alive, South Africa has been a democratic, multicultural country built on the work of the ANC and leaders such as Nelson Mandela. As a young republican, I am very proud of our party’s affinity with the ANC and Mandela. ANC members are regular visitors to the Sinn Féin ard fheis. Although others in the Chamber were reluctant to stand shoulder to shoulder with the South African people and their struggle, we have always been proud of our unity in struggle.

Throughout my education and from the media, I have been presented with the image of Mandela as a peacemaker and a statesman. The struggle that he carried is too often overlooked. What struck me most about Mandela was his never-ending devotion to what is right and his love of his country and its people. There are many lessons for our young people to take from his extraordinary life. He was committed to changing South Africa for the better, and for all people, especially women. He set about creating a constitution that gave women in South Africa one of the most comprehensive sets of rights in the world, designed to protect them from discrimination and violence. His desire to advance women’s liberation has inspired, and always will inspire, young women around the world as we continue to fight for equality.

We should take a moment to remember his family. The pain that he endured was not felt by him alone. His family shared the burden. It is important that all of us remember that the work of political activists is only ever possible with family support.

Rightly or wrongly, society has elevated Mandela to a demigod, somehow different from the rest of us. We must remember that he was only human. He took extraordinary action in extraordinary times. He truly lived by his own words:

“There is no passion to be found playing small — in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living.”

There is no doubt that we have lost a truly incredible leader. The best way in which we can honour his life and his example is by emulating the passion that he had for human rights, education and equality. One thing is for sure: there are not nearly enough people in our world like Nelson Mandela.

Mr Eastwood: I am glad to have the opportunity to add my words of condolence to the family of Nelson Mandela and the people of South Africa, who saw him as the nation's father. Nelson Mandela was an inspiration to many people across the world. The great work that people in this country did has to be remembered, whether it was that of political leaders such as John Hume or that of anti-apartheid campaigners such as the Dunnes Stores strikers. The impact that those people, and people across the world, had in bringing international pressure to bear on the South African regime was very important indeed.

Nelson Mandela led his country to democracy. He did so with real humility and dignity. He was able to banish bitterness from a very volatile situation and made “forgiveness” the key word in developing the rainbow nation. His long walk to freedom has finally come to an end, but, for many others, the inspiration and legacy that he leaves in the fight for democratic struggle, justice and peace will be felt for many years to come.

1.15 pm

Smithwick Report

Mr Speaker: Mr Paul Givan has been given leave to make a statement on the findings of the Smithwick report, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. Once again, I remind Members that, if they want to be called, they should continually rise in their place. Members will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr Givan: The inquiry that Justice Peter Smithwick held was into the ambush of two RUC officers by the Provisional IRA on 20 March 1989 after they had attended a meeting in Dundalk garda station. Of the two officers, Chief Superintendent Harry Breen had been highly decorated for his service to the RUC and was highly respected by his colleagues. Superintendent Bob Buchanan served in Lisburn, in my constituency, as a chief inspector. He, too, was highly respected in his community. A devout Christian, he was also a lay preacher in his church.

After an exhaustive process, Justice Peter Smithwick has found there to have been collusion between members of an Garda Síochána and members of the Provisional IRA in the murder of those two officers. His report found a general culture that existed and still exists among the gardaí where loyalty to the force is more highly regarded than honesty. That should worry all of us. In his dismissal of that, Garda Commissioner, Mr Callinan, does not deal appropriately with the issue. The report has clear challenges for the leadership of an Garda Síochána about how it failed to handle concerns about rogue officers and the culture of the organisation, which, Judge Smithwick says, prevails to this day. That culture was manifested at the tribunal by the unprecedented attack on evidence provided by the PSNI through Assistant Chief Constable Drew Harris, when the legal representatives of the commissioner said that it was “nonsense on stilts” and that he had paraded his rank before the tribunal. The judge did not think so, the Chief Constable does not think so and the Garda Commissioner now needs to do more than just explain this outburst by his legal representatives.

The Irish Government, in their attempts to rush proceedings through arbitrary deadlines, did not help, and Judge Smithwick was rightly resilient in resisting that pressure. Any process needs to deal further with the role of the Irish Government in other cases, not just that of Lord Justice and Lady Gibson but that of the Hanna family, where there are strong suspicions of collusion. They also need to look at the role that the Irish Government played under Jack Lynch in the infancy of the Provisional IRA movement in arming, assisting and facilitating it; the Irish Government's refusal in over 90% of cases to extradite those whom the UK Government sought for terrorist activities; and their failure to protect the border, leaving the IRA able to carry out its attacks and providing it with a safe haven.

Let us remember that the people who carried this out were those in the IRA. They were people who, when one officer held up a white handkerchief pleading surrender, shot and brutally murdered him.

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

Mr Givan: Those were the actions not of an army doing its duty but of terrorists and those in that organisation that Gerry Adams should be ashamed of.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. After the Weston Park talks in 2001, Canadian Judge Peter Cory was asked to examine the case for public inquiries into the killing of Pat Finucane, Robert Hamill, Rosemary Nelson, Billy Wright, Judge Gibson and his wife, RUC Chief Superintendent Harry Breen and RUC Superintendent Robert Buchanan. Cory worked diligently and, in 2003, handed his reports over to the two Governments. He concluded that there was no basis for proceeding with an inquiry into the deaths of Judge Gibson and his wife. I think that some of the underlying reasons for that have already been placed in the public domain. Sinn Féin supported the establishment of the inquiries as he recommended, including Smithwick, and we did so on the basis that families had the right to full disclosure of all relevant information.

Judge Smithwick concluded that, although the tribunal has not uncovered direct evidence of collusion, on the balance of probability some form of collusion occurred. We await the formal and considered response of the police services on both sides of the border, which, I think, is proper. That will be due process taking its course. People should make up their mind on the conclusions by reading the full report: I suspect that some of the commentary that we have heard already comes from people who have not had the benefit of reading the report in detail. Indeed, it takes some time to do so, because it is quite a bulky report. However, it is already clear that what Judge Smithwick describes as collusion is very different in form and scale from the collusion that occurred in the North. During 30 years of protracted and violent conflict on our streets, the British state was directly responsible for structured, institutionalised and coordinated collusion that led to the deaths of hundreds of citizens, including those killed in the Dublin, Monaghan and Dundalk bombs and by the murderous activities of the notorious Glenanne gang, which killed over 100 people in the so-called murder triangle, not to mention the role of the British Army murder squad, the MRF. To this day, the British Government refuse to hand over the vital information on these events.

It is also important to note that, while the Irish Government have fulfilled their commitment under Weston Park — the parties in the Chamber were involved there, and I was part of my party's delegation — the British Government are in clear breach of their commitments and have refused to establish an inquiry into the murder of human rights lawyer Pat Finucane. The Irish Government, with support from the Assembly, should continue to pressurise the British Government to honour their Weston Park commitments and set up the promised public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane.

Finally, Sinn Féin believes that there needs to be an effective truth recovery process for dealing with all legacy issues, which cause such difficulties in the party dynamics in this place. We have repeatedly called on the British and Irish Governments —

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

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: — to invite a reputable and independent international body to establish an independent international truth commission. We repeat that call today.

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the opportunity to comment on this matter of the day. I welcome the publication of the

Smithwick report, and I congratulate Judge Smithwick on his robust independence during a very lengthy inquiry process. I am also mindful of the Breen family and the Buchanan family. They have shown great dignity throughout what must have been a very difficult period and in the 24 years since the murder of their loved ones. I pay tribute to their dignity. I also pay tribute to the professionalism of their legal representation.

Unfortunately, it is no surprise that Sinn Féin has sought to cast cold water on the importance of the report, but it is still unbelievably remarkable how deliberately insensitive Sinn Féin has been, no one more so than Gerry Adams. Despite the lows that he has reached in his career, he has somehow managed to be even more insensitive, even in a week when so many have discussed the spirit of generosity displayed by Nelson Mandela. We have reflected on the clearly painful process that South Africa embarked on, but at least there was a willingness to tell the truth there. When we read the Smithwick report, we see that, even when amnesties were secured by the IRA, its members were absolutely incapable of telling the truth. Judge Smithwick is rightly scathing of their engagement. We know about Mr Adams's credibility in respect of honesty. We also know that, at the Saville tribunal, the deputy First Minister made it clear that there were questions to which he would provide no answer.

This report has firmly established Garda collusion on a level yet to be quantified. We simply do not know whether we are dealing with one mole or more. One set of murders has been investigated, and collusion has been established. Many more murders — some 160 — in that area were of a cross-border nature, including those of countless members of the security forces and private citizens like those who were caught up and cruelly murdered in Kingsmill and other incidents. We need to know more about that. The immediate apology from the Republic is welcome, but it should be only a first step in seeking to establish how deep the collusion ran and how high up the chain of command it ran. Otherwise, this is not enough.

Mrs D Kelly: Less than a week after the publication of a 1,600-plus page report, I do not think that we will do justice to its findings and conclusions in such a short time. However, as Mr Kennedy stated, we have to be very mindful of the families and, in particular, their search for truth. Many families right across the North, as we know, will not see justice, but there is a prevailing demand for truth recovery from victims' organisations and individuals who were victimised over the years.

We also have to be very mindful of those who stood against terrorists, North and South. Both police services lost colleagues at the hands of those who would seek to murder and maim their fellow Irishmen and Irishwomen. The allegations of collusion are a great slur on those organisations. We heard a very quick response from the Southern Government to the report, and I note that they will study it in detail. There are, however, three recommendations that have a particular resonance for the police and the gardaí on cooperation and the sharing of intelligence. I know that both police chiefs and Justice Ministers will meet to discuss the relevance of those recommendations at an early date over the coming weeks.

Mitchel McLaughlin is correct in saying that there is an outstanding need for an inquiry into the death of Pat Finucane. That is a promise broken by the British

Government. No doubt, many international commentators will consider how the British have failed to live up to their commitments.

I am very mindful that the Haass/O'Sullivan talks will intensify over the coming days and of the needs of victims. One of the final recommendations of the report was that victims' needs must be front and centre. If there is to be justice in any policing system, that has to be the case. I urge those involved in the talks to bear that in mind. This is the best opportunity that we will have to establish a form of truth recovery.

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

Mrs D Kelly: However, as Mr Kennedy and others have stated, that will require all to tell the truth, and it is unfortunate — if that be the right word — that the IRA frustrated the Smithwick tribunal and did not make themselves available for cross-examination. Let us hope that, if it makes a commitment to the Haass/O'Sullivan talks, we will see a different set of principles.

Mr Ford: First, I repeat my sympathies to the Breen and Buchanan families. There is absolutely no doubt that Chief Superintendent Breen and Superintendent Buchanan were dedicated police officers doing their duty in the fight against crime and terrorism, and they suffered for the work that they were doing. There is no doubt that their families suffered grievously because of those dreadful murders, and they continue to suffer. The way in which they have shown forbearance and dignity, even in their response to the report, is an example to us all.

On behalf of my party, I welcome the very speedy response made by the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and the Minister for Justice and Equality, in particular the absolute and unqualified apology for any failings of the Irish state or its agencies. That stands in contrast to what can be the inclination when difficulties emerge in all kinds of ways.

Mrs Kelly has already referred to it, so, although it is not quite my role to speak as Minister on a matter of the day, I can confirm that I had several informal discussions on this issue with Alan Shatter last week. He and I will meet formally with the Garda Commissioner and the Chief Constable of the PSNI next week to consider how the issue can be taken further forward. It is absolutely clear that we need to address the findings of the Smithwick tribunal. We need to ensure that there is the best possible cooperation and joined-up approach to the fight against terrorism.

The public position of the Irish Government stands in very significant contrast to what were outrageous comments by the Sinn Féin TDs from Louth and Donegal, Gerry Adams and Pádraig Mac Lochlainn. The suggestion that the two officers doing their duty were somehow responsible for their own death is a disgusting slur on the honourable trade that they had and the way in which they sought to protect the community. It is important that we address the issue highlighted by Mr Givan of a culture in organisations of people seeking to stick up for their colleagues, rather than necessarily addressing the truth. I suggest that that culture is not unique to an Garda Síochána, but it is an issue that must be addressed by the two Departments and the two police services if we are to maximise cooperation and build on the good position that we are in now. However, we should remember that we have to do that because of the way that Judge Smithwick, in an excellent report, has

highlighted the problems of the 1980s and the loss that this society suffered with the murder of the two officers.

1.30 pm

Mr B McCrea: On behalf of NI21, I offer condolences to the families of Breen and Buchanan. I would also like to place on record our thanks for the service that they gave our community.

Judge Smithwick has spent eight long years trying to unravel what went on, and the question in front of all of us is, "Did it actually make any difference?". Have we got to the whole truth? Have the families got justice? Is this something that will make our place a better place? I have to say that I am not sure that the Smithwick report will do any more than give us a call for more inquiries. Yet, the truth is that we cannot do inquiries of this level for every victim, and, even if we did, we would not get the truth. The very point that has been made by the previous Member about the disgraceful attitude of those who know about things but will not speak out shows that we will not get answers when we go down this route. From studying, at some length, the Smithwick report, it is apparent to me that, if we insist on going back through the past and having rancorous debates and if we ignore the lesson that came from the earlier debate on Nelson Mandela, Northern Ireland will have no future. We will be stuck in the past.

I will conclude by saying a committed "Thank you" to the servants of the state who did their best but with a plea to the people of Northern Ireland to put the past behind them, to accept that bad things were done and to move forward and build a future that we can all be proud of.

Mr Allister: The Smithwick report was a forthright exposé of the chilling fact that a mole in the gardaí who was in cooperation with the murderous IRA led to the killing of the two most senior officers to lose their life in Northern Ireland. That is as chilling as it is shocking, but it raises the question of what other episodes of collusion there were. That arises in the context of the Republic of Ireland having spawned and armed the Provisional IRA, of their repeated brazen thwarting of extradition over the years and of the porous border that they maintained to the facilitation of the IRA campaign. So, quite apart from these specific incidents, there is much yet to be apologised for by the Republic of Ireland.

The second very significant part of Smithwick was its exposé of the political expediency that overshadowed a number of these matters. The finding that, because of political expediency, there was denial, sadly both North and South, about the existence of a mole was itself a timely finding, and, again, it raises the question "How many times over the years did that political expediency play its hand in conning and deceiving as to what was going on?" I must say that I was most disappointed by our Justice Minister's mealy-mouthed response last Friday when he tried to downplay the findings of collusion with a line the essence of which was "Well, you know, there are, as it were, bad apples in every large organisation". Was that another example of political expediency kicking in to avoid facing up to and to help deny the realities that were found?

Then, of course, we had the disgusting comments from the disgusting Mr Adams, suggesting that these men had only themselves to blame and, indeed, the IRA had a duty to murder them. That was shameful.

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

Mr Allister: I will finish with this: is this the only opportunity that the House will have to debate this important matter? Surely, we should find time for a proper debate on these issues.

Mr Speaker: Time is gone.

Mr McNarry: It is not difficult to feel someone else's hurt and pain, and, today, the House must speak out and let our feelings on this issue be known. The Breen and Buchanan families have a verified, beyond doubt report on the truth, and it is their truth. It says that, in all probability, the cause of their loved ones' savage murder by Provo assassins was aided by the shameful collusion of members of Garda Síochána. Some people in here would not know the truth if it jumped up and smacked them in the face. Well, Smithwick's truths have jumped up and hit where the truth is about what was supported then in the killing fields between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Yet, as has been alluded to, Sinn Féin still wriggles with lamentable crassness away from acknowledging the truth, which was that the Provos, their political wing and members of Garda Síochána were, at a time, one and the same thing.

Mr Breen and Mr Buchanan were men dedicated to protecting and saving lives. It was their killers who chose the opposite way, because they were dedicated to taking lives. So, what we need to know now, without equivocation, is how commonplace collusion was between the gardaí and the Provos. It is asking too much to expect victims to believe that the Smithwick findings began and ended with one or two so-called rogue guards. I call on the Taoiseach to publicly answer this question: did gardaí collusion begin and end with the killing of Mr Breen and Mr Buchanan? If not, what was the full extent of guards working with Provo terrorists? Fittingly, today, following what we have seen this past couple of weeks, is it the case that, in all probability, collusion extends today to dissident Provos?

Mr Hussey: I begin by paying tribute to all those in the Royal Ulster Constabulary and an Garda Síochána who gave their life in the service of their country. I had the honour of serving with Superintendent Bob Buchanan. A nicer man you could not have met. He presented me with my RUC service medal, which was a very proud moment for me. Clearly, the man was a strong Christian, and he had strong Christian ethics. All reports indicate that Chief Superintendent Breen was a true gentleman. I was not going to speak on the issue, until Mr McLaughlin spoke. At no point did he apologise for the slur that was put on those two brave men by Mr Adams, who was never in the IRA. Mr Adams made comments that were beneath contempt, and Sinn Féin should apologise for them. He said that the IRA was right to murder those police officers.

Everybody knew that the police officers who travelled between the North and South were not allowed to carry their firearms, so they were murdered in cold blood. It was a shoot-to-kill policy by the IRA. They ambushed two senior police officers and murdered them in cold blood. No Sinn Féin Member can stand up and say anything different. On reading the report, one learns the disgusting way in which they killed Chief Superintendent Breen. I will not reopen the wounds of that family, but, if I were you sitting in the Benches over there, I would go home tonight and hang my head in shame. Not one inch of Ireland was worth what happened to those two very brave men.

There was collusion between an Garda Síochána and the IRA, and there was an act of cold-blooded murder in south Armagh. That is what happened. That is the horrible truth, and, for that, Sinn Féin should apologise. That party calls on everybody and their granny to apologise for what happened in Ireland from 1690 to God knows when. This happened on your watch. Your leader is a disgrace. Your president should resign. You should get rid of him as soon as possible. The man is a disgrace. I praise Chief Superintendent Breen and Superintendent Bob Buchanan, men who were proud to wear the uniform of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and who served this community.

Judge Smithwick has caught you out, and I thank him for his work.

Mr Craig: It is with great sadness that we talk about the Smithwick tribunal today at all. We need to bear in mind the two families in question: the family of Chief Superintendent Harry Breen and that of Superintendent Bob Buchanan. One thing that struck me, which was referred to earlier and about which I am not at all surprised, is that not only could Sinn Féin not apologise for what Gerry Adams said about the two families, its members could not even bring themselves to mention their names today. Maybe the fact that they cannot even mention the families connected with the judgement says something about their conscience on the matter.

I want to read from the Breen family statement, in which Judge Smithwick's report is described as:

"a truly remarkable exposé and indictment of wrongdoing and collusion with terrorists ... within An Garda Síochána".

That was the clear outcome of the report and what it clearly stated. Others in the House need to take that on board. It goes to the heart of the issue in Garda Síochána itself, which is how its members think, the mentality of the force: you do not say anything bad about it or your colleagues, and you do not look for wrongdoing in that force. I think that the exact opposite is true of the PSNI in Northern Ireland. I do not want to hear anyone compare the RUC, the PSNI or any force in Northern Ireland with the Garda Síochána. Some people came pretty close to doing that in the House today, which is disgraceful.

I read the report with great interest and noted what the lawyers and barristers acting on behalf of the Garda Síochána said about ACC Drew Harris's evidence. As stated earlier, they said that it was nonsense and went on to say, "It is nonsense upon stilts".

They must have been pretty strong stilts because it proved to be absolutely true. The commissioner of the Garda Síochána owes the Chief Constable and the PSNI an apology for what his legal representatives said. I repeat my call for him to apologise in person to the Chief Constable.

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. Time has run out for that matter of the day. As we move on to the next one, I remind Members to be mindful that Question Time is at 2.00 pm. I do not want to interrupt Members, but this matter of the day must end before 2.00 pm.

Gun Attacks: PSNI Officers

Mr Speaker: Mr Nelson McCausland has been given leave to make a statement on the gun attacks on the PSNI which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24.

Mr McCausland: On Thursday night, a republican gunman in Ardoyne opened fire on police officers who were driving up Crumlin Road past the Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church. The terrorists were able to construct a firing platform in Ardoyne, and ten shots were fired from a Kalashnikov rifle. The vehicles were hit, but, thankfully, none of the police officers was killed or injured. Nevertheless, that was attempted murder and a reckless attack that could also have endangered the life of members of the public.

The following night, several shots were fired at police officers on the Suffolk Road in west Belfast. Again, that was an attempt to murder police officers, but, thankfully, no one was killed or injured.

1.45 pm

The murder or attempted murder of police officers is always wrong. It was wrong in the past, when the Provisional IRA murdered police officers in the RUC, and it is wrong today when the attacks are carried out by any of the smaller republican terrorist organisations.

There was also a grotesque irony about the Crumlin Road attack in that it was carried out outside the grounds of Holy Cross. Dissident republicans object to the behaviour of others outside a Roman Catholic church but seem to have no qualms about perpetrating murder outside a Roman Catholic church. Indeed, of course, in the past, the Provisional IRA murdered people who were going to worship in a Roman Catholic church. However, it is a thoroughly perverse sort of mind that can protest about music and, at the same time, perpetrate and perpetuate murder.

There has been an upsurge in republican terrorist activity. Recently, the Assembly noted the car bomb attack in the centre of Belfast. The vehicle used in that terrorist operation was hijacked in Ardoyne. We can speculate about the reasons for the increased level of terrorist activity and there may even be something of an element of competition between the various dissident terrorist groups. However, the one thing that is absolutely sure and certain is that those who plan or carry out such acts of terrorism must be identified, brought before the courts and put behind bars where they thoroughly deserve to be.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I condemn the attacks that the Member has just enumerated. I am from North Belfast and I represent North Belfast, and the attack on the Crumlin Road, outside Holy Cross chapel, was particularly dangerous. We could be standing here today talking about the deaths of police officers, but thankfully we are not.

The people involved in these attacks have minimal support, if any, for doing what they did. They are completely rejected by the people of Ardoyne and, indeed, the people of Lenadoon and Suffolk and by the whole community across the board. It should be said that, in the aftermath of the Crumlin Road attack, not only could we have been dealing with the deaths of police officers but it was done in the proximity of an interface. Clearly, although the target was police officers, there was also a secondary attempt to

raise tensions and bring loyalist paramilitaries into the fray. I have listened to some unionists and loyalists who have spoken on the matter and have said that they will resist that entirely.

The issue here is to make sure that they cannot bring us back to the past. Everybody needs to be involved in making sure that that does not occur. Again, let me condemn these attacks and assure Members that the people who vote for us all in the House are absolutely and entirely against such attacks.

Mr A Maginness: I join my Assembly colleagues in condemning these cowardly and reckless attacks in Belfast on the PSNI. I endorse what Mr Kelly has said; these attacks were reckless also because they could have involved the injury or death of civilians who, perhaps, would have been going about their lawful business in both areas. However, they were also provocative attacks, which were designed deliberately to raise tensions in the city of Belfast. We have tensions in this city and we do not want to excite further tensions. We want to lower tensions and we want to bring about peace in this city.

It should also be said that these attacks arise against a background in which our politics are not particularly good. We need to improve our politics and make them better so that those who may support these groups see that, in fact, there is an alternative way and that violence cannot achieve anything in this society. That has been proven in the past. If we want to do something positive, we make our politics positive. We have already referred to the legacy of Nelson Mandela. What Mandela did, above all, was show a spirit of generosity and a spirit of forgiveness to those who opposed him and his people. We should learn from that and show generosity and a spirit of forgiveness to one another. If we develop that spirit of generosity and forgiveness, we can transform the atmosphere and, I believe, reduce these deadly attacks. I hope that we can improve the situation here and that, with the assistance of the whole House in united condemnation, we can send a very firm and powerful message to those who perpetrated the attacks in Belfast.

Mr Hussey: Only by the will of God, I suppose, we are not standing here today to talk about the death of a police officer. In 1977, I joined the Royal Ulster Constabulary and had to wear a flak jacket, carry a sidearm and travel in an armoured vehicle. Where are we today? Police officers have to wear flak jackets and travel in armoured vehicles. That is the sad reality of where we are.

Those people who used high-velocity firearms are not heroes. They are cowards. I have said this before and I say it again: they are cowards, because they fire shots from a brave distance away in an attempt to murder police officers or any other individual who happens to be in the area and in their line of fire. Where do they get those firearms from? We understand that they are AK-47-type guns. They are not Kalashnikovs, but they are that type of gun and have probably been obtained from eastern Europe. From where do they get those weapons, and how do they get them into Northern Ireland? They are bringing them into Northern Ireland for no other reason than to murder and cause mayhem.

If they murder a police officer, what will they gain by that? The public will be horrified, but what will be gained? We need people to stand up and say, "No, we do not want to

return to the days when police officers had to wear flak jackets and travel in armoured vehicles". People must give evidence to the police. The legal police service in Northern Ireland is the Police Service of Northern Ireland. No civilised society wants to see its police officers shot in the street. Nobody joins the police to get shot. People join the police to serve their community.

I condemn these cowards outright. I have said before, and I say again, that not one inch of Irish soil is worth the murder of anybody. These cowards must be brought to account and before the courts. The only way in which that can be done is with the support of the people. We all know that the majority of people do not support terrorists of any kind, regardless of their religious or political background. I therefore urge the public to hand in those people as quickly as possible, because before Christmas, the supposed season of goodwill, I do not want to see us standing here condemning the murder of a police officer.

Dr Farry: I join other Members in condemning the attacks on the police. They are a reminder of the ongoing threat that still pervades our society against the whole community but particularly the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the other services and agencies that are involved in public protection.

We can take some degree of comfort from the fact that there is near-universal condemnation of these attacks on the police from right across the community and that they are being rejected by those who are involved in democratic politics. However, it is important that we acknowledge that there are people out there, particularly at night-time, who are seeking to protect the whole community. Arising from that, there has to be a challenge to us all to cooperate with the police, to acknowledge the risks that they are taking on our behalf and, through our own actions and the way in which we respond to other challenges that may exist on the streets, not to make things any more difficult for them than would be normal in any society.

So, we need to be clear in the Assembly that we are standing up for the rule of law across the board, without qualifications or inconsistencies, and that we are giving the police our full support unambiguously for the actions that they are taking on behalf of the community. We need to maintain our resolve as the democratically elected people of Northern Ireland that we will make our politics work and send out a strong message that we reject the use of violence, which has no place in this society, not that it ever had. We need to make quite clear through our actions as MLAs our ability to deliver on behalf of all the people of Northern Ireland the idea that democracy and the rule of law are the only way forward for this society.

Mr Humphrey: As a Member for North Belfast, I condemn the attacks on the police on the Crumlin Road on Thursday night and in Suffolk on Friday night. They were the latest in a number of criminal and evil actions of murderous intent over the past number of months to try to kill police officers.

Going back to July last year, automatic guns were fired from Brompton Park at police officers to try to murder them; a viable device was placed at a garage in Twaddell Avenue; there was a pipe bomb beside Forth River Primary School and Forth River Park on the Ballygomartin Road; an under-car pipe bomb that fell off a car was found in Ballymagarry Lane; and a rocket launcher was found close to two primary schools in Springmartin. We raised

that matter in the House. Shots were fired in July, and a blast bomb was thrown in Ardoyne.

Therefore, those people are involved in a clear programme across north and west Belfast to try to murder innocent people, including police officers. They have complete disregard for life and the community that I represent. There have been in the region of 17 bomb attacks and hoaxes in recent months, largely on police officers. The bomb on Victoria Street could have been catastrophic to this city and its economy.

It is very clear that the police need the community's support to bring those people to justice. That community support is vital. As a representative for North Belfast, I have to say that, at this stage, there needs to be more covert and overt police operations. We need to have the police actively involved in pursuing those people, and the security services need to be involved on a wider scale in apprehending those criminals, who have an evil agenda.

I appeal to those who would set their face against the full extension of the National Crime Agency to Northern Ireland to reconsider their position. Our police force, communities and people are being exposed to increasing levels of evil, and it is clear that every tool that can be used by the police and security services to bring those people to book should be used.

This evil — it is evil — needs to stop. Dissident activity is wrong, as was the activity of the IRA during its campaign. We as a community must unite, going right across from political people to community people to those who are actively on the ground, to show very clearly that their evil intentions, criminal activity and murderous intention will not succeed.

The people of Northern Ireland will not be bombed or shot into some sort of Thirty-two County Ireland, as they were not in the past. We need to move forward and to have democracy seen to be working. Those who continually attack the political process and the institutions should remember this: this is providing succour for those who would see the political process in Northern Ireland as having failed.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

I call Mr Basil McCrea, who has about one minute.

Mr B McCrea: Mr Speaker, Northern Ireland stands at the precipice. I have one minute to say that the public may hope that this is an aberration and that these things will not carry on. However, they are wrong. The very situation for peace that they hope for at this time of Christmas will not happen. I fear for the fate of the Haass talks. I fear that, if they fail, we will plunge ourselves back into the abyss after the new year and that this is only a foretaste of what is to come. Whenever people in the Chamber stand up and ask for friendship, demand action or in other ways implore people to do things, they must realise that it is their responsibility and that we are in clear and present danger.

Mr Speaker: We are very close to Question Time, so I ask the House to take its ease.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Environment

Recycling: Packaging

1. **Ms Brown** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the progress made by his Department and the waste and resources action programme to optimise packaging design and recyclability. (AQO 5190/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): My Department's recently published waste management strategy includes higher targets for the recovery and recycling of packaging waste and highlights the contribution of voluntary agreements and the incorporation of eco-design in delivering resource efficiency.

New recycling targets for the different packaging waste streams were introduced in January this year. Meeting those targets will equate to an overall packaging recycling rate of 72.7% by 2017, which is significantly above the minimum recycling target set out in the EU packaging directive.

The Courtauld commitment, which is managed by the waste and resources action programme (WRAP), is a voluntary agreement between government and the retail grocery and manufacturing sectors that is aimed at improving resource efficiency and reducing the carbon and wider environmental impact through increased prevention of food and packaging waste.

The second phase of the commitment, which ran from 2010 to 2012, resulted in a 10% reduction in the carbon impact of grocery packaging. Traditional grocery product and packaging waste in the supply chain was reduced by 7.4%. The third phase of the commitment, which commenced in May 2013 and will run until 2015, places further emphasis on the reduction of weight and the carbon impact of grocery product and packaging waste.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for his answer. We are all aware — the females amongst us will certainly be very aware of this — of the waste from items in our grocery shop that goes straight into the various bins as soon as we get home. There is certainly merit in the argument for multi-trip packaging and product reformulation. Therefore, will the Minister outline when he will be in a position to issue guidance to supply chains on the increased use of refillable bags or the need to make better volumetric use of packaging?

Mr Durkan: I thank Ms Brown, the Deputy Chair of the Committee, for her supplementary question. This is, indeed, an issue of great importance, and it is one that we in the House all have a role in addressing, particularly as we move into Christmas, which is a time when there is a lot more waste, be it through packaging, wrapping or gift bags. I take this opportunity to put a message out there to people about the need to minimise such unnecessary waste packaging at this time.

As I said, I recently published the waste management strategy for Northern Ireland, 'Delivering Resource Efficiency'. It aims to set the direction towards using waste as a resource more efficiently and to make it a key element in developing a low-carbon circular economy. Through the Rethink Waste programme, my Department provides a range of guidance and, indeed, incentives to promote waste prevention, including around reuse and increased levels of recycling. Those include the provision of financial assistance, technical advice, communications and educational resources across the full range of stakeholders, from the individual to community groups to schools and, most importantly, to business. In the past four years, over £10 million from the Rethink Waste fund has been allocated to over 100 projects for initiatives that boost waste prevention and recycling.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I neglected to tell Members that questions 8 and 13 have been withdrawn.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. What discussions on the issue has the Minister had with large retailers, and what cooperation have they given to the Department to try to address it?

Mr Durkan: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a cheist. Déanfaidh mé mo dhícheall freagra a thabhairt uirthi. I thank the Member for his question, which I will do my best to answer. Quite a lot of work has been done with small and large retailers by my Department, primarily through WRAP. I am sure that the Member, as his party's environment spokesperson, is familiar with that organisation. As recently as Friday, I spoke to people from Sainsbury's in my local Derry store about the importance of not just in tackling packaging waste, but food waste. I am aware of the work that has been done by other large retail chains on that issue. They are keen to tell me, as Minister, departmental officials, the public and, indeed, other businesses that they see real benefits in reducing waste. Obviously, they see the environmental benefits that we all want to see. However, they also see the benefit to their business not just in cost reduction but in PR and the fact that they can point to corporate responsibility and show that, the greener they are, maybe the better business they will do.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his answers. Recyclability is a very important issue. One element of that is the reuse of carrier bags. I ask the Minister for his assessment of the impact of the carrier bag levy in promoting the reuse of carrier bags.

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Maginness for his question. The 5p single-use carrier bag levy has dramatically reduced the number of single-use carrier bags dispensed since its introduction in April 2013. Two recent surveys — one conducted in June and one more recently in October — suggest that around half of shoppers are now frequently reusing carrier bags. Although that is extremely encouraging, there is clearly still a lot of room for improvement. Applying a 5p levy to low-cost reusable bags should help significantly reduce unnecessary purchases of those bags, encourage even higher levels of reuse and generate even more substantial environmental benefit.

Taxi Operator's Licence: Affiliation

2. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the actions he is taking to assist taxi drivers who are currently experiencing financial uncertainty as a result of delays to the implementation of changes relating to affiliations and operator licences. (AQO 5191/11-15)

Mr Durkan: This issue was recently brought to my attention, and I instructed the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) to undertake a review of the process for affiliating drivers and vehicles to a taxi operator licence. That review has now been completed, and I am pleased to be able to advise that an amended improved process has been agreed and will be implemented within the next couple of weeks. The new process will significantly reduce turnaround times for affiliating taxi drivers and vehicles to taxi operator licences. Provided that the administration fee of £5 for each additional driver or vehicle added to the licence is paid, vehicles and drivers will be added immediately to operator licences. That will mean that the Driver and Vehicle Agency will affiliate drivers and vehicles to operator licences within a target of three working days.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. An dtiocfadh leis an Aire a dheimhniú cén uair a thiocfas na cuspoirí atá aige deileáil leis na moilleanna seo go tapaigh, cén uair a thiocfas siad i bhfeidhm; agus cén cineál monatóireachta a dhéanfar orthu? Will the Minister confirm when the new turnaround target will come into effect? What level of monitoring will there be?

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist shiomiúil sin. Tiofadh siad isteach i gciann cúpla seachtain. I thank the Member for that interesting question. I hope that the new procedures will come in by mid-December. I have instructed that the new procedures for affiliating the taxi drivers and taxi vehicles to operate our licences should be implemented by mid-December, and the DVA will carry out checks weekly to ensure that the new process is working satisfactorily. I have asked for a report, by the end of March, on the operation of procedures to ensure that it is working as intended and that drivers and operators are seeing the benefits of this initiative.

Mr Weir: As the operator licence scheme will be part of the wider considerations of the wider reform of taxi regulations, what consideration has the Minister given to the unique situation in Belfast city centre, and does he intend to make any changes or variations to that?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Weir for that supplementary question. I am aware of the lobbying that is going on, particularly around the move to single-tier licensing in Belfast and the fears of the implications that that might have for the industry, particularly in Belfast and especially for public hire in Belfast. That sector has been lobbying not only Mr Weir but parties right across the Chamber on this issue, and I have to say that I have a degree of sympathy with its fears. However, I am doing my utmost to allay them.

The demand for the services of Belfast public hire, or indeed any taxi firm, will be determined by the service that is being provided and the price at which it is provided. Consumers will, and should, be able to exercise choice, and this is a matter for each consumer. It is for my Department as a regulator to set minimum standards that all operators, vehicles and drivers must meet so that taxi users can receive the service that they expect and then

to ensure compliance with those standards. That is what I have relayed again and again to representatives of Belfast public hire.

I have also undertaken to work with my counterpart the Minister for Regional Development around issues such as taxi ranks and, perhaps, access to bus lanes for wheelchair-accessible vehicles. Currently, all Belfast public-hire vehicles are wheelchair accessible, so it is fair to assume that they will still use ranks and that they will still use the bus lanes. I know that they are looking for some sort of guarantee that that might be for them alone. I am keen not to alienate anyone —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister has used up his time.

Mr Durkan: — in this process, be it any driver or any company. I will be happy to work with Mr Weir and other members of the Committee to ensure that this is done right.

Ms Lo: Some Belfast public-hire members have said to me that it will not be financially viable for them to purchase or maintain taxis with disability access if it becomes single tier. Therefore, there will be a reduction in the number of taxis with disability access for the public. Can the Minister explain what measures he is taking for this not to happen and for the current level of taxis with disability access to be provided?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Chair of the Environment Committee for her question. This is certainly not what we envisage happening, and it is certainly not what we intend to happen. Having met consumer groups, Disability Action and other representatives of consumers with disabilities, I know that it is not what they see happening either. On the contrary, what I have heard from representatives in the taxi industry is that there may be a rush to purchase taxis with disabled access, thus rendering obsolete any advantage that one sector currently has. This is about improving standards, improving accessibility and improving the service and the industry for consumers and also for drivers and operators. As I said in an earlier answer, it will really be the market that directs this.

If drivers see that there is an advantage in having disability accessible cars, I have no doubt that they will pursue that avenue.

2.15 pm

As regards other cost implications of the implementation of the Taxis Act, at the behest of the Committee, the introduction of the Act was put back from September this year until September next year. I have looked further at this to enable drivers and operators to prepare for the implementation, and I am going to stagger the introduction of measures as part of the Act — for example, receipt printers will not now be necessary until 2016. We have looked at the costs, and it is calculated that the cost to individual drivers will be somewhere in the region of £840 over five years.

Local Government Reform: ICT Convergence

3. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the information and communications technology system convergence works that are being brought forward in advance of the review of public administration. (AQO 5192/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Delivering the right information and communication technology (ICT) option to support local government reform is paramount. The systems convergence working group, which was set up by my predecessor under the reform structures, has engaged Gartner advisory services to review the ICT requirements for local government. The purpose of that was to plan in advance of April 2015 for the transition from 26 councils to 11 new councils and to determine the best strategic delivery model for local government ICT services thereafter.

Gartner has engaged with local government stakeholders to establish key systems convergence priorities, options for the creation of a strategic delivery model and resource plans to deliver key pieces of work for local ICT services. Initial findings show that local government believes that a new, more agile, adaptive and flexible ICT delivery model is required to deliver the types of local government services that citizens require, particularly given the challenging fiscal environment. It has been agreed that a hybrid model best aligns with the anticipated working practices of the consolidated councils.

In order to deliver the Gartner report's recommendations, it is proposed that a project team is set up to work closely with representatives from each of the 11 statutory transition committees (STCs) in the run-up to April 2015. A consultation on this proposal is under way across local government, and the outcome from the exercise should be available in mid-December.

The project team will work to create an IT strategy and a more detailed operating model, but, for now, four main types of ICT models are proposed. First, the development of a local government-wide telephony solution, which will result in reduced costs and ease of connectivity between all of local government. Secondly, the creation of a local government active directory that will provide for regional identity and access management as well as the opportunity to deliver secure common business platforms. Thirdly, the formation of a regional data centre, which will result in —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister has used up his time.

Mr Durkan: — reduced hardware costs and a reduced requirement for servers, storage, business continuity and disaster recovery.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his answers up to now. How does the Minister envisage councils meeting the financial implications of the ICT system convergence?

Mr Durkan: In February, the Executive kindly agreed to proposals from my predecessor for a financial package around the reform of local government. That totalled £47 million, of which £30 million will deal with rates convergence and the rest with other aspects of reform, including the systems convergence that we are talking about.

As it is anticipated and, indeed, expected that local government will yield the benefits of huge savings in the future through reform, councils should also face some of the cost of reform. Work is ongoing on a voluntary basis between many councils through the innovation for competitive enterprises (ICE) programme. Those councils have seen benefits through that, and I would like to explore

the possibility of making it non-optional and non-voluntary to get more councils on board. They will see the benefits. It is not just about making financial savings. It is also about improving the delivery of services to ratepayers and citizens.

Mr Cree: Minister, can you tell us when local councils will be given accurate and final figures with respect to the implementation of an ICT programme that is specifically for the Planning Service?

Mr Durkan: I will have to come back to the Member with a precise anticipated date for that. However, I know that it is an issue of huge concern to local councils and to existing statutory transition committees, of which I have met three over the past two weeks and intend to meet a further three this week. The transfer of planning is perhaps the issue that most questions have been asked about during my meetings with the STCs. People are worried not only about the cost associated with delivering planning but about the training that will be required for members of councils to deal with and make planning decisions. So I am keen for the Planning Service to be fit for purpose and easy to transfer to local councils.

Mr B McCrea: Has the Minister considered open source coding platforms as a way of reducing the cost of licences and improving services in the forthcoming changes?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that question. I have not, to date, considered that. I must check whether my officials have, and, if not, I am sure that we now will.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. What level of savings is expected as part of the convergence work?

Mr Durkan: ICE has calculated that, over the 25 years from reform, savings in the region of £200 million will be realised. Obviously, there is outlay at the start of reform, and I spoke of the £47 million that will come directly from the Executive to assist with that. We definitely need, at this advanced stage, more buy-in and cooperation from councils, not necessarily with the Department but with each other. I spoke of the ICE programme and the fact that its voluntary nature means that not as many councils as we would have liked have signed up or participated. In fact, you could describe the speed of ICE as glacial. However, now that people realise that we have come so far and are so close to local government reform, there will be more action from councils. Many of them and, indeed, all the elected representatives whom I have met are determined that this will cross the line in a way that delivers a better service to citizens and does so at a fair price.

Planning Bill: Further Consideration Stage

4. **Ms Dobson** asked the Minister of the Environment whether either the First Minister or deputy First Minister has raised directly with him any opposition to his statement on 22 October 2013 regarding his decision not to proceed with the Planning Bill. (AQO 5193/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In my statement to the Assembly on 22 October, I clearly set out the legal, procedural and evidential reasons for my decision not to move the Planning Bill to Further Consideration Stage, including the fact that the Department's legal opinion from David Elvin QC and Paul McLaughlin BL indicated that clauses 4 and 15 were outside the legislative competence of the Assembly. Subsequent

to my statement, there was opposition to my decision not to move the Bill from some quarters in the Assembly, notably from those who tabled the two significant amendments. Otherwise, I have been heartened by the widespread support that I have received from many quarters in and outside the Chamber for the difficult but necessary decision that I took, which was in the best interests of the planning system and everyone in the North. I stand over that decision. Since I made my decision, I have obtained further supplementary legal opinion from David Elvin QC and Paul McLaughlin BL that reaffirms their initial opinion. I have shared that opinion with Executive colleagues and the Attorney General and invited them to consider it carefully and diligently. I have yet to receive any formal or direct comment that opposes its veracity.

I can advise that I was approached to meet, and have now met, the First Minister and deputy First Minister to explore their views on my decision not to move the Bill. The meeting was a useful and positive engagement and raised a number of issues that I now want carefully and diligently to consider.

This is the responsible thing to do, and I anticipate further discussions in the near future. In the meantime, I remain committed to pressing ahead with speeding up and improving the planning system to provide the certainty that investors and others need to ensure that planning plays its full role in supporting economic recovery and sustainable development.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he be taking any further action to clarify the seemingly significant contradiction between the legal advice of one of our country's top planning and public law QCs and that provided to the First Minister and deputy First Minister by the Attorney General?

Mr Durkan: As a Minister, I have the right to seek and receive legal advice from whatever source I deem appropriate. I have chosen to do so from David Elvin QC, an eminent barrister in this field who is widely recognised as one of the top barristers on these islands in planning and public law. I stand by his advice. Other Ministers have the right to seek advice from where they want. Subsequent to my announcement, I have received advice from the Attorney General that he disagreed with the initial opinion that I had sought. However, upon seeking a second opinion from the same source and sharing it with the Attorney General and my Executive colleagues, I have not had anyone question the veracity of that legal opinion.

Mr Campbell: I commend the Minister. Not long after he took office, I went to him on a planning issue that affected a number of jobs in the north-west. He took direct action and, as a result, those jobs were safeguarded. On that very basis, Minister, and given the complicated planning process we have, which, on some occasions, means planning processes taking years not months, what are you going to do to introduce a much more streamlined, effective delivery mechanism so that people can see that there is a point in a planning application, particularly if many jobs are at risk?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Campbell for his thanks for working on that particular issue, in your constituency, Mr Deputy Speaker.

As I said, I am determined to ensure that we have a planning system that is fast, fair and fit for purpose. I have quite a few ideas on how to do that, some of which I shared with the First Minister and deputy First Minister

during our meeting two weeks ago. I have come back from that meeting having been given a bit of time to work up proposals, which I hope to present to them and the Assembly in the near future. As I said, I think it is vital that we have a planning system that gives certainty to investors and to others. That is what I fully intend to bring about.

Mr P Ramsey: Will the Minister share with us the feedback that he has received from the business and environmental communities and the general public on his decision not to proceed with the Planning Bill?

Mr Durkan: I will happily share the gist of the feedback with the Member and the House. Since my decision not to proceed with the Planning Bill, which I termed as having been made toxic by the significant amendments tabled at Consideration Stage, I have received very positive feedback wherever I have gone, be it through meeting environmental groups or representatives of the business community in the North. They, too, want to see a planning system that is fast and gives certainty, and want to play their part in ensuring that we have one. Everyone I have spoken to since making my decision — all of them; I emphasise that — has been of the opinion that the Planning Bill as amended was not the way to do that.

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

Three Rivers Project, Strabane

1. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the three rivers project in Strabane. (AQT 481/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist sin. It is not the first time today that I have been asked for an update on the three rivers project. Barely a day goes past when I am not asked for an update on that proposal, such is the fervour in Strabane and the surrounding area, and such is the desire there to see the proposal come to fruition. I am assessing the application. As I said, I am aware of demand in the area. I took time two months ago to walk around Strabane, where I spoke to shoppers and shopkeepers and was struck by the overwhelming support for the proposal. It was not unanimous, but it was overwhelming. I hope to be in a position to make a decision on the application in the not-too-distant future. However, there are some technical issues around the application that need to be addressed.

2.30 pm

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given the high importance of this economic development in Strabane, I ask the Minister what efforts he has made to try to resolve the outstanding planning issues.

Mr Durkan: There are several outstanding planning issues, and without wanting to get into the detail of each and every individual issue on each and every planning application in the Chamber, I will happily meet the Member to discuss the application with her.

Planning Applications: Black Mountain

2. **Ms McCorley** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the planning application for the Black Mountain, which he discussed with Paul Maskey and me a couple of weeks ago. (AQT 482/11-15)

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. Mar is eol don Aire, bhuaill mé féin agus Paul Maskey leis roinnt seachtainí ó shin, agus phléigh muid an t-iaratas pleanála faoin Sliabh Dubh. Bhí mé ag smaoinreamh an dtiocfadh leis an Aire sinn a thabhairt suas chun dáta ar an iartras sin.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist sin. I did indeed meet the Member and the MP for West Belfast on the issue at Black Mountain. I am sympathetic to the concerns raised at the meeting. At that stage, I was awaiting a further consultation response from the National Trust, which I do not believe has been received by the Department as yet. I will pursue that. If it has arrived, I will get back to the Member, and if it has not, I will chase it up to see where it is.

Ms McCorley: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. An dtig leis an Aire a dheimhniú gur ghlac sé san áireamh na himnithe ar leith atá ag an phobal áitiúil? Can the Minister assure me that the local residents' concerns have been taken into account?

Mr Durkan: Every planning application is subject to full scrutiny, and the opinions and concerns of objectors are taken very seriously and taken into account. On this particular application, I am acutely aware of the concerns and of the fact that they centre around health fears, and so forth, as well as potential damage to an area of outstanding natural beauty that is now much used by hillwalkers and mountain bikers etc. I assure the Member that those concerns have been taken on board and will be taken into account when a final decision is being made.

Road Safety: Speed Detection Vans

3. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of the Environment whether, given the cross-cutting nature of road safety issues between his Department and the Department of Justice, he has had any recent discussions with the Justice Minister on speed detection vans and their use. (AQT 483/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I recently met the Minister of Justice, and a lot of our work is cross-cutting, not least on road safety. However, the issue of speed detection vans did not come up during the meeting. I will happily go back and have another meeting with the Minister of Justice and put that matter on the table. It is vital that all Departments work together to reduce the likelihood and incidence of road accidents. In this role, I am determined to ensure full cooperation and collaboration with others to drive down the number of driving-related deaths and accidents on our roads.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for that response. Will he ensure that, in his discussions on road safety with the Minister of Justice, the conversations on the use of speed detection vans will concentrate on road safety and accident prevention? Many people believe that that is more a case of raising revenue, given that they see speed detection vans placed repeatedly in areas where there have been no accidents whatsoever. It appears purely to be a revenue-raising exercise.

Mr Durkan: I will certainly raise the issue with the Minister.

Mr Campbell: Who has now joined us.

Mr Durkan: Yes; he has now joined us. Maybe you can raise it with him before I can.

I am aware of the public perception that speed traps are there to boost revenue rather than to reduce accidents. I am aware of a few such spots in my constituency. There is a spot not very far from the Member's house, and one might find that it is particularly profitable. *[Laughter.]* I am determined that resources should be allocated where they are needed to reduce accidents, not to boost the coffers.

Councils: Causeway Coast and Glens

4. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of the Environment to assure the House that the name "glens" will not be removed from any business marketing or promotional work within the new council cluster of Causeway Coast and Glens. (AQT 484/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist. In my opinion, that will really be a matter for the new council to decide on. However, one would imagine that the council would like to have everything in the title that will increase the number of tourists coming into the area. Although the Causeway is, of course, widely recognised, one cannot understate the tourism value of the glens.

Mr Lynch: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his answer. He has answered my supplementary question by agreeing that the removal of "glens" from the name of the new council would be detrimental. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Durkan: Ná habair é. Do not mention it. If I can see that the removal of "glens" from the names of initiatives in that council area could be detrimental to tourism, one can only imagine that locally elected representatives and those who are charged with making these decisions will also be all too well aware of it.

Community Planning: Community and Voluntary Sector

5. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline how he is assisting the community and voluntary sector to participate fully in the community planning process. (AQT 485/11-15)

Mr Durkan: During questions for oral answer, I spoke of the training that will be provided as part of local government reform. Although a lot of the emphasis of that training will naturally be directed towards local government and locally elected representatives, there will also be training for the community and voluntary sector in and around community planning. Community planning is a very exciting and very important part of RPA. We need the full buy-in of communities — not just the community and voluntary sector, but communities — to ensure that it works.

Therefore, councils and STCs will be charged with delivering training on a local basis. It is important that, for community planning to succeed, a bottom-up approach is taken. Of course we need Departments and Ministers signed up and buying in to it, but, for it to really succeed on the ground, we need ordinary people whose lives will be affected by it to play a full role.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat. Will the Minister outline whether he has had discussions with the Minister for

Social Development about community and voluntary sector participation and, if so, what they entailed?

Mr Durkan: Although my Department is charged with local government reform, other Departments will transfer functions. The Department for Social Development will transfer the function of community development. The model by which it is transferring differs from that of my Department. Currently, the Department for Social Development is transferring the budget associated with community development without transferring the staff. However, the new councils that will have the powers and functions transferred to them will be given the option of taking on the staff from DSD who currently perform this function on a secondment basis.

Road Traffic (Drink Driving) (Amendment) Bill

6. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Road Traffic (Drink Driving) (Amendment) Bill, which aims to reduce deaths and injuries on our roads. (AQT 486/11-15)

Arbh fhéidir leis an Aire an t-eolas reatha atá aige ar an Bhille chun an tAcht Tráchtá Bóthair a leasú a roinnt linn? Tá sé de aidhm ag an Bhille sin gortuithe agus básanna ar na bóithre a mhaolú.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas as an cheist. I will happily provide an update on the status of the Bill, which will play an important role in driving down the carnage on our roads. The principal objectives of the Bill are to reduce fatal and serious injuries from collisions where driver or rider alcohol consumption is a causation factor and to address the over-representation of young drivers in fatal and serious collisions. A comprehensive consultation process was carried out in the development of the policies: the drink-driving consultation of 2009; the graduated driver licensing policy consultation in 2011; and the drink-driving legislation consultation just last year. The original version of the paper was issued to the Executive on 15 May this year. I understand that there are competing priorities in the Executive, but I hope to be in a position to introduce this important Bill early next year.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Minister tell us what impact he believes the Bill will have on the statistics?

Mr Durkan: As I said, one of the key aims of the Bill is to tackle the over-representation of young drivers in our fatal and serious road collision statistics. The graduated driver licensing programme that I referred to in my earlier answer will play a key role in this, if statistics elsewhere across the globe are to be believed. This is a very important issue. I believe that the Bill will succeed in reducing road accidents and should, therefore, be welcomed across the House.

Justice

Legal Aid: Family Law

1. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any discussions he or his officials have had with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People in relation to the proposed changes in legal aid for family law cases. (AQO 5205/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): To date, neither I nor my officials have had any discussions with or received any submissions from the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People about the proposed changes to legal aid for family law cases. The commissioner did, however, provide a written response to the proposals for the reform of financial eligibility for civil and criminal legal aid. My officials are currently considering responses to proposals to change civil legal aid remuneration, and I am happy to meet the commissioner to discuss the policy proposals.

2.45 pm

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his answer. I am disappointed that, until now, there was no invitation to the Children's Commissioner for a meeting. The Minister will be aware of the grave concern about the impact of legal aid changes on representation in family law courts. Will the Minister take on board the concerns raised by the Children's Law Centre and others about the reduced budget potential for representation at such hearings?

Mr Ford: I assure Mrs Kelly that we will take on board all the representations received, including those from the Children's Law Centre, but Members will be aware of the difficult financial circumstances that we are in and the necessity of ensuring that we bring legal aid expenditure within budget without reducing the scope of legal aid. That remains my intention.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister satisfied that the proposed cuts to the legal aid budget for family law matters will not have a negative impact on vulnerable children?

Mr Ford: I have done my best to ensure that we will not see any cuts that would affect the rights of vulnerable claimants, be they children or others. That is one of the issues that we are looking at in the review of access to justice. We are looking at the needs of children and young people in particular, but I repeat the point that I have just made to Mrs Kelly: there are difficult financial circumstances, and we are maintaining the scope of legal aid at a significantly wider level than in England and Wales.

Mr Swann: Does the Minister accept that, in cases of implacable hostility, a parent may need the protection of the court to maintain a relationship with their child? Will legal aid still be available in those cases?

Mr Ford: The answer is yes, I accept that vulnerable parents may need legal aid, and it will continue to be available. We have to ensure that the appropriate representation is provided, and I remain to be convinced that it is always necessary to provide the level of representation that is currently provided. Frequently, a solicitor would be capable of handling a case where, at the moment, a junior barrister may be funded, and a junior barrister would be capable of handling a case where, currently, a QC is funded.

Mr Allister: Has the Minister met any solicitors who are deeply exercised by his proposals, particularly in respect of civil legal aid? Many of them have been lobbying Members of the House. How many times has the Minister met such solicitors to hear and to understand the concerns that they have?

Mr Ford: I attended a meeting convened by the Law Society some weeks ago at which a very large number of solicitors were present. I have also met officers of the Law Society. Given the number of solicitors' firms in this jurisdiction, I do not think that it would be possible for me to meet each individual who has written to the Department or to individual MLAs.

Prisons: Search Technology

2. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Justice whether further search technology is to be piloted in local prisons to enhance search procedures and to negate the need for body searches. (AQO 5206/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service has evaluated millimetre wave scanners in the prison environment and has sought to obtain the necessary licences and approvals to pilot transmission X-ray body scanning technology in our prisons. In accordance with the justification of practices legislation, the required justification application was lodged with the Department of Energy and Climate Change in May. The process must now be completed by Chris Grayling, the Secretary of State for Justice, following consideration by the justification liaison group. All of this is outside the control of my officials.

While I remain determined to reduce the level of personal intrusion that is inherent in existing search procedures, any new solution must, at minimum, perform at least as well as the existing methods. Ultimately, nothing should be done that would compromise the safety of everyone in our prisons.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his response, which was interesting. I understand the difficulty that you are having, but could any alternative technology be used that would eliminate the requirement for full-body searches?

Mr Ford: In response to what is a fair supplementary question, I can inform Mr Cree that the only two technologies that have been assessed as in any way suitable are the millimetre wave scanners, which we trialled and found not to be suitable, and the transmission X-ray scanners, for which we seek the justification approval. The reality is that, even if successful, such scanners would not remove completely the need for full-body searches. For example, if they were to identify that something was secreted, it would then be a requirement to have a full-body search. As I am aware, at this stage, there is no other technology beyond those two, although we keep in touch with developments worldwide.

Mr P Ramsey: Given that it is a most emotive subject and considering the concerns with that and accepting that there are statutory requirements for scanners, has an independent assessment or evaluation been carried out of the suitability of those full-body scanners?

Mr Ford: Again, I appreciate Mr Ramsey's point. The reality is that the Northern Ireland Prison Service is at the forefront in these islands of looking at this technology. It is in use in airports, but it is not in use in any prison or similar facility anywhere in these islands. That is why we have to go through the detail of the justification application, and that is why the matters are technically out of our hands at the moment. We simply await the response to that application.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Given the time for which we have been involved in the process of seeking a licence, is the Minister satisfied that proper urgency is being provided? Is it a case of people not wanting to do this and looking for ways to slow it down?

Mr Ford: I cannot give Mr McCartney assurances on what processes are entirely being applied by DECC, but I can say that meetings are being held, Prison Service staff have been at them and we have done our best to push forward the fact that this is an important and urgent issue for us. Clearly, however, there is a major issue about a completely new technology being used in prisons, and it is only right that that should be subjected to proper assessments on health grounds.

Justice: Cross-border Cooperation

3. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Justice whether any areas of increased cross-border cooperation were discussed at his recent meeting with the Minister for Justice and Equality. (AQO 5207/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is very positive ongoing cooperation between the various criminal justice agencies across the two jurisdictions. That reveals itself most notably through the six project advisory groups covering public protection, managing offenders, forensic science, victims and witnesses, youth justice and criminal justice and social diversity.

Cooperation is developing further in areas including work to speed up justice by sharing best practice on the production of short or fast-track reports for courts; the drafting and development of a forensic partnership strategy and action plan, which covers the forensic science services of Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland; the holding of a cross-border hate crime seminar; ongoing discussions on the European victims directive; development of an information-sharing agreement between the PSNI and an Garda Síochána relating to domestic and child abuse; and the development of a protocol between the juvenile justice centres in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Will the Minister give an update on the all-Ireland approach to dealing with human trafficking?

Mr Ford: You will appreciate, Mr Deputy Speaker, that the issue of human trafficking is, as I will announce shortly in my statement on the North/South meeting, a matter of key concern in both jurisdictions. It is an issue on which we see joined-up working between an Garda Síochána and the PSNI, in particular, and through the involvement of an Garda Síochána in the Organised Crime Task Force subgroup on human trafficking.

Back in October, Alan Shatter, as Minister for Justice and Equality, and I opened and co-hosted a cross-border forum on human trafficking to enable the various agencies to identify the challenges and seek cooperative solutions. We are currently looking at bids for EU funding in respect of education around trafficking and meeting the needs of victims. They are all matters that are of considerable concern to a number of North/South agencies and that the two of us, as Ministers, continue to discuss regularly.

Mr Givan: Given the importance of cross-border cooperation, what action is the Minister taking to ensure that the response by the Garda Commissioner to ACC Drew Harris's evidence is properly dealt with and does not jeopardise that relationship? Does the Minister intend to continue with his political expediency of being blasé about the Smithwick tribunal report?

Mr Ford: It is difficult to answer a question that is based on an utterly false premise, Deputy Speaker. Stating the reality that a few bad apples does not mean that an entire force is corrupt is a simple statement of fact, whether some Members like it or not. That is not being blasé; that is being utterly factual.

Last week, on a number of occasions, I had informal discussions with Alan Shatter TD on dealing with the issues arising from the Smithwick report. As I said earlier in the House, the two of us will have a formal meeting with the Garda Commissioner and the PSNI Chief Constable. We will ensure that we maintain the best possible joined-up working.

I certainly accept that there was a difficulty in the last few days between the Garda barrister and ACC Drew Harris. The assurance that I have from the Minister for Justice and Equality is that he accepts, as Judge Smithwick did, the evidence that Drew Harris presented to the tribunal.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Minister consider seriously with his colleague in the South the setting up of a model of intelligence exchange based on the integrated border intelligence team made up of agencies from the United States and Canada, as recommended by Judge Smithwick?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Maginness for that question, because it reflects significantly the need to ensure the best possible joining up. This morning, I was actually out with PSNI and HMRC officers on an operation directed against fuel laundering. It was very close to the border near Cullaville in south Armagh. On that operation, there was direct cross-border cooperation using the same vehicle-to-vehicle radio system between the PSNI and Garda Síochána. That is an example of positive movement forward.

The issue of intelligence sharing is, of course, one that can also feature in agencies that are not my devolved responsibility. However, the lessons to be learned, as highlighted by Judge Smithwick, are ones that I am determined to learn. I believe that Alan Shatter shares my concerns.

Domestic Violence: Disclosure Scheme

4. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to introduce a domestic abuse disclosure scheme. (AQO 5208/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Home Secretary announced recently that the domestic violence disclosure scheme currently operating on a pilot basis in specific locations in England and Wales will be rolled out across England and Wales from March 2014. Department of Justice officials have been liaising with colleagues in the Home Office throughout the duration of the pilot scheme. The evaluation arising from it will be shared with the regional strategy group on domestic and sexual violence, which will consider the potential to introduce a domestic violence disclosure scheme in Northern Ireland.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he share any details that he may have regarding the success or otherwise of the scheme where it has been introduced in those pilots in the rest of the UK?

Mr Ford: I do not have the detail of the scheme, as it was implemented by the Home Office, but my officials will certainly seek the most detailed information possible on it. What we have are options of, potentially, two different kinds of process for disclosing information, whether it be the opportunity for a member of the public to have the right to ask or the potential of disclosure to a prospective victim — what is described as the “right to know”. Both can be implemented in the England and Wales arrangements. The important issue is to see that we get the message across in Northern Ireland. Certainly, there is already informal sharing with the PSNI anyway.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. The Criminal Justice Inspection recently published a negative report on domestic violence. Will the Minister assure us that its recommendations will be implemented as soon as possible?

Mr Ford: Of course, that job falls largely to the regional strategy group on domestic and sexual violence, but I can assure all Members of the House that reports from CJINI are taken seriously in the Department. We will seek to ensure that those recommendations are followed up in the most appropriate way.

Mrs McKevitt: Will the Minister ensure that all victims of domestic abuse are offered special measures when involved in court proceedings?

Mr Ford: I cannot give an assurance in quite the way in which the question asked for it, but I would have thought that the reality is that the great majority of victims of domestic abuse will find themselves eligible for special measures. To give a blanket guarantee that all victims in all circumstances will receive an entitlement to special measures is beyond me as Minister at this point.

Prisoners: Education, Training and Employment

5. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Justice to outline his plans to increase the opportunities for prisoners to access training and employment experience whilst in custody. (AQO 5209/11-15)

Mr Ford: Key to the reform of prisons is putting the offender at the centre of the prison system, assessing his or her needs and working in partnership to address those needs, aiding their successful reintegration into the community on release and making society safer by doing so. Indeed, education, training and employment is one of the key resettlement pathways to which the Prison Service has committed itself. Reflecting that, one of this year's business targets was that NIPS would, for the first time, publish an employability strategy by March 2014. The strategy was, in fact, published on 20 September. It is a four-year strategy covering the period 2013 to 2017, linking the opportunities available to prisoners with employment market trends and opportunities through the delivery of a range of services.

One of those services must be a modernised learning and skills service. I am glad to inform Members that work is

well under way to put in place a revised curriculum and outsourced delivery model during 2014, with employment skills training as one of the core elements. A range of employment initiatives is under development, and a new passport to employment, which was developed by prisoners and aims to capture soft skills in addition to qualifications gained, is being piloted in Maghaberry.

3.00 pm

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for outlining some of the more strategic policy initiatives. Will he give us some examples of how the outworking of these policies and strategies is beginning to be seen on the ground?

Mr Ford: I thank the Member for her supplementary. I am not quite sure how much is available on the ground, but I will talk a little about what is available in the institutions. We have already seen good progress: for example, Members may have heard mention of a social enterprise called Mugshots that I launched a couple of weeks ago in Hydebank Wood. I probably should not do a commercial, but I will anyway: if anyone is looking for mugs, T-shirts, carrier bags or similar articles to be printed with the logo of any institutions, Mugshots can do a very good range for you.

Five prisoners are undergoing a business mentoring scheme with Business in the Community, and I referred to the passport to employment at Maghaberry, which covers soft skills as well as specific qualifications. A number of prisoners were interviewed by the Timpson group for 16-week work placements. Two are already on placement, with other interviews scheduled for next week. The UK-wide Employers' Forum for Reducing Re-offending, in which the Timpson company has a very significant role, is undertaking work that will lead to some opportunities for Maghaberry in February. Those are key examples of things moving forward. We also hope, in the very near future, to see the publication of the prospectus for Hydebank college as we seek to transfer the running of the young offenders' centre (YOC) into a mechanism more suited to meeting the needs of offenders and providing them with the skills for when they return.

Lord Morrow: I listened carefully to the Minister's response to the question. My concern is always for the victims of violence. What message does this send to them? Will he ensure that the sensitivities and needs of victims are also considered when any new programmes are introduced for prisoners?

Mr Ford: I entirely agree with Lord Morrow about the importance that we should place on the needs of victims. Indeed, we have put in place the victims and witnesses' strategy to show the importance of that. However, in the specific context of rehabilitating those in prison in order to make this society safer by having fewer victims in the future, we have a specific obligation to put a lot of effort into that rehabilitation work. I have just highlighted a key part of that, which is employability.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat. Does the Minister agree that, when prisoners are not engaged in purposeful activity, the process of rehabilitation is fundamentally undermined?

Mr Ford: I certainly do agree, which is why we hope that, under the new arrangements for Hydebank Wood, we will have close to 30 hours a week of constructive activity, whether related to education, skills or employment for that

group of prisoners in Hydebank Wood. We will seek to make similar changes in the other institutions.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. What progress has been made in the development of education and training services at Hydebank Wood?

Mr Ford: I hope that we will outsource the education and skills provisions formally in the very near future. I mentioned the college prospectus, which is very close to finalisation. Members will appreciate that this is a very significant and fundamental change to the running of the college. That is why, with the new governor in place and a task force established to look at that particular work, we seek to make that major transformation over the coming months. When I visited the Mugshots enterprise, it was certainly a very positive example of how one relatively small group of prisoners had already seen the opportunity to do something more constructive, but it is a challenge to get that rolled out to as many prisoners as possible.

Criminal Justice: Cost of Dealing with the Past

6. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the recent Committee on the Administration of Justice report on the estimated costs of dealing with the past. (AQO 5210/11-15)

Mr Ford: I welcome the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) report and thank the inspectors and staff for their thorough and informative review. I asked CJINI to carry out the review to give us a better understanding of the cost and impact on the criminal justice system of dealing with our past. The report puts the estimated costs at around £30 million this year. In the next five years, at current estimates and allowing for inflation, it is projected to exceed £180 million. That is a low-end and conservative estimate.

The report recognises the significant efforts made across the justice system to deal with our past. However, it also highlights the challenges the system faces, both in dealing with the past and delivering an effective justice system now and for the future. It is a further reminder that dealing with the past is not simply a justice issue; it is for all of us across government and civic society.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. He has stated on previous occasions that, without agreed and properly resourced structures to deal with the past both within and outside our justice system, there is a significant risk that public confidence will be undermined in dealing with the past and legacy issues. Does the Minister have a proposal on how the structures to deal with the past might be paid for?

Mr Ford: Although I appreciate Mr McCallister's question, I think that, at this point in the discussions between the parties under the chairmanship of Dr Richard Haass and Dr Meghan O'Sullivan, it would be a foolish Member of the House who set out their plans, given that they might be contradicted by an agreed process within the week.

Mr Nesbitt: Does the Minister put a financial cost on dealing with the past? Does he think that is appropriate for victims?

Mr Ford: Mr Nesbitt makes a reasonable point, but I can only answer the question I was asked about the estimated costs, and I have done so. There is, of course, a real

issue for this society as to how we deal with the past, how we address the needs of victims and how we deal with the fact that some people have benefited from a very expensive inquiry and others will not. The ongoing work of the Historical Enquiries Team (HET), the Police Ombudsman and inquests all have costs, but are all less than completely satisfactory ways of meeting the needs of society as a whole and of specific individual victims. I take the point that Mr Nesbitt makes. I was asked about the costs and I have given them, but it is a much wider issue and one that goes way beyond the justice system.

Drugs Problem: DOJ Assessment

7. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the local drugs problem. (AQO 5211/11-15)

Mr Ford: Statistics provided by the PSNI indicate that drug seizures and arrests have seen upward trends over the past three years. The Organised Crime Task Force's 2013 report noted that the drugs market in Northern Ireland had seen extensive change over the past few years, mirroring that seen in other parts of the UK and Europe. Further, while cannabis continues to be the main drug used in Northern Ireland, the emergence of new psychoactive substances has been challenging for law enforcement, together with a growing market in prescription drugs bought over the internet.

The Department of Justice is a major contributor to the outcomes defined in the Executive's 'New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2 2011-2016', which is led by the DHSSPS, the aim of which is to reduce drug- and alcohol-related harm in Northern Ireland. In addition, my Department's community safety strategy reflects the outcomes contained in the new strategic direction, and my Department and its agencies are working with key stakeholders to deliver those outcomes.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister has referred to the increase year on year in the number of detections for drugs. Although that is welcome, it is also deeply saddening that there are so many people who continue to deal drugs. Can the Minister give an assurance that he, along with the Minister of Health and the PSNI, will do everything that he can to ensure that drug dealers, who are a scourge on our society, are removed from our streets and everything is done to get the appropriate evidence not only to arrest those people but to bring them to justice?

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with the point that Mr McCrea makes, although he encourages me to stray into operational policing matters. I can say that I am aware of a very significant operation being carried out in Belfast against drug dealers by the PSNI.

I can also highlight the work being done at Maghaberry prison between the PSNI and the Prison Service, so a lot of work is being done. There are also the education and treatment factors, which lie with the Department of Health but where we are working in partnership where appropriate. I take the point that more needs to be done, but more needs to be done using a very much joined-up approach.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhúochas leis an Aire as na freagraí go nuige seo. I thank the Minister for his answers.

What measures are being taken in prisons to curtail the availability and use of drugs?

Mr Ford: A number of measures are being adopted in prisons. First, there is a robust and intelligence-led approach to searching, as there is the potential to smuggle in drugs. Action is taken by the PSNI externally against visitors. The education function, which lies more with the Department of Health, is important. Another measure is the managing of supervised swallowing of prescription drugs to ensure that they do not end up being traded among prisoners, particularly when someone who needs those drugs is forced to hand them over to others. Those are all key issues in the fight against drugs in partnership among the Prison Service, the PSNI and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 8 has been withdrawn and will receive a written answer.

Court Hearing Centres: Closures

9. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the estimated savings resulting from the closure of a number of court hearing centres. (AQO 5213/11-15)

Mr Ford: Annual savings in operating costs from the closure of the hearing centres are estimated at £228,000. In addition, the closures addressed a potential unfunded capital pressure of £1,728,000 to maintain the buildings and meet Disability Discrimination Act requirements. When I announced the closures, I indicated that my decision was not based on monetary considerations alone. The hearing centres were not able to provide the level of accommodation and facilities that court users, including victims and witnesses, expect. The transfer of business to alternative, larger court venues goes some way to addressing the issue.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for his reply. I understand that Strabane court has been removed from the list of closures. Are decisions on other centres' removal from the list pending, or will the programme go ahead as planned? The savings seem very little for the inconvenience that will be caused.

Mr Ford: Lord Morrow talks about inconvenience. We have to weigh up what inconvenience may amount to. Although there was a certain amount of comment when Larne and Bangor hearing centres were closed, to the best of my knowledge, not a single comment came in subsequently to suggest that there was a major problem. There definitely are better conditions for those who use the courthouses in the alternative venues than was the case in the small centres, which were, as I said, unsuitable under disability discrimination legislation.

The wider position is that the other two courthouses that were earmarked for closure can be closed only when changes are made to the court boundaries system, which is awaiting further legislation. However, there is the overall issue of the Department of Justice's estate strategy, which may well affect smaller centres, but that matter is under way.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That ends the period for oral questions. We now move on to topical questions.

Termination of Pregnancy: Fatal Foetal Abnormalities

1. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the timeline and process for the proposed consultation on amending the law relating to fatal foetal abnormality. (AQT 491/11-15)

Mr Ford: I can give the House only a general outline. As I said last week in response to questions from the media, the likelihood is that a document will be published for consultation before Easter next year. That is because of the situation that arose when the matter of guidance was being looked at. That is the responsibility of DHSSPS. When the Minister of Health said last week that it was not possible to deal with fatal foetal abnormality under any reform to DHSSPS guidelines, he then made it clear that the matter lay as criminal law with the Department of Justice. In response to questions from the media, I gave a general indication that matters with drawing up the consultation document are at an early stage.

Members will, of course, be aware that I reported last May that we were looking at a consultation on the premises on which abortions could be performed. So, the issue of fatal foetal abnormality is now also feeding in to that.

3.15 pm

Mr McElduff: Will the Minister provide an assurance that the consultation will be as broad and as thorough as possible and that it will fully involve the Assembly?

Mr Ford: I think that that has been the case with every one of the very many consultations that DOJ has done in the past three and a half years. I assure Mr McElduff that I am not changing my way of doing things now.

Termination of Pregnancy: Media Statement

2. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Justice to clarify the circumstances in which he issued a statement to the media last week on the consultation on abortion law. (AQT 492/11-15)

Mr Ford: The circumstances were broadly those that I outlined to Mr McElduff. At Question Time last Tuesday, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety confirmed that it was not possible to deal with fatal foetal abnormality under the revised guidelines. The DOJ had been holding off on its role in the consultation on abortion until we established what the DHSSPS guidelines might manage. Once it was confirmed that that was not the case, I believe that the media contacted the Minister of Health and asked for a statement on his position. The media certainly contacted me and asked me for a statement on my position, and I made it clear that, given that DOJ gave an undertaking to deal with the issue if DHSSPS could not, it was clear that the matter fell to us, and I answered in the affirmative. It was not an announcement of the consultation details; it was an announcement of what the process will be.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his clarification. How will that relate to the consultation on abortion law that he committed to earlier this year?

Mr Ford: I believe that we will potentially have a number of issues on abortion to consider. At the point where the Assembly did not pass an amendment to the Criminal

Justice Bill that would have rendered abortions that were otherwise lawful unlawful if they were not performed on health service premises, it was clear that, at that stage, it fell to DOJ to look at a consultation on that aspect of abortion law. We then got wrapped up further in fatal foetal abnormality, and it was appropriate to await the resolution of that point by DHSSPS. Now that that has been resolved from a health point of view, there will be a single consultation in spring next year that will look at all the relevant aspects of abortion law.

Bloody Sunday: Criminal Investigation

3. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with the Chief Constable or any other agencies in Northern Ireland on the criminal investigation into Bloody Sunday. (AQT 493/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have not discussed the criminal investigation into Bloody Sunday specifically with the Chief Constable. Obviously, I discuss such matters generally with the Chief Constable, but, as I understand it, it fell to the Chief Constable operationally to deal with the issue following the outcome of the Saville report.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister, albeit that I am not content with his response. As Justice Minister, do you not feel that you have a responsibility and a duty of care to reassure the families whose loved ones were murdered on Bloody Sunday and to give them some hope for the foreseeable future that accountability will take place and that a criminal investigation will commence?

Mr Ford: I share Mr Ramsey's concerns, but I cannot give an assurance to the bereaved families on how operational policing will be carried out in an area that is precisely the Chief Constable's responsibility. I cannot direct him on what investigations to carry out or not to carry out. We would be in a very bad way if I could do so. I appreciate Mr Ramsey's concerns, but those are operational matters for the Chief Constable, not the Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Declan McAleer is not in his place.

EU Justice and Home Affairs Council

5. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Justice for a brief — a brief — overview of the key Northern Ireland issues that he discussed at the recent meeting of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council in Brussels. (AQT 495/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is always concerning when one of my colleagues asks me to be brief twice. I had the opportunity to address formal sessions of the Justice and Home Affairs Council and to have a number of other meetings around that, which included the UK Government representation, the Northern Ireland Executive office and the Irish representation, to see some of the work being done in Europe that we need to join up with.

I had one useful meeting with staff from the Commission who are looking at the issue of what they call the de-radicalisation agenda. Across most of Europe, that is directed against those on the fringes of Islamic terrorism, but given experiences in Northern Ireland, it seemed that there is potential for us to contribute to and benefit from such discussion.

I had an extremely useful meeting with the EU anti-trafficking coordinator to discuss Northern Ireland's

position with regard to the directive. Although it is certainly not my place to indicate what her view was — she will have to make an assessment of where Northern Ireland stands — she did not lead me to believe that Northern Ireland was in anything other than a good place around trafficking matters. I said that she might well wish to visit Northern Ireland to see the situation on the ground. I suggest to the Justice Committee that it may well wish to take evidence from her as part of its review of Lord Morrow's Bill. Lord Morrow may wish to meet her. I think that that would be useful. I say that knowing that she did not agree entirely with everything that I said. I believe that she has a specific role in the EU that we should take note of.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for making a brief reply, as he normally does. Following on from the human trafficking issue, were there any learning points that could be factored into our approach to the issue or the legislation that is being considered here at home?

Mr Ford: The House would expect me to say that, of course, we have the legislation in a very good place as it is, but we do always need to learn. When Mrs Vassiliadou produces her reports, it will be interesting to see what she suggests about Northern Ireland, other similar jurisdictions and what we might learn from one another.

I think that it is appropriate at this point to say that, having had a useful discussion last week with Lord Morrow about the Department's attitude to aspects of his Bill, I believe that we are getting a better joined-up system in Northern Ireland that will put us at the forefront of work being done in Europe.

Rural Crime: Organised Groups

6. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister of Justice whether he believes that organised groups are involved in the recent spate of cattle and farm machinery theft from farm holdings. (AQT 496/11-15)

Mr Ford: I do not have any specific information on exactly how thefts such as those involving cattle are being organised. There is clearly an issue in some parts of Northern Ireland, as there is an issue about rural crime generally, but I am not sure that I have the specific information that would give any particular benefits on that point. What is important is that we see, as ever, a joined-up approach, cooperation between the relevant agencies, and the kind of good work being done by policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs) to deal with some rural crime issues being carried forward. I certainly hope that what we will see from the rural crime unit, which is a joint operation of NFU Mutual, the police and my Department, is that we will be able to identify trends and better fight them.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Does he feel that measures that he has in place with his counterparts in the Twenty-six Counties are effective in combating the increasing problem that we have in the rural areas?

Mr Ford: I am not aware that the rural crime that we face at the moment is particularly a cross-border issue. However, I am aware, for example, that some items of valuable machinery have been taken across the border, across the water and even, in some cases, to continental

Europe. It is an issue in which joining up, on a cross-border basis, the sort of work being done by the Organised Crime Task Force will be useful. However, it is very difficult to establish trends in what is a difficult and complex area. Clearly, some rural crime is not agricultural crime. We need to address that at the same time as we address issues such as machinery theft and cattle rustling.

Termination of Pregnancy: Ministerial Responsibility

7. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Justice, following the announcement about his abortion consultation and related guidance, whether this is a case of one Minister passing responsibility to another because he does not want to face up to having to deal with the issue. (AQT 497/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am sure that the deputy leader of the opposition would not ask any Minister to criticise any other Minister in the House in any circumstances. The reality is that we are in the slightly unusual position that the guidelines relating to abortion are a matter for the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, but the criminal law on abortion is a matter for the Minister of Justice. That is the reality of the challenge. When the matter passed beyond guidelines, it clearly became a matter for the Justice Department. As much as Mr McCallister might wish to encourage me to criticise my ministerial colleague Edwin Poots, I do not think that it is the case that he has ducked the issue. I think that he has carried the matter as far as he can. It is clearly the case that the very difficult challenge of how we manage fatal foetal abnormality cannot be dealt with by health measures alone.

Mr McCallister: He is absolutely right; I would have been quite content if he had criticised his ministerial colleague, and I am surprised at him showing a rare effort at collective responsibility. I listened to the Minister's answer. If he is successful in changing and clarifying the law around fatal foetal abnormality, will his Department publish the guidelines or will it be the Health Department?

Mr Ford: The guidelines were the subject of a court directive to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, whether they are the responsibility of Mr Poots, Mr Wells or anyone else at a particular time in the future. The issue of setting the criminal law is an issue not only for me but for this Assembly, representing the people of Northern Ireland. The specific departmental responsibility falls to the DOJ, so we need to be clear about the difficulty of getting that joined-up approach, but I believe that we have the option to do it. We will have to see that we get the law right and then, hopefully, we will not need guidelines to explain it.

Collusion: State Organisations

8. **Ms Maeve McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Justice whether he agrees that the recent book from Anne Cadwallader and the 'Panorama' documentary highlight that the rotten apple in the barrel theory is no more than wishful thinking. (AQT 498/11-15)

Mr Ford: No, Deputy Speaker, I would not.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I am extremely disappointed with the Minister's response. I ask the Minister directly: how many instances of collusion in

different places in different years by different British state organisations does it take for him to accept that collusion was systematic and endemic?

Mr Ford: As I have said many times before in this House, I am responsible for devolved justice matters for the past three and a half years. My opinion is no more worthwhile than the opinion of any other Member of this House in an area for which I have no responsibility and, more to the point, no information. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: We have time for a very short question from Mr Seán Lynch. I would appreciate Members not shouting from a sedentary position. That does not help.

Street Protests: Criminal Records

9. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Justice whether he agrees that more needs to be done to try to warn those people who get involved in illegal activities such as protests that they might end up with a criminal record. *(AQT 499/11-15)*

Mr Ford: I can only echo the comments made by the current chairman of the Parades Commission in his media interview at the weekend, when he pointed out the number of young people who have acquired criminal records because they had been misled over street protests. Of course, that is not the only way in which young people get misled into criminal activity, but it is a salutary reminder of what can happen when people follow the lead of those who do not have their best interests at heart.

Mr Deputy Speaker: We do not have time for a supplementary question, because time is up. That concludes Question Time. I invite Members to take their ease while we make a change at the Table.

3.30 pm

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

Ministerial Statement

Criminal Justice: Intergovernmental Agreement on Cooperation

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): With permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement regarding a meeting under the auspices of the intergovernmental agreement on cooperation on criminal justice matters on Friday 15 November. I hosted and represented the Executive at the meeting, which was attended by Alan Shatter TD, Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence. It was the seventh formal ministerial meeting under the intergovernmental agreement (IGA) since the devolution of justice in April 2010. As I have said in previous statements to the House, I am committed to keeping the Assembly informed of meetings held under the auspices of the agreement on the same basis as North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meetings.

The meeting on 15 November provided us both with an opportunity to review final progress against the 2012-13 joint work programme, as well as to formally agree a joint work programme for 2013-14, which will run through to the summer of 2014.

It was pleasing to note the positive progress that has been made in a number of areas. Those include the sharing of information between the probation services on short pre-sentence reports and short turnaround reports, which are aimed at speeding up justice; the successful transfer and processing of 60 drugs cases from Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI) to the Irish Forensic Science Laboratory; and progress made by the PSNI towards the completion of a good practice guide and toolkit for policing in partnership with diverse communities, which will be shared with an Garda Síochána. These are just some of the examples that demonstrate the excellent ongoing cooperation between criminal justice agencies across both jurisdictions.

One of the actions in the current work programme was the organisation of the fourth annual joint public protection seminar, which was held in Hillsborough Castle on the same day as our meeting. The theme of the seminar was partnership working for public protection, and it provided an opportunity for representatives of both probation services, alongside those from other agencies, to discuss a number of key public protection issues. Those included a coordinated strategic response to dealing with mental health in criminal justice; responding to the needs of prisoners with mental health issues; developing a response for young adult offenders; developing a strategy to deal with accommodation issues; and engaging with victims. The seminar also saw the launch of volume 10 of the 'Irish Probation Journal', an extremely professional joint publication from the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) and the Irish Probation Service. Having addressed the previous three annual seminars, I was particularly pleased to join Alan Shatter in opening the fourth annual seminar.

I have attached a copy of the joint work programme for 2013-14 to the printed version of this statement. I intend to give a detailed report on progress made against the actions following the next IGA meeting and before the summer of 2014. In the interim, progress against the actions will be monitored by the working group of officials.

Six project advisory groups provide the mechanism by which work is taken forward. They focus on public protection, registered offenders, youth justice, forensic science, support for victims of crime, and social diversity. Each of the project advisory groups has continued to promote and support cooperation across the broad spectrum of criminal justice agencies on both sides of the border. Examples of cross-border cooperation that will be taken forward include the drafting and development of a forensic partnership strategy and action plan that covers the forensic science services of Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland; the hosting of a cross-border seminar on hate crime; ongoing discussion on the European victims directive; the development of an information-sharing agreement between the two police services on domestic abuse and child abuse; and the development of a protocol between the juvenile justice centres.

There is excellent ongoing cooperation between the PSNI and an Garda Síochána at an operational level on the management of sex offenders. I am pleased to report that there continues to be good progress in supporting and promoting North/South cooperation to make Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland a safer place.

The meeting was a good opportunity to be updated on the establishment of an ad hoc North/South crime strategy group. That group has met three times during 2013 and will report future progress to the working group of officials.

The IGA provides a helpful framework for supporting North/South cooperation on criminal justice matters, but the real benefits of cooperation are seen as individuals in the criminal justice agencies develop strong working relationships with their respective counterparts.

It is that type of practical, informal and ongoing interaction and cooperation that Alan Shatter and I are both committed to further promoting and supporting.

Finally, as I have said before, the agreement is not intended to provide for discussion of cross-border security issues. However, I have cause to discuss such matters regularly with Mr Shatter, and I used the opportunity of us being together to briefly discuss some general wider cross-border security-related issues, including the work being done in the areas of tackling organised crime, fuel laundering and human trafficking.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I thank the Minister for bringing the statement to the House today. Human trafficking is a very important aspect that needs to be tackled to address organised crime, and he will be aware of the all-party Oireachtas report that was unanimously supported and the Turn Off the Red Light campaign that was endorsed by all elements of civic society. That report calls for the criminalisation of payment for sexual services. Has that been talked about yet? In the context of them taking forward legislation, has the Minister updated his counterpart about the efforts of this Assembly to tackle that heinous crime?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Givan for that point. Despite the Oireachtas joint Committee report on prostitution legislation, I am not sure that legislation is likely in the near future in the Oireachtas. I had the opportunity to discuss the ongoing business of the Assembly in the context of Lord Morrow's private Member's Bill, and there are clearly similar issues North and South as we look to the research to deal specifically with the prostitution issue and to tighten up the human trafficking legislation.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Buíochas leis an Aire. I welcome the statement and the fact that the meeting took place. The Minister spoke about the cooperation between the probation boards North and South, particularly on the mental health of prisoners. What does the Minister feel the long-term impact of that cooperation will be?

Mr Ford: The long-term impact will simply be ensuring that we learn lessons wherever they are to be learnt. There are clearly similarities between society North and South, and there are cross-border probation issues that we have to deal with. I am not sure that, at this stage, we have specific lessons to highlight, but the important thing is that we continue to encourage the ongoing informal meetings and cooperation so that individuals can learn from each other on both sides of the border as, indeed, individuals in our probation services will learn from each other in whatever part of Northern Ireland they are in. It is important that we get that informal learning to tie into the formal research that appears in publications such as the 'Irish Probation Journal'.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that I am working off a speaking list. In that context, I call Mr Alban Maginness.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his replies. The final paragraph of the statement says:

"the agreement is not intended to provide for discussion of cross-border security issues".

The Smithwick report makes specific recommendations on cross-border policing. Is it not time that the agreement is updated to include the types of recommendations made by Judge Smithwick?

Mr Ford: Mr Maginness raises an interesting question about how we will progress in what you might now term the post-Smithwick era. I always say that the agreement is "not intended to" when I make statements on the IGA, because the practical reality is that, when Ministers from North and South meet, we end up discussing wider issues informally at the end of the agenda. So, there are clearly ways in which those matters are being dealt with.

As I indicated earlier to, I think, Mrs Kelly, there will be a formal meeting between the two Ministers, the Garda Commissioner and the PSNI Chief Constable next week, and one of the things on that agenda — although it was not the only thing on the agenda when the meeting was set up some weeks ago — will be how we jointly respond to Smithwick. It may well be that it is then appropriate to look to the working of the IGA. After a few years of devolution, it is a different body than when the IGA was being operated by the Northern Ireland Office pre-devolution, and it may well then be appropriate to look to see the best ways of dealing with it and whether we should formally amend the terms of reference. I am certainly open to that, but we have

not gone into detail on that issue, probably because the informal cooperation has worked so well so far.

Mr Nesbitt: The Minister talked about the discussion of a number of key public protection issues, including the needs of prisoners with mental health issues. Will he define the key needs of such prisoners?

Mr Ford: Their key needs relate to the kind of work that is, for example, being done in the Donard centre in Maghaberry to ensure that those who are vulnerable and those who have different mental illnesses get a measure of treatment that meets their needs, which are not always easily met in custody. That work is operationally led by the South Eastern Trust, but there is an input from prison officers. It is important that we ensure that all those in the care of the Prison Service receive whatever care they need if they are vulnerable, whether because of physical or mental illness. We are doing our best to join up that work, though there is clearly a major challenge in doing so, particularly in light of staffing difficulties in the South Eastern Trust.

Mr Dickson: Minister, you referred to fuel laundering in your statement. Since the devolution of justice in 2010, some 100 raids by HMRC have taken place. Will the Minister update us on the latest situation?

Mr Ford: As I said earlier, I was at Cullaville to watch an operation being carried out by HMRC to seal a fuel laundering plant. That is part of the ongoing work, and there is a significant cross-border element to it. I hope that, before the Christmas holidays, there will be a formal announcement on the development of a new marker for rebated diesel, the so-called red or green diesel, which would make it more difficult for fuel launderers to operate. I also remind the House that, today, we have in place legislation that allows fuel laundering offences, if sentencing were regarded as unduly lenient, to be referred by the Director of Public Prosecutions to the Court of Appeal. I suspect that that is likely to result in some custodial sentences being awarded in the future, which has not been a generality for some time. Today has shown how practical operation and legislative operation can make life more difficult for the launderers.

Mr Wells: I realise that the Minister has an extraordinarily liberal view on organised prostitution. However, I recommend that he watch the 'Prime Time' documentary on the subject, which was broadcast on RTÉ. It shows that women are routinely trafficked, weekly, throughout all 32 counties of the island of Ireland because men regularly demand new prostitutes to abuse. Will he assure us that the issue will be discussed at the next meeting? We can prevent this continuing, not only for women who are trafficked but for women who are being used in prostitution.

Mr Ford: I suppose that being accused of being a liberal by Jim Wells is meant to be an insult, but I am not sure that I hold what he describes as an extreme liberal view on prostitution. I have made it clear that research will be done by DOJ on the nature and extent of prostitution in Northern Ireland and on what legislation might be appropriate. There may well be lessons to learn about how we relate on a cross-border basis. I am certainly happy to learn lessons, if there is work to be done in conjunction with the Department of Justice and Equality in Dublin.

I note our recent successes in Sweden, including two prison sentences for those responsible for trafficking between Northern Ireland and Sweden.

Mr Wells: Sweden, again.

Mr Ford: Yes, interestingly, there has been trafficking into Sweden, despite what some Members tell us is the problem. It is clear that there is a cross-jurisdictional issue in Europe, which has not been entirely addressed by the Swedish model.

I believe in evidence-based policymaking, and we are seeking to find the evidence for an appropriate approach in Northern Ireland. We will see what transpires from that research. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire as an ráiteas. I welcome the Minister's statement.

Has the Minister, in his discussions with the Minister in the South, looked at security at ports and airports across the island with a view to how they could strengthen measures of identifying potential victims of human trafficking as they enter the country?

Mr Ford: There was no specific discussion about ports and airports at the last meeting. It is not a devolved issue for us in Northern Ireland, and there are difficult issues to address regarding the common travel area of the UK and Ireland generally. However, the issue has featured in the past, and we have looked at work that can be done across the border and across the North Channel, to the Scottish ports, in order to pick up those who might be being trafficked. Maintaining open borders within the common travel area while ensuring that we do what we can to ensure that trafficking does not happen is a major issue.

3.45 pm

Mr Humphrey: I welcome the Minister's statement today and the progress he has made on fuel laundering. I also welcome his position change on unduly lenient sentencing. I am glad that he has adopted the position outlined by the Justice Committee. Does he agree with me and my party colleagues that, if greater resource were available through the National Crime Agency (NCA) being fully extended to Northern Ireland, more successes such as the one he talked about earlier would be made with human trafficking and fuel laundering? Does he agree that it is time that parties in this place agree to those powers being fully extended to Northern Ireland if they are committed to law and order?

Mr Ford: I have to defend my position. I am not sure that I was ever in the position of changing my mind on the issue of unduly lenient sentencing. Issues such as changing the law are about getting the most appropriate balance. The fact that a Minister cannot jump up and immediately put into place what a Committee would want is part of the nature of what we have to say.

I agree entirely with Mr Humphrey's substantive point. There is currently a gap, and there is operational pressure on the PSNI because we do not have access to the NCA resources in the devolved area. There are issues around civil recovery, which we are unable to do currently if it is a matter of a crime in the devolved area, and there are

challenges facing all of us. I hope that the discussions that I have had with other parties in the House and his will bear fruit and that we will see the NCA operational in Northern Ireland, subject to all the constraints and the checks and balances that we put in place, working in support of the PSNI and other agencies to tackle organised crime.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Patsy McGlone.

Mr McGlone: Gabh mo leithscéal, céin cheist í sin? I am sorry about that. Excuse me.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for his statement today. Looking at the work programme, I note that no target has yet been set for work on support for victims and witnesses of crime. Can the Minister provide any more detail on the work being done on that issue, and will he accept that, in light of the recent revelations in the Smithwick report, this matter now assumes an even greater urgency and importance?

Mr Ford: I am sorry, Principal Deputy Speaker, I did not catch all of the question because of the noise in the Chamber, but I assure Mr Anderson that the general issue of support for victims and witnesses of crime is a key issue for the Department and one that operates on a cross-border basis. The fact that we are able to provide some assistance to our Southern colleagues in how the victim and witness care unit functions is an indication of positive work being done here that others are learning from. We are not always the last jurisdiction to put something good in place, but we will certainly see that the next issue listed, the media initiative in the spring of next year, will, I believe, show useful progress to every part of this island.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for his statement. He noted an ad hoc North/South crime strategy group and the intergovernmental agreement. Does he accept that it is the outworkings of these strategies and agreements that are key to progress? How does he see them deliver on crimes such as fuel laundering and tobacco smuggling?

Mr Ford: I agree that it is the outcomes that matter to people and not the headline figures of what we are aiming for. That is why we need to see the best possible joining up between the different agencies. That is also why we have the six project advisory groups, showing that we can join up the work between the different agencies, North and South. I believe that all of those are showing positive work. However, as we know, as we seek to tackle organised crime, literally Europe-wide, we face the challenges of criminals changing their ways of operation and moving into different areas. We know that people are involved in a variety of organised crime, which, at times, includes tobacco and fuel smuggling and a variety of counterfeit goods production, as well as, in some cases, human trafficking. That is why one of the other issues that is important, and that will be addressed by the Organised Crime Task Force this week, is changing mindsets to persuade people not to become customers.

Executive Committee Business

Road Races (Amendment) Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Road Races (Amendment) Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development).]

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments detailing the order for consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate in the provisional grouping of amendments selected list. There are two amendments, which will be debated in a single group. The amendments propose changes relating to Sunday contingency days for the North West 200 and the removal of the 24-hour notice required when applying for a direction to put a contingency day into effect. Once the debate is completed, amendment No 2 will be moved formally, and the Question will be put without further debate. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Clause 1 (Specification of contingency days in orders under Road Races (Northern Ireland) Order 1986)

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We now come to the amendments for debate. With amendment No 1, it will be convenient to debate amendment No 2. I call Mr Jim Allister to move amendment No 1 and to address the other amendment in the group.

Mr Allister: I beg to move amendment No 1: In page 1, line 15, at end insert

“(1CA) An order authorising the use of the roads specified in the Schedule to the Road Races (North West 200) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 may not specify as a contingency day—

(a) the whole of a Sunday; or

(b) any part of a Sunday beginning before 1.30 pm or ending after 6 pm.”.

The following amendment stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In page 2, line 9, leave out from “and” to end of line 14.— *[Mr McCallister.]*

Mr Allister: The House is aware that just last week we debated matters germane to the subject of amendment No 1. We had the debate at Consideration Stage on whether a proposition that I made to the House that generally in the Road Races (Amendment) Bill there should be a prohibition on road racing during stipulated hours. In the debate, many made the point that, whereas that might be a suitable approach for the premier race that is the North West 200, it was, in the Minister’s words, a “one-size-fits-all” approach that, in his view and in the majority view of the House, rendered it unsuitable for the entirety of road races to be covered by the Bill. The Minister said, for example, that it:

“would impose a single solution across all events regarding timing, and that would not be appropriate.”
— *[Official Report, Bound Volume 90, p43, col 2].*

Other Members made similar points. I note from looking at Hansard that Mr Spratt made that point as a drawback to the amendment that I had moved. Mr Samuel Wilson and others also made that contention. The House reached a view that it would be unhappy to apply across the board the proposition that I made. I, of course, accept, and have to accept, that that was the will of the House.

I now ask the House to consider the specific instance of the North West 200, in the context that it is a route on which there are particular problems. On the route, there are not only four operative churches with set, regular times of operation but a highly populated area with many churchgoers to other churches outside the route whereby the route of the North West is the means of access to their church of choice. My appeal today is that we give those churchgoers and churches the certainty that they seek.

Since last week, I have spoken directly or indirectly — either me or people on my behalf — to 13 affected churches in the area: the four churches on the route, and nine others that regard the route as a means of access for their congregation. I have to tell the House that the unanimous view of those consulted is that they still crave for certainty where their church services are concerned. They say to the House that they want protection for their freedom of worship to be enshrined. Therefore, they want to see at least the hours on which they operate protected from the generality of the Bill. That is not an unreasonable request, and I do not think that it is a request that any Member should lightly cast aside. If you have many hundreds of churchgoers living on the route, operative churches on the route and other churches affected, given that they have article 9 rights, surely it is not unreasonable to say that the least that the House can do is to protect for them the operations of the Bill to ensure that their rights are protected.

I think that there was an appreciation in many parts of the House last week of the particular issues on the North West route. I sensed from many that, although they rejected the wider ambit of my amendment, there was sympathy with the North West situation. What I return to today is an amendment that is exclusive and specific to the North West. It is not all that I would want in the Bill; left to me, the Bill would be very different in its composition. However, working with what we have got and trying to obtain that which is obtainable for the churches and churchgoers in that area, I respectfully suggest to the House that what is being proposed in amendment No 1 is measured, modest and appropriate to meeting their legitimate needs. I do not think that the House should put itself in the position of wanting to trample the rights of churchgoers anywhere in this Province. When you particularly have a very pertinent issue on the North West route, it is something that, I respectfully suggest, the House needs to listen to. I trust that it will listen to it in that spirit and recognise that there is no loss in doing that.

Indeed, I think that it was Mr Dunne who told us last week that he had an assurance from Mervyn Whyte, who very successfully heads up Coleraine and District Motor Club, which operates and organises that event every year, that it was the club's intent that no wheel would turn on a Sunday morning — I think that that was the phrase — because it did not wish that to be.

The fundamental point about that is this: we are framing legislation that will last some time into the future. The last

time that road racing was looked at in any legislative form was in 1986. That is 27 years ago. It could well be another 27 years before the legislation is amended again. Whereas I totally accept that people such as Mervyn Whyte are not in the business of abusing the rights of churchgoers, we are framing legislation that is likely to outlast not only the Minister's control of the Department but Mervyn Whyte's control of Coleraine and District Motor Club. So, we are seeking surely to implement principles that will be of good service to the churches and churchgoers and all the interests in that area, whoever is the Minister and whoever is the primary organiser of the races.

It is in that spirit that I say to the House that we should, therefore, give due consideration to the fact that, in legislating for the future under different Ministers and organisers of these races, we should put in a statutory protection where there is obviously a need for such. The plea of those churches that I spoke to was that they might have that certainty. I do not think that it is too much to ask of this House that we might afford to them the certainty, from year to year, that no one is in the business of infringing their rights of freedom of worship and that the hours that have been stipulated that exist elsewhere, as we recalled, in the Isle of Man, on particular Sundays, will equally be afforded to their route, given that their route has this specific issue at its heart.

It is in that spirit that I appeal to the House to give fresh consideration to what is a different proposal; it is not my ideal proposal by any manner or means — none of these was — but it is a pragmatic proposal to deal with an existing problem on the north coast. We can use amendment No 1 to resolve that difficulty and do no despite outside of that. So, I appeal to the House to give this amendment a fair wind, to consider the issues that it seeks to address and to conclude that it addresses them in a rational, reasonable way, with which the House could be at ease. I trust that that will be possible today.

4.00 pm

Mr Spratt: First, I will make a few remarks as Chair of the Committee. I am not very clear at this moment whether NI21 — Mr Allister moved his.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. My understanding was that the second amendment would either be moved or spoken to at this point, but I seek direction from the Chair.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: No, it will be moved when we come to that point in the process, though NI21 will have an opportunity to address the subject matter. We are debating both amendments. Amendment No 2 will be moved at the appropriate time.

Mr Spratt: Thank you. That clarifies the position.

I will refer to remarks just made by Mr Allister in proposing his amendment. The Committee is, and always has been, sympathetic to those who object to the potential for Sunday racing, particularly in the north-west area. That has been the stance of the Committee in its entirety. Mr Allister is right: last week, when we spoke on the subject, the issue was the fact that the amendment before the House would have been an issue across the board for all other events that might be held on a contingency day, which might fall on a Sunday. The Committee position has not

changed. Mr Allister made the arguments last week about the human rights issues of folks being able to attend their place of worship, and, right around the House, there was no division on that issue. That was accepted, but the issue was how it was worded.

I will leave my remarks as Chair behind and speak from a party perspective. Since last week, a number of meetings have taken place, and the amendment that is in front of the House today mentions the North West 200 only regarding the legislation. We are reasonably content with that.

Mervyn Whyte has been referred to. He successfully puts a lot of very hard work into the North West 200; in fact, he works on it for 12 months of the year. I understand that he held a meeting last Friday with a number of clergy. The clergy remained steadfast in their opposition to Sunday racing, as you would expect, but clarification was given to them that it would be a last resort in times of inclement weather, etc. In fact, the contingency days could have come about in last year's racing. Thursday night racing could have been extended, with the possibility of Tuesday racing as well, because the forecast was so clear for the Saturday last year. That is not me saying that; it is what the experts have since said.

At the meeting last Friday, Mr Whyte and the organisers were able to give considerable clarification to the churches. They also clarified their position on a number of other issues. They are happy that there is the 24-hour period to allow consultation with the local residents, local councils and everybody concerned. Mr Whyte was very clear that that needs to take place. A considerable amount of reassurance was given. It was made very clear that Sunday racing would take place only as a last resort.

Another point, which I mentioned last week but is worth repeating, is that even the organisers are concerned about getting the required number of people on the course on a Sunday, after a full week of activities in the north-west area. I think that the organisers need to have around 800 people out on the course. The organisers said that it could well be difficult to get that number of people out on the course if a Sunday were added as a contingency.

There was a second message from the organisers. Although Mervyn Whyte says that he would prefer the ability to close the roads at any time on a Sunday, he said that, if hardy came to hardy, he was willing to accept the 1.30 pm to 6.00 pm closure, with a reduced programme of racing. I think that is significant. He says that three races could probably be run during that time.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Spratt: Just give me a minute and I will be happy to give way. Mervyn Whyte said that it was his wish that we would never have to resort to Sunday racing, but that, if we did, it would be only in extreme and exceptional circumstances.

Mr B McCrea: I know that we talked about this in the previous debate. The real scenario was outlined in which, two years ago, one race took place on the Saturday but then there was an oil spill and various other things, which meant that no further racing could take place. Would Mr Spratt be supportive of the races that could not be run — the extra programme — being run on a Sunday, potentially between 1.30 pm and 6.00 pm? Is that what he would have in mind on behalf of the participants?

Mr Spratt: Of course, there has to be the 24-hour notice period. I think that the Member is trying to pave the way for the nonsensical amendment that he will present to the House shortly. It is not about what Mr Spratt says; it is about what the rest of the Members of the House say about it. Very sensible arguments have been made. The Member concerned has thrown in some red herrings, such as oil spills, bomb scares, funerals and all sorts of things. He has thrown them all in to muddy the waters. I am not prepared to go down that route, but I am prepared to accept the will of the House in due course.

From a party perspective, the circumstances have changed considerably since last time. We are now talking specifically about the North West 200. Indeed, given that our amendment, which, we think, gives protection, has already been accepted and was supported fully by the House last week, we do not have any major objection on this side of the House. This amendment will give added protection to those who want to continue to treat Sunday as the special day that it is. We are prepared to accept the amendment in the spirit in which Mr Allister presented it to the House.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will speak on amendment No 1.

I have listened to the Chair. I accept the meeting that he had with the stakeholders and organisers. Even though there was a fair bit removed from it, I accept what he says and the messages that have come out of that meeting. Circumstances have changed. In the context that the amendment is specific to the North West 200, we are told that the organisers are not against such a time limit, and it is reasonable that all stakeholders' rights are respected, including those of churchgoers. As the Member has stated, it is a different proposal. I agree that it deals with the issue in a reasonable and pragmatic way.

Mr Dallat: My involvement on this is purely to ensure that we have a North West 200 for the future. I suppose that maybe we could congratulate ourselves that we have got it this far without crashing. The Bill is unique in many ways in that it sets out contingencies for something that we hope will not happen. It is not a demand for something that is not the norm. Other Members have pointed out that there have been cancellations in two of the past three years. That was the signal that something had to happen to ensure that, in future years, the sponsors of that race would get value for their money.

It is important to remember that it is not just the 100,000 or so people who turn up: the television coverage is massive. No money from the Tourist Board, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, Invest Northern Ireland or any other organ of the Assembly could buy that type of coverage. As I said, we hope that the Bill never has to be implemented. Certainly, as a member of the Committee, I was happy with it as it was. I am not sure what has happened in the meantime. Certainly, the organisers have said that they can live with the amendments. I also note that Mr Allister's approach this afternoon was a great deal more conciliatory than it was last week. Perhaps, he has swapped his Yamaha 650 for a humble moped to persuade the rest of us to get on board and make a success of the Bill.

It would be remiss of me not to mention my colleague Mr Basil McCrea. I do not want to be unfair to him, but has he discovered a reverse gear in motorbikes? Last week, he

appeared to be in support of one thing, and now he seems to have gone backwards. I think that Basil has had a bad fall. It is important to emphasise again and again that —

4.15 pm

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dallat: You will have your opportunity in a minute or two to get on your bike.

This is not about desecrating the Sabbath or eroding respect for Sunday observance. I pay tribute to the Minister for his involvement and to the Chairman. They have gone to enormous lengths to ensure that the Bill will pass through the House unblemished. No credit is due to those who tried to derail it; they were not successful. I am happy enough with the amendments if the organisers are happy enough.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call Mr Hussey, I should advise the House that he would appreciate being allowed to remain seated for his contribution. I am content that, with the leave of the House, he may remain seated.

Mr Hussey: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to remain seated.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Bill. As it is my first time talking on it, I would like to congratulate the Minister and his officials on taking the pragmatic stance that they have taken. Unfortunately, ill health kept me away for a few weeks, but I am now back on my bike, even though I did not pedal too far to get here today.

I hope that we can all agree in the Chamber on the need for the Bill. I trust that the difficult experiences that have been encountered by the organisers of races such as the North West 200 over the past few years will at least now be avoided as far as possible. Of course, whilst the North West 200 has been hit hard over the past few years, we should not forget that there are many other races across Northern Ireland that are also at the mercy of the weather. The Bill is about much more than just one race; it is about all road races, so we should approach it in that manner.

A broadly similar amendment to that in the name of Mr Allister today was discussed at Consideration Stage. Today, however, it specifies the North West 200, and that clarification is welcome, as his previous amendment would, I believe, have inadvertently included all road races on a Sunday, including those that currently take place on a Sunday. My party is on record as stating our belief that the Road Races (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, as well as the Bill, should not be seen as a threat or something to be concerned about by residents and organisations located along race routes.

Organisers, I trust, already go and will continue to go to great lengths to minimise the disruption to local communities as much as possible. After all, they are reliant on the annual approval of the Department, so it is in their interest to approach the issue as sensibly as possible. We should also remember that, if Sunday contingency days were to be applied for and granted under the Bill, it would not breach any pre-existing prohibition, mainly because no such prohibition exists.

I accept, however, that, for some people and organisations, promises may not be enough to give them total peace of mind. So it is that we come to Mr Allister's amendment.

The North West 200 is one of Northern Ireland's two world-renowned international road races, the other being the Ulster Grand Prix. It pumps millions into our economy on an annual basis, and it attracts tens of thousands to the Coleraine area throughout the weekend. We must, however, remember that, with the best will in the world, there is inevitably some disruption to the local community.

Whilst locals have been able to adapt to that, the Ulster Unionist Party is not opposed to their ability to get to and from church services being formally protected in the Bill. Therefore, we will support amendment No 1, not because it adds anything to the Bill, but because, I hope, it will put to rest the valid concerns that some people who attend any of the four churches along the route and other churches that have been mentioned may have about accessing their place of worship on a Sunday morning.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will just clarify that we are having a single debate on both amendments. It seems, from some of the signals that I am getting, that Members are confused about that.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Your earlier ruling was that the amendments would be taken separately. We have had a debate on amendment No 1. Most of us assumed, I think, from your ruling, that we would move on to a debate on amendment No 2, yet you seem to be indicating now that we are having a debate on both amendments.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Actually, I informed the House that there were two amendments, which would be debated in a single group. The amendments propose changes relating to Sunday contingency days for the North West 200 and the removal of the 24-hour notice required when applying for a direction to put the contingency day into effect. That was the announcement that I made to the House. We will move on. I am sorry for delaying you, Mr McCarthy.

Mr McCarthy: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I will not take too much of your time. I want only to support and back up the comments made by the Chair, the Deputy Chair and other members of the Committee. I noted the words that Mr Allister used in proposing his amendment. He said that it was not an unreasonable request. Members will know that the Alliance Party is made up of very reasonable people. Given that background, I have no problem supporting amendment No 1. He also said that we do not want to trample on anybody's rights. Of course we do not want to, nor will we trample on anybody's rights. It was said earlier that Members have met and had discussions with people on the route. We certainly want to meet the legitimate needs of everybody concerned. I want to make sure that every —

Mr Spratt: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCarthy: I will, surely.

Mr Spratt: I thank the honourable Member. I knew that he was very reasonable and would give way. I note what he has just said about the notification of folk living on the route of any change of plan on a contingency day. Does the Member agree with me that the amendment in the name of Mr McCallister and Mr McCrea would create absolute uncertainty and that their party has moved from its stance of last week to a new stance this week that

makes the whole situation totally uncertain? A week really is a long time in politics, is it not?

Mr McCarthy: I agree with Mr Spratt. I cannot get my head around what they are proposing. A wee bit of publicity for the — what is it? — NI21 people may well be the reason. For a start, it is nonsensical. I assure everybody that we have done our duty, so people should be at ease if we go ahead and support the amendment in the name of Mr Allister.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr John McCallister, and I hope that that is clear.

Mr McCallister: I rise in trepidation after the mauling that we have just had from the Alliance Party. The purpose of Mr Allister's amendment and, indeed, the amendment in my name and Mr McCrea's is very clear. Contrary to Mr Spratt's intervention, our argument has been consistent. We are being lectured by Mr Spratt, the man who argued against Mr Allister's amendment last week but has rolled over and accepts it this week, simply with the addition of the North West 200.

Mr Spratt: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: I am happy to give way.

Mr Spratt: I made my reason very clear. Obviously, Mr McCallister was not listening. Mr Allister's amendment last week covered races across the board, and that was the issue. Mr Allister has come back to the House today with an amendment specifically naming the North West 200. I made it very clear last week that the Committee had sympathy with folk getting to and from church and wanted that to continue. That point was made, and, if he checks Hansard, he will find that that is the case.

Mr McCallister: That was a wonderful bit of clarification. The only drawback is that he made it very clear last week that there was no need for Mr Allister's amendment because the DUP had come up with a wonderful amendment that could protect everyone. Is this a concession from him today that his amendment did not make a blind bit of difference to the folks up in the north-west — the churchgoers who want to go to church? He has changed on the issue and will probably continue to flip-flop. I will give him one more go to clarify.

Mr Spratt: I absolutely have not changed. It is your corner that has absolutely changed. Our amendment was accepted by the entire House last week with, I think, the exception of three votes, so our amendment stands part of the Bill. It clearly gives flexibility, and that is where we stand. What you propose today gives no flexibility whatsoever and is nonsense.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Could I have all contributions through the Chair, please?

Mr McCallister: Thank you, Principal Deputy Speaker. So, that still leaves the question: are you voting for it or not? The problem that the Member did not address is that he said last week that his amendment gave adequate protection and this week he says, "Well, maybe it doesn't. We will actually back Mr Allister on this amendment because it is North West 200-specific". I welcome his road to Damascus conversion, if you like, but he is the one who is flip-flopping and changing. He graciously points out to us all that he will accept the will of the House. That goes for everybody in the House. Whatever the House votes on

and decides, we do not have a lot of choice but to accept, except when they corrupt that system by using petitions of concern.

We have managed to create something that has broad support. Everyone in the House wants to see a North West 200 event being run and held successfully. The Minister's own explanatory and financial memorandum to the Bill refers to major road racing events, such as the Ulster Grand Prix and the North West 200 festival. An economic assessment of the North West 200 put the figure at 90,000 visitors with expenditure of £4.45 million, so that for every £1 of public money spent there was a return of over £30. We have to make every effort to ensure that the event is run and run successfully.

The amendment standing in my name and Mr McCrea's would give the Minister and his Department more flexibility in when they would make the assessment about using a contingency day. Mr Spratt spoke about adding days: we are not adding days. We are not permitted to add days. I would love to have gone further with the amendment and left the decision on whether we triggered the use of a contingency day even later. You could have used part of the Saturday to deal with oil spills, emergency situations that arose, a bomb scare or whatever it happened to be. However, this is primarily legislation for bad weather. The point that we made and the point of the amendment is to say, "If the Minister wants it, he could have the power to narrow the window of when the decision would have to be made". You could actually shorten the time when the decision to apply for the contingency day has to be made. That is something we should all welcome. Given the starting point that we all want, which is that the event should take place and be a success, that is the essence of why you should maximise the Minister and his Department's flexibility in making those arrangements.

Although I supported Mr Allister's amendment last week and will do so this week, you could also find that, if bad weather is predicted late on, that will not only shorten the event; if Friday was a contingency day, it will also shorten the time you have to apply to use Friday and for the window not to have passed if you have decided to bring the event forward rather than push it back to the Sunday in the event of weather being the issue. That is desirable to have in the Bill. This is literally a weather contingency Bill, and the more flexibility we can give the Minister and the Department, the better. I agree with Mr Dallat: we probably all hope that the legislation does not have to be used or that, if it does, it is used in very limited circumstances.

4.30 pm

Mr Spratt: I thank the Member for giving way. I will quote some words from an email from Mervyn Whyte, who is the expert on the North West 200 course:

"I am not sure of the reason for this amendment. Is it to remove or alter the 24-hour notice which we felt was the correct way to go in relation to notifying the residents who live on this particular course? I would prefer to stay with the 24-hour notice. If I don't give this amount of notice to the residents in the North West course, be they traders, deliverymen, bin collection etc, they will not have any idea of what our plans are for race week. They will not be able to make plans for that particular day".

Those are the words of Mervyn Whyte, who is the expert.

Mr McCallister: That was a useful intervention, but I have two points to make about it. There is nothing to stop Mr Whyte giving more than 24 hours' notice. There is nothing to stop him giving 48 hours', 60 hours' or 72 hours' notice if he knows that he needs the time. The point is that you then have the flexibility. In an earlier contribution, Mr Spratt said that our amendment made things inflexible. It actually does the opposite: it gives more flexibility. Of course, anyone who applied would make the decision at the earliest possible point. The amendment would give flexibility. If the time in which to make the decision had passed, there would still be flexibility, if we are all starting from the point that we want to see the event run.

The other point is, of course, that contingency days, along with the actual race days, are applied for by 31 March. You know what the days are, and a consultation is done on that. You know what days will be used, including the possible contingency day. Therefore, all the residents and churchgoers will effectively be on notice that that is the week in which the event will be run.

I come back to my earlier point that it gives you flexibility. If it were predicted on a Tuesday that there would be torrential rain all of Saturday and Sunday and Friday were the contingency day, you could still apply for and use that day. It gives the Department and the Minister much more flexibility to make such decisions.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Yes.

Mr Wells: I have absolutely no doubt that, as long as Mr Whyte is in charge of the North West 200 and Mr Kennedy is the Minister for Regional Development, the issues that I have concerns about will not arise. However, in 20 years' time, Mr Kennedy may not be the Minister for Regional Development and, in 30 years' time, Mr Whyte may not be the chief executive or the person who organises the North West 200. You could have a situation in which the organisers, under different leadership, are under tremendous pressure from sponsors who are demanding a quick decision. The sponsor may say, "I am going to withdraw a substantial amount or all of what I am giving to this race this year if you do not comply". At least with what the legislation proposes at the moment, the organisers can say, "I am sorry, but there is nothing that we can do. The law is very clear on this". That is my concern, because a major multinational could come in and sponsor the North West 200 and put huge pressure on those organising it.

Mr McCallister: I have two things on that. As the law stands, there is nothing to prevent anyone applying to race on a Sunday as normal. It might explain why Mr Wells was not as, shall we say, enthusiastic about some of the amendments last week. I do not think that he voted on Mr Allister's amendment. I think that it would have been important to support that amendment, if that indeed is his view.

The other point is that you could apply for Sunday racing anyway. We are still only talking about contingency days. I suspect that no Minister would say that the biggest emergency that we can come up with is a sponsor saying at the last minute that it will withdraw its sponsorship of an event.

If that is really what we are saying, it would become a free-for-all anyway if we were to respond to that.

As you rightly pointed out, Mr Kennedy may not be the Minister forever, but I am sure that the whole House wishes him to be Minister for many years to come.

Mr McNarry: No, not the whole House. That is for sure.

Mr McCallister: We have some dissent from colleagues on the opposition Benches.

In the event of Mr Kennedy or a successor taking that decision, you are still limited. It gives an added 24 hours of flexibility, but you are still limited in when you can apply to move the day that you originally applied for and take a contingency day. So, you are still protected. Of course, the Minister can say no. It builds in the extra flexibility. That is the point of doing it. That is the reason that Mr Kennedy and his Department are bringing the Bill, and that is why we should be maximising the flexibility that is in it. It comes back to Mr Dallat's point, which is that what we all want and what we are all signed up for is to run the event and to make sure that it happens. The economic case that Minister Kennedy set out is compelling. It is too big an event to lose, and we need to make sure that we do all that we can to run it. When you add in Mr Allister's amendment to protect churchgoers' and racegoers' competing rights on a Sunday, you improve the legislation in the way that the House should.

Mr Dallat made the point about the Committee being happy with the Bill. Quite frankly, the Committee dropped the ball on this legislation. There are some flaws in it that were highlighted mainly by Mr Allister. The Bill would be markedly better if it had been through a proper Committee scrutiny, even if that had been done in a six-week period. It would have been markedly improved legislation. So, if you tie in the two amendments and the protection for churchgoers, which Mr Allister quite rightly highlighted last week and this week, with support from your party, and, I gather, from other parties, it looks as though it could be passed. If you build into that the changes in the amendments that Mr McCrea and I tabled, you give the Minister that flexibility. I accept that it is not ideal, but you create a more flexible system. You narrow the window in which you can apply for the contingency day.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Yes.

Mr Wells: I know that the honourable Member's relatives are regular visitors to the North West, because I have met them there. I have never met him there, but has he driven or walked the route? Does he understand what he is saying? It goes through some of the most built-up parts of the Coleraine borough. Therefore, it is not a question of simply racegoers and those on their bikes; it is also about churches, schools, businesses, bus companies and taxis etc. You must give those people a sensible amount of warning that there is going to be a change in the expected days on which racing will occur. It is there for very good reasons. Signs have to be changed, and safety devices have to be put up. You simply cannot do it at short notice. Therefore, 24 hours strikes me as extremely reasonable.

Mr McCallister: I can, of course, confirm that I have been to not only the area but the race on many occasions. My late father was a huge road racing enthusiast. The point is that I want the event to go ahead. I want it to be a success.

Mr Wells's point is that, effectively, when we apply for the practice and racing days and the now built-in contingency days, it has to be with the Department by 31 March. That is when you are effectively putting all the people who the Member mentioned on notice about the possibility of whatever contingency days are applied for, whether it is the Friday and the Sunday or the Thursday, Friday and Sunday — whatever configuration it happens to be.

To me, it seems absolutely sensible to build in flexibility for one of the flagship events, which is probably the biggest sporting event that we hold. Why would the Minister not want the power and the flexibility to make those changes? He probably has strong views about racing on a Sunday, and it might also help bring it the other way in the event of a late weather forecast. So, you should build in that flexibility.

It is eminently sensible to give the Minister and the Department as much flexibility to deal with this as possible. You should couple that with the protection that Mr Allister has rightly fought very strongly to get. He has dragged a reluctant major party in government over the line on it. Even though that party said that its amendments give all this protection, it has come over to that argument. So, put the two amendments together, and I think that you improve the Bill. That should be welcomed.

Mr B McCrea: I have a few points that I want to add. First, I will deal with the amendment brought forward by Mr Allister. I consider the decision by a number of parties here today to support his amendment to be a vindication of the argument that not only he but that I put forward. Some Members have not understood the argument or why it was put forward, because they were quite adamant at the last sitting about how it was totally and utterly unnecessary. They said that it was superfluous and could be handled by their party's amendment. If that is the case, I wonder why they are now deciding to accept it.

The official record will show that Mr Allister said that there were some Members who were critical of me as a person, and the argument was put forward that that means that those Members are very weak in their argument. I have to say that I am surprised at some of the Members in this House, people I hold in great esteem. Some of them said in the debate that they thought that I had fallen off my bike, but they have not yet declared how or why. So, I hereby give the opportunity for those honourable Members to explain in detail what their problem is, given that, I suspect, they will support amendment No 1. A deathly hush comes across the Chamber. People should not make accusations that they cannot back up.

Mr Spratt is very keen on red herrings. I had the opportunity to read the official record, and Mr Spratt again talked about red herrings. I made the point about the potential for things to go wrong, and I did, of course, mention that there may be a bomb scare. I asked him whether he was aware of it, and he said:

"That is exactly what the amendment seeks to achieve."
— [Official Report, Bound Volume 90, p31, col 1].

He gave a lengthy response to the fact that there are issues that need to be dealt with. They are not red herrings but contingencies that need to be planned for, and the purpose of this Bill, as I understood it, was to try to protect one of our major events and one of the major economic

generators in the Province. That is the whole reason for doing it, and we do not know exactly what will come back up.

Since I am on the issue of people who cannot advance an argument but do turn turtle, Mr McCarthy tried to pretend that he does not know who NI21 is. He will get to know in the election soon enough. I have to say that, for people who pretend to be reasonable and to be able to hold an argument, the last time I heard from Mr McCarthy, he was apologising for only being recently on the Committee and not being fully up to speed with matters. Well, let me tell you: that is not good enough. If you are going to talk on a matter, make sure that you understand what you are talking about. [Laughter.]

4.45 pm

We then come to provoking a little bit of a response to the Member's offer. Let me tell you that the people on this Bench may not agree politically on every issue but, collectively, we are prepared to debate issues, and we can do so without reading notes or having things brought to us by Committee Clerks or anything else. We care passionately about what we are talking about. When Members deride people, they must understand that it is our job to debate legislation. When we see legislation that is wrong, it is appropriate that people should stand up and be counted and not roll over and say, "If the big boys say it is OK, we will go along with them". When the big boys change their minds, they then say, "Oh, we're going to have a go at that as well".

Mr Allister may not welcome this —

Mr Spratt: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I am wondering when the Member will talk about the amendment that he is recommending to the House. Surely, that is what he should be doing in his speech rather than lecturing everybody around the Chamber. We are sick of his lectures.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am not sure that that is a point of order. I think that the Member was addressing the amendment and the points that were made across the Chamber.

Mr B McCrea: I appreciate the very clear guidance from the Principal Deputy Speaker on that matter. I was responding to comments that were made by the person who raised that point of order and to other points that were made in the debate. It is my right to challenge people who, frankly, do not know what they are talking about, who are flip-flopping around on this argument and who cannot stand up and be counted on what they really believe.

Last week, those people argued strongly that Mr Allister was wrong, that he had no need to stand up and do what he was doing and that he could not possibly be right. They lined up in their droves to vote in the "No" Lobby. Now, they are saying, "Do you know what? Good old Jim may not have been all wrong. There is some merit in his argument". At that time, some Members did not understand his argument and, even now, I am not so sure that they really understand his argument. However, they have had some pressure from constituents, and they think that Mr Allister may have gained some political advantage. On that basis, they are trying to minimise it, pretend that it did not happen and that this is what they were really in favour of all along.

Let there be absolutely no doubt. The official record is there, the video tapes are there, and people lined up in the Chamber to say that Mr Allister was wrong. Mr Allister was not wrong; Mr Allister was right. There is a balance of responsibilities and rights, and it is right and proper that those who want to go their church should be facilitated. He was right to say that, if you deny those people those rights, there may be human rights issues that may be challenged in the courts. He was also right to say that we are trying to find an acceptable compromise so that, should we have a situation in which we have to postpone the race, we are able to reschedule it because of the economic benefit.

I move on to the point that my colleague, John McCallister, raised. When we look at what has happened — it is not conjecture — for the past two years, a number of unforeseen circumstances have meant that we have had to cancel racing. One of the questions that I ask Mr Spratt, through you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, is this: what would happen in the event, as has happened, that there is an oil spill after one race has been run? If that happens this year for a third year and we have another washout with only one race, how does that affect the financial viability of the North West 200? In my opinion, it is a cause for concern. Whatever the reason, those people who bring racing teams to the course and those spectators who come up want to see racing, and if you lose the race for three years, there will be a question of viability. So, that is my real concern about this point, and we have introduced amendment No 2 because I do not think that the Bill, as presently constituted, will serve the cause that it sets out to. Believe it or not, we are all in agreement. We are all here trying to make sure that we protect what is one of our principal events and major economic advantages so that it can be run despite the weather or whatever else.

I will mention this because some people talked about the Isle of Man. Mr Allister outlined why you might need such contingencies. An article on the well-known Visordown website states:

“A house caught on fire near Kirk Michael and fire crews were called to the scene at 7pm. The sidecars were out on the course at the time but were sent back to the pits to allow emergency services open access to the roads.”

The headline is “House fire postpones TT practice”. People said that it was bad enough that the weather was bad on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, but, when the oil tank caught fire on the last day, that was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Gary Thompson commented:

“Even before the house fire that affected this evening’s session, the majority of the field simply hasn’t had enough practice time on the Superbikes because of the bad weather earlier”.

Not on the day, but “earlier”. He continued:

“On behalf of the race organisation I’d like to apologise to anyone affected by the disruption on Sunday but we don’t have an option. We will endeavour to get the roads open again on Sunday as soon as possible.”

There is then a list of the schedules and what will happen. It opens at 1.30 pm and goes on until 5.00 pm.

We were trying to ensure that, had we had a situation similar to the one that happened two years ago when there

was a combination of wet weather and then an oil spill, it would be possible for us to run some of the races on the Sunday. The point that we are putting out to everybody is that we would be giving advance notice and telling people that, as the event has got bigger, it is not possible to consider it as a one- or two-day event but that it is almost a four- or five-day event in which the possibility of having to run races on Sunday is considered. The reason why we supported Mr Allister’s amendment is that we realise that it is entirely unreasonable to impose such strictures on churchgoers, and we want to protect them by saying that there will be absolute certainty that there will be no racing until 1.30 pm and that it will finish at 6.00 pm.

Put together the amendment that the House will now accept from Mr Allister and the amendment that Mr McCallister proposed and you will have the tools to protect the race, the economy, those people whose livelihoods depend on it and the citizens of the triangle who want to go about their business.

The challenge for this House is not to shout people down and tell people that they do not want to listen when Mr Allister makes an argument, Mr McCallister makes an argument or, heaven forbid, I do, but to listen to the argument, defeat the argument if they can or embrace it if they cannot. In that regard, we should all be trying to find a way to improve the situation for all people. Mr Allister and Mr McCallister’s amendments are well thought out and deserve the support of this House. I ask people to not reject things just because they want to make some cheap, party political points but to do the right thing for the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to Members from all sides who contributed to the debate, particularly members of the Regional Development Committee. I will come shortly to the amendment indicated earlier by Mr Allister and the love-in fest that it has now become. First, I must deal with the issues presented by Mr McCallister and, more latterly, Mr McCrea.

I think I am not the only one in the House to say that I am very glad that Mervyn Whyte and others are the race organisers for events like the North West 200, and that none of the organisers are called Basil McCrea or John McCallister. A level of confusion exists that is caused by their failing to understand both the purpose of this Bill and the current legislation. Let me respectfully say this to them: the amendment that we are seeking to bring to the current legislation is a straightforward, one-clause amendment that seeks to offer flexibility, principally for the reason of bad weather. I have heard the argument about oil spills. I have heard of the cataclysmic potential for earthquakes, and heaven forbid that any such event should happen. However, you cannot legislate in those terms for on-the-day events.

I hope very much that, when the Hansard report is produced, Mr McCallister and Mr McCrea will compare and contrast their contributions of last week to that which they have offered the House this week. Last week, Mr McCrea waxed lyrical about the opportunity that it was essential to provide for churches, businesses and householders on the course of the North West 200; that those people should have certainty around attendance at worship or travelling to worship. That was for churchgoers in the particular churches that are on that course. He even invoked the possibility that the Attorney General would have to see

whether or not this was competent, so that those human rights could be defended.

Boys, oh; a week is a long time in politics. I have never been one termed with having magical powers to cause such division, but I see the cracks of a major split between NI21 and the two primary individuals represented in the House. What Mr McCrea argued for last week is now completely contradicted in Mr McCallister's amendment this week. It could not be clearer. They need to understand fully what they are actually seeking to do. The Bill seeks to provide for and give 24-hour notice for the emergency provision of contingency days. It does not extend the number of days to race, which is a maximum of three days. *[Interruption.]* There was no attempt to bring forward an amendment to the Bill —

Mr McCallister: You should read Hansard.

Mr Kennedy: I am happy to give way.

Mr McCallister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: Yes.

Mr McCallister: I made very clear reference to the fact that the Bill does not add days, and I corrected Mr Spratt. It is about contingency days. If the Minister does not feel that he personally can handle the extra flexibility or the extra power and responsibility, is it possibly a sign of weakness that he does not want to have to say no to people?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the insight that he has provided. It continues to undermine his argument, and shows his basic lack of understanding as to what is at stake here. There is no request in the legislation that the organisers of the North West or any other race extend the number of days. Please understand that.

5.00 pm

Mr McCallister: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Kennedy: No, no. Please understand that.

Mr McCallister: Try to read Hansard.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. Please make comments through the Chair and not from a sedentary position.

Mr Kennedy: If the Member is prepared to listen, I will take some time to try to explain the situation to him. There are no extra days. The legislation seeks to make a provision for contingency days, principally in the event of bad weather. If, within 48 hours of a race or practice day, the organisers have received the necessary data from the Met Office, showing that bad weather would make it impossible to race on Friday or Saturday, they will seek special dispensation for the use of a not-named contingency day. That is what it provides for. People have confused that issue all along. Some have portrayed it as simply an attempt to introduce Sunday racing, which it is not, because the existing law provides for Sunday racing. It is just that it has never happened in the history of the North West 200 or, indeed, any motorcycle racing in Northern Ireland. It has happened in four-wheeled events such as the Circuit of Ireland but not in motorcycle racing. Have a little understanding of that.

The amendment that Mr McCallister proposed today would give me or whoever is Minister — even if it is not

me in 20 years, and I do not rule out that possibility — a level of flexibility that it is neither desirable nor sensible to give to any Minister. Nor is it sensible from the point of view of organising a race. In emergency circumstances, organisers will have to give notice to those who live on the course and, if a race is to be held on a Sunday, to alert churches and other bodies. For practical reasons, the amendment is not sensible. I do not understand the logic, and I respectfully ask the Members to reflect on the nonsense that they put forward here today, given their stated position last week.

The notice period was included in the Bill to strike a balance between facilitating a request from a promoter to use a contingency day and the need to give the local community as much notice as possible in the event of a promoter seeking to use a previously identified potential contingency day. Therefore, the 24-hour notice period and the duty placed on my Department by clause 1(3) are intended to ensure that, within that period, the promoter, among other things, liaises as widely as possible with those most likely to be affected by the granting of the contingency day. That is the safety net for the churches, householders and others, given the undoubted inconvenience that will result from any contingency day. That period was considered necessary by the sport, the race promoters, to put into effect any arrangements previously agreed with the local community to minimise disruption. It is not simply what the Department conjured up, what the Committee thought might be a good idea or even what the Minister thought himself. The organisers recognised the need to give appropriate and maximum notice to those who would be impacted upon.

It is also intended to ensure that the Department has sufficient time to carry out the necessary checks and does not take at face value the word of the organisers, although that has never been an issue in the past, and I am confident that it will not be in the future. It was included so that we as a Department or the Minister responsible would have the capacity to test whether all of the necessary arrangements had been put in place and ensure that the appropriate notifications and arrangements had been made.

We cannot legislate for oil spills, civil disturbances, emergency situations and on-the-day events. If an incident happens on a race day or practice day when the road is closed, effectively, the road closing order for that day has been made: it is one of the three days. That means that one of the maximum three days available to the race promoter will have been expended and cannot be saved. There has been no call before from any quarter, including either Mr McCallister or Mr McCrea, to increase the number of days of closure. If practice and racing have already taken place over the two days, and part of the race programme has taken place on the third, it would simply not be possible to run the remainder of the programme on the following contingency day.

It is not clear how Mr McCallister envisages a race promoter seeking to bring his race forward, say, from a Saturday to a Friday, as might have happened at this year's North West 200 if such flexibility had been available. It is impossible to see how a promoter could apply for a direction in those circumstances. The Isle of Man was mentioned. The intention may have been to emulate the Isle of Man arrangements. However, the fact is that the Isle of Man contingency arrangements provide only for

postponement. In the event of races or practices having to be cancelled in the first week, the middle Sunday is used. That is the contingency provision that exists in the Isle of Man. It is a different scenario because of the length and extent of the event. They do not enable races to be brought forward as this Bill does.

I have to say in all charity to the Members that their amendment is entirely impractical. I will ask the House to oppose it.

I turn now to Mr Allister's amendment. Mr Dallat mentioned that Mr Allister had perhaps adopted a more conciliatory approach. I cannot speak for him in that regard, but I am pleased that Mr Allister listened to my argument at last Monday's Consideration Stage when he sought to apply the 1.30 pm to 6.00 pm rule to all potential races across Northern Ireland. My argument was indicated clearly. It is a pity that people, including Mr McCallister and Mr McCrea, did not hear it. Mr Allister certainly heard it. I am pleased that he has responded positively to my suggestion that he refine his amended proposal for Members to consider at Further Consideration Stage.

Mr Allister's proposal would ensure that, in future, the legislation would provide race promoters with a safeguard should sponsors seek the North West 200 race to start earlier than 1.30 pm on a contingency day that is a Sunday. He argued that point at Consideration Stage, and it is a point that was well worthy of consideration. Now, his amendment wishes for the House to legislate only for the North West 200. On that basis, I am permitted to accept the amendment. From the indications around the House, it is clear that there is sympathy for that amendment. I have no doubt that it will be carried.

I made the point last week that I am satisfied that there is provision for the Minister and the Department in the current legislation to be entirely satisfied that the arrangements are in place to facilitate churchgoers, churches, householders and businesses on the route. However, if the amendment gives added comfort in addressing the concerns that some people have, I am happy that that comfort is provided. Amendment No 1 therefore stands a realistic chance of success. Although I am prepared to accept amendment No 1 in the name of Mr Allister, I say strongly to the House that amendment No 2 should not proceed.

The House has had a good opportunity, at Consideration Stage and now at Further Consideration Stage, to debate the Bill. Yes, the legislation was given accelerated passage, and it was important that we gave it that. The reasons for doing so were simply that we want the changes to be brought about in time for the new race programme in 2014. People have sensibly accepted that, and we have used the Consideration Stage and the Further Consideration Stage to tweak and amend the Bill as necessary. As Minister, I am pleased that we are now making progress with it. It was my intention to bring it forward in my early discussions with race organisers such as Mervyn Whyte. I pay tribute to him, Alan Drysdale and other race officials, all of whom made significant contributions to the debate and offered sensible advice. I also pay tribute to those who, from a particular standpoint — that of the churches — articulated their concerns, which, I believe, are now largely dealt with as a result of the amendment that will be made.

I commend the Further Consideration Stage of the Bill to the House.

Mr Allister: The winding-up speech can be quite short.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Allister: I am grateful for the indications of support from across the House for my amendment. I was accused — if that is the right word — by Mr Dallat of being “conciliatory”. The problem is that I can get no one to disagree with me today, so I am very happy to be conciliatory. However, in all seriousness, I appreciate the mature reflection on the amendment and the response to it. It does not make for a Bill that is everything that I would like it to be, but it makes for one that is more protective of interests that I am keen to protect. It brings an element of comfort to those who are entitled to expect some statutory protection, and I am grateful for that.

I have not said anything about amendment No 2. I will say this, however: I am grateful that, last week, Mr McCrea and Mr McCallister had the foresight to see the wisdom of what I was trying to argue. I am sorry, in consequence of that, that I cannot reciprocate their level of support. Indeed, I regret that there have been unnecessary attacks on the motivation of the signatories to amendment No 2.

The problem that I see with amendment No 2 lies in the workability of the notice that, in consequence, would or would not exist for local residents. You could have a situation in which there would be a very short period of notice, whereas, by virtue of people's daily lives, their obligations and expectations, you need a reasonable modicum of notice. The amendment might have been a much more viable proposition if we had primary legislation in the 1986 order that is different from that which exists. With the restraint on three days applying, we cannot lucky-dip-choose out of Saturday racing, pick a portion of it and put it somewhere else. It is all or nothing where the whole days are concerned. I think that it is quite clear from new paragraph (1D) that the Bill deals with an entire substitution of a particular racing or practice day. So, I understand entirely the sentiment about maximising the flexibility, but, within the confines of the 1986 order and the three-day restraint, it is something that throws up workability issues.

5.15 pm

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes, I will give way.

Mr B McCrea: I just want to say that I value the Member's analysis of the situation and that I agree with him. When one looks at the 1986 order, one sees that article 3(4) states:

“Notwithstanding anything in paragraphs (1) to (3) a road shall not be used for or in connection with motor races on more than three days in any calendar year.”

That is the issue that the Member is rightly drawing attention to, and it makes matters more difficult to organise. Perhaps in the future the primary legislation will be revisited and we will do this job properly. Nevertheless, I agree with him on the points that he raised.

Mr Allister: The problem is that you cannot, therefore, legislate for the oil-spill situation. Once you have started racing on the Saturday and you are into your third day, you have exhausted your options. That is where the flexibility

proposal of fewer than 24 hours' notice falls down. However, those are only my thoughts.

I am grateful to the House for the manner in which it approached amendment No 1 today, and I recommend it to the House.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I think that honourable Members may have spotted that a relatively new Member of the House committed what many would regard as a cardinal sin. In these situations, had it been anyone but Mr Allister, the Member who was speaking may have found it extremely distracting to have another Member walk in front of them in the middle of their speech. As I said, he is a new Member to the House, but he has decades of experience of covering the House, and I am sure that he will want to reflect on what just occurred.

Mr McKinney: I fully recognise that I walked in front of the honourable Member, and I would like to apologise to him. Having walked in front of the Member, I made a point of consulting the SDLP Whip, and he said that the best thing might be to apologise to the Member privately. *[Laughter.]* So, I apologise to the House.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I think that the Chair will be satisfied that that is private enough.

Mr Allister: No issue was taken. I think that it is the people who come up behind you that you need to be more careful about. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: On that happy note, I call order.

Amendment No 1 agreed to.

Amendment No 2 proposed: In page 2, line 9, leave out from "and" to end of line 14.— *[Mr McCallister.]*

Question put and negatived.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Further Consideration Stage of the Road Races (Amendment) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

I ask the House to take its ease.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Committee Business

Electricity Policy: Security of Supply

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 15 minutes to propose the motion and 15 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes. I call the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment to move the motion.

Assembly Business

Mr P Ramsey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Before the motion is moved, I understood that it was necessary for us to suspend Standing Orders to enable the House to go on late tonight. If that is in order, may I formally propose?

Mr Speaker: Thank you. We intended to move the motion, but I thank the Member for raising the issue. We will do that piece of business now.

Extension of Sitting

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

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 9 December 2013 be extended to no later than 9.00 pm. — [Mr P Ramsey.]

Committee Business

Electricity Policy: Security of Supply

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the first report of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment on its Review of Electricity Policy: Part 1 — Security of Electricity (NIA 145/11-15); and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in conjunction with her Executive colleagues, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the System Operator for Northern Ireland to implement, as applicable, the recommendations contained therein.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I mentioned this to the Minister, but may I give my apologies for leaving early this evening? Due to a pressing family matter, I must leave the House, so my apologies in advance. I know that the Minister and members of the Committee understand the position.

The reason why we are debating the motion today is that, from the end of 2015, the EU industrial emissions directive will result in the closure of three units at Ballylumford B station and reduced running hours for Kilroot power station. That is coupled with an ongoing fault on the Moyle interconnector with Scotland and the delay in the completion of the North/South interconnector. As a consequence, our surplus margin, which is the amount of electricity needed to ensure security of supply, will reduce from 600 megawatts to 200 megawatts from the start of 2016. The result will be that, if there is a prolonged outage of a major power plant, there may not be enough electricity during periods of peak demand to meet our needs. Six hundred megawatts is considered sufficient, but 200 megawatts is considered too low.

Throughout this review, the Committee was unable to elicit from the Department, the regulator or the Systems Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) how low the margin could be set and still have sufficient capacity to ensure security of supply. However, it seems that, today, more than a week after the Committee agreed the report, that figure has been calculated and published in a report from the Department and the Utility Regulator. I am sure that more will be heard from the Minister later. We are told that the required surplus margin is 450 megawatts. That means that we will have to find additional capacity of around 250 megawatts to meet our needs. So, how do we do that? Today's report states that the Utility Regulator, with DETI, is continuing to progress feasible options and associated costs for securing additional generation capacity to operate from 2016.

The Committee's report demonstrates that there are alternatives to additional generation that could be considered. However, as Chair of the Committee, I can now, at least, very much welcome the idea that this review may have injected some urgency into the process to address the problem.

The Committee considered a number of options, but was unable to recommend a particular course of action in the absence of the figure for the required surplus margin. We were told that the Moyle interconnector will have a temporary repair in place by 2014 but, although that will

add 250 megawatts, it will not be reliable enough to be considered. We were told that, because Ballylumford B station is already in a derogation position, it cannot be considered for further derogation from the directive. We know that the commissioning of new generation would add considerable cost to consumers' bills and would be a long-term solution to a short-term problem. We also know that there would be significant costs associated with upgrading the three Ballylumford B station units, each of which has a capacity of 180 megawatts. It seems that everybody knew that there was a problem, but nobody knew the extent of it until now and, apart from the Committee, nobody had given any serious consideration to how to address it.

Where do we get the additional 250 megawatts that we need from the start of 2016? AES, the owners of Kilroot and Ballylumford, told the Committee that the company is evaluating the economics of making the main units at Kilroot compliant with the industrial emissions directive from 2016. If Kilroot became compliant, that would make its full capacity of 476 megawatts available and would resolve the security of supply problem up to 2021. However, the current view of AES is that Kilroot will opt into a transitional national plan, which will result in its capacity being reduced to 45% from 2016. That option has already been factored into the security of supply calculations.

The CBI briefed the Committee in considerable detail on aggregation of units. This is a concept whereby large energy users with significant standby capacity are permitted to pool their resources and bid into the electricity market. The concept of demand-side management also exists, whereby large energy users receive an incentive to shed some load during periods of peak demand. It seems that aggregation of generation has been taken into account in the Systems Operator's capacity statement, but demand-side management has not.

SONI believes that any additional contribution is not significant. However, the Utility Regulator informed the Committee that it is estimated that initiatives in those areas could provide between 100 and 200 megawatts during peak demand: a not so insignificant amount in the context of a requirement for an additional 250 megawatts. However, more work is needed to determine the exact amount. There is also a lack of clarity about the legislation that would be required, and there seems to be little understanding of the contribution that could be made in this area. Nevertheless, the Committee noted that, although current licence categories do not cover aggregation of units, the Utility Regulator has asked the Department to make provision for that activity through the legislative process.

The Committee considered the possibility of utilising two existing cross-border standby connections: one near Enniskillen and the other between Letterkenny and Strabane. Each has a capacity of up to 125 megawatts. They are used to provide backup when there are faults on the system. Those may be sufficient on their own to meet electricity needs from 2016. However, first, there needs to be more clarity on whether that is feasible. In fact, the Committee found great difficulty in getting detail from any source on the feasibility of that option. When that was put to representatives of NIE, they seemed to think the Committee was naive enough — I really do not think that we are — to suggest it as an alternative to the North/South interconnector rather than merely, as we

were, an interim measure until a permanent solution is devised. It is interesting to note that those cross-border connections have not been considered in today's report from the Department and the regulator. I encourage the Minister to revisit that option in conjunction with demand-side management before any decision is made to secure additional generation, which may not be the most cost-effective short-term option. Work needs to be done immediately to determine the feasibility of demand-side management and aggregation of units, and also on the feasibility of utilising the two existing cross-border standby connections. If feasible, they would seem to provide the most cost-effective options.

If those options are not feasible or provide only limited capacity, the only other viable option would seem to be to upgrade the Ballylumford B station units at considerable cost. However, that cost is and remains unknown. Upgrading all three B station units would provide well over 500 megawatts of capacity. Therefore, with other options available, if an upgrade is required, it may be sufficient to upgrade only a single unit, which would generate 180 megawatts. From the report today, indeed, an assessment of additional capacity should be made early next year, and we eagerly await the outcome of that assessment.

5.30 pm

Whatever solution is devised to resolve our security of supply difficulties from 2016, the problem does not end there. Further restrictions will result in a deficit of supply from 2021 onwards unless the new North/South interconnector is built before that date or some other new generation capacity is commissioned. There seems to be an assumption in today's report from the Department and the Utility Regulator that the North/South interconnector will be built. There are references to the completion date of 2017 being "challenging". However, the completion of the interconnector in its current format is by no means a foregone conclusion, and there is, of course, no new generation planned for the North.

We urgently need a decision on the North/South interconnector. If the interconnector is not going to be built, there needs to be a plan B in place to provide the required security of supply by 2021. If the interconnector is going to be built, consideration must be given to providing appropriate community benefits to the host communities that it affects.

In summary, there seems to have been a lack of urgency about the whole area of security of supply, and businesses are beginning to express real concerns. Real signs of those concerns exist in the wider community, as we heard in the Committee's evidence sessions on the matter. There may be an impact for future investment if companies do not have enough confidence in the security of our electricity supply. We need an assurance from the Minister that the electricity that we require to meet demand from 2016 will be available and reliable. We need an assurance from the Executive that, from 2021, we will have a permanent solution in place to ensure security of supply for the foreseeable future.

Mr Frew: I welcome the debate on the report of the Committee's review of electricity policy, part 1 of which deals with security of electricity supply. That, in itself, brings in the question of cost. The Chairperson of the Committee is right to suggest that businesses, especially

large users of energy, see this as an issue. However, it is not so much about security of supply at this stage as about the cost of electricity and, of course, everything else that goes with that.

The background to this is that we have three main power stations, two of which must reduce their output by 2016 in order to comply with the EU directives that are coming down the line. That puts pressure on every member state in one shape or another. This is not just an issue for Northern Ireland; electricity supply infrastructure is a worldwide issue. However, it is key that Northern Ireland is at the forefront of any solution, not least because we still rely on a large manufacturing base here, nowhere more so than in my constituency of North Antrim. It has some of the most important manufacturers, which employ up to 1,000 people and, in their day-to-day running, indirectly employ up to between 1,000 and 2,000 people in support jobs. Therefore, it is vital that the cost of energy is reduced and kept down and that security of supply is confidently there.

That is very important, because if we want to attract foreign direct investment by manufacturers who will employ people in 400, 500, 600 or, perhaps, even 1,000 jobs, we must be able to assure them that although there are issues and pressures on grids, infrastructure and security of supply, we can guarantee them that we are getting around those issues and resolving them, and that we are confident that, in 2016 and 2021, we will have sorted this out and their supply will be uninterrupted. That is very important.

In the manufacturing business, a lot of companies are on continental shifts, so it is incumbent that they get supply 24 hours a day.

It is not about peak times for some of those companies; it is about 24 hours a day. They cannot fathom any sort of interruption in their supply, even if it is planned. That would be a big no-no.

Of course, with all of that and with the resolution will come a cost. The most important aspect of this is that balance of a reasonable cost to the consumer. No matter what we do, who comes in and what infrastructure we put in place, it will have to be at a reasonable cost to the consumer, because they will ultimately pay for it. That is why, when we look to the delays with the North/South interconnector or to the resolution of the issues with the Moyle interconnector, it has to be at a reasonable cost, and that has to be weighed over a long period.

There is no way that we could have an interconnection system under ground that could cost at least five times as much as an overhead line. That is one of the issues that we need to tackle and one of the things that we need in place now and not in 2016, 2017 or 2018. We need a solution now. It costs this country and the business £25 million for every year we do not have that in place, so it is very important that we have a North/South interconnector in place. It is also important that we have a Moyle interconnector that is pushing out 450 MW as opposed to 250 MW.

At the moment we are fixing cables with a fault in the outer sheath and the outer conductor. Every time we fix that fault we cut through the main conductor, which is basically intact. The only resolution I can see there is for two other cables to be laid —

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

Mr Frew: — that will allow that cable to run as it is. This is a very complex issue. Five minutes can never do it justice, of course. I could go on for hours on the subject, but it is important that we take it for the important issue that it is and try to find a resolution.

Mrs Overend: I am glad to participate in this afternoon's debate. The Committee bringing the motion to the House is a very important issue. Security of supply was also put in a no-day-named motion by my colleague Roy Beggs and me, and we were particularly pleased that the Committee wanted to examine the matter in detail. A lot of work has gone into compiling the report, and I am glad that recommendations are already being noticed by the Department, SONI and the Utility Regulator, particularly in their update paper released this morning.

As has already been said, we face testing times when it comes to the security of electricity supply in the near future. By 2016 the supply will be at risk, and by 2021 the supply will be running in deficit if nothing is done now to prevent that. Options have been discussed both in Committee and between the relevant parties involved in the decision-making and delivering processes, but until now it has not been clear that sufficient action has been taken to move any projects forward in a meaningful way. It should not take a motion brought to the House by the Committee to prompt various bodies into action regarding such a fundamentally important issue.

There is great concern, shared by all Committee members, about the slow speed of resolving the issue. There are too many uncertainties, and unfortunately that leads many to believe that the relevant bodies are not taking the issue seriously enough. What is certain, though, is that the consumer will feel the effects of the unnecessary delays and the inaction. Indeed, the Committee was informed that the consumer is already paying for the failure, in particular, to make any meaningful progress on the North/South interconnector. I was informed when questioning representatives of NIE that it costs around £25 million a year because of the failure to make progress on the interconnector in the form of compensation to generators. That works out at around £100 added on to the bill of each family in Northern Ireland. Those families already struggle with fuel bills, rising energy costs and spending power being squeezed by low wages and high inflation. Furthermore, the failure to fully cost the potential of other options, such as the Moyle interconnector, which will ultimately fall on the customers, and other options available for the Kilroot power station, ensures that progress on those projects cannot take place, adding further cost to the public.

Those delays will also have a detrimental effect on local businesses. The threat of insufficient electricity supply in Northern Ireland will be a great worry to many large energy users across Northern Ireland, such as factories, manufacturers and large industrial companies that rely on a constant and uninterrupted electricity supply to ensure that work levels remain high. It should not be the case that our contingency plans include asking our large industrial companies to sell off their generated electricity or shut off at peak times to prevent an overload in the power grid. At present, though, it seems that they may be forced to consider those options, neither of which has been fully planned for. The mechanisms to allow them are not in

place in Northern Ireland, so further legislation might be required to ensure that they can go ahead.

These fears also damage our reputation as a place that is open for business. The Minister can do everything in her power to sell Northern Ireland to world business leaders as an attractive place to do business; we can ensure that there are economic incentives and benefits for large multinational companies coming here to set up business; we can promise the best and most qualified workers to ensure that their businesses are run to the highest standards; and we can offer our expertise in and history of manufacturing and production, but, if people are unable to run their factories or there are threats that they will have to shut down production lines because of power outages, we will not attract any businesses here.

I welcome the updated paper from the Utility Regulator and Department that clarifies the 200 MW supply margin from January 2016. It is important that we get the basic and fundamental issues right as we go forward so that we continue to sell Northern Ireland as a great place to do business. If the Department, the Utility Regulator and the System Operator fail to properly examine the costs, risks and rewards associated with the short-term options and do not act with haste to ensure that our only current long-term option — the North/South interconnector — moves along at the earliest opportunity, our electricity may not shut down but Northern Ireland's business prospects might. I support the motion.

Mr Lunn: I am a non-member of the Committee. I congratulate the Chair and members on producing a timely and thoughtful report. I note that the Committee's concern is electricity pricing, which Mr Frew commented on a few moments ago, but the report focuses on continuity of supply, and rightly so because that is a far more pressing and immediate issue. It is clear that a combination of factors — reduced capacity, concerns about the effectiveness of a temporary repair to the Moyle interconnector, the rundown of generation at Ballylumford and Kilroot and the delay in agreement on the North/South interconnector — must cast some doubt on the capacity to meet Northern Ireland's needs, even given the cushion of the current margin between demand and potential supply.

I would like to throw in a few more thoughts, Mr Speaker. We remain almost entirely dependent for electricity generation on sources outside Northern Ireland. As long as those sources, mainly in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, remain secure, we will be near enough all right. Only yesterday, however, I heard the chairman of EDF acknowledge on 'The Andrew Marr Show' the possibility of a deficit developing in the UK between the decommissioning of power stations and the introduction of new nuclear facilities in about 15 years' time. During that period, the UK will be heavily dependent on oil and gas for generation, and the sources of those raw materials are sometimes questionable. North Sea production is declining, and the Gulf states can reduce or increase supply at their discretion. Raw materials can be affected by other factors, such as regional tensions or even war. There is generally a war going on somewhere in the Middle East, so it would not be a surprise. Our gas supply comes increasingly from Russia through pipelines that cross several countries, including the Ukraine. Given political developments in that country at present, that is another potentially unstable arrangement.

If the UK were unable to maintain supply at peak times, which was hinted at by the chairman of EDF, we would suffer along with everybody else.

Is it not time for a serious look at our own resources? I know that I will sound like Mr Agnew, but I am talking about our windy climate, our tidal resources, the energy potential from biomass or waste technologies — I must say that I welcome today's announcement that a biomass plant in Londonderry has been approved, along with other facilities — and, dare I use the F-word, fracking. I do not know whether fracking is desirable, necessary or economically viable, but I would like to know, and I hope that the present investigation of its viability will continue. If we were in a position to provide a level of generation from our own sustainable resources, I would be far more comfortable about our long-term prospects. Other countries, notably Germany, are proving that it can be done.

5.45 pm

Whichever scenario we look at, we see that there are circumstances or a combination of circumstances that could cause our supply to be on or go over the edge. In recent times, during bouts of really bad weather, this has come close to occurring. Mr Frew referred to the difficulties for major industry and the fact that the absolute requirement for 24-hour production in some cases could be seriously affected. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. I certainly welcome this timely report.

Mr Anderson: I speak as a member of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee in support of the Committee motion, which asks the House to approve its first report on security of electricity supply. I joined the Committee on 16 September, and I know that considerable work has been done in the area of electricity supply during the past year.

Security of supply is, indeed, a vital matter. We only have to experience a short power cut, especially in the middle of the coldness and darkness of winter, to realise how much we depend on electricity. Only last Thursday, several thousand consumers had to endure cuts in supply when high winds struck the Province. Without electricity, we are in trouble. As domestic users, we rely on it, and it is the lifeblood of business and industry.

In its assessment in January this year, the System Operator for Northern Ireland made it very clear that, for a variety of reasons mainly centred on the need to comply with the EU industrial emissions directive, we face a possible threat to our security of supply from the start of 2016 — just two years from now — and that the risk will intensify to the extent that we will be in deficit from 2021. That is the crux of the issue. It is a pressing matter, and I am sure that no one in the House would argue that we should do nothing about it. Doing nothing is simply not an option.

The Committee has spent considerable time and effort assessing the extent and nature of the problem. It is very complex, as, indeed, is the range of possible solutions, but actions need to be taken soon. The problems outlined in our report are not new problems and have been known for some time. We are urging the key players — the Minister, her Department, SONI and the Utility Regulator — to undertake work that will ensure a proper understanding of the estimated level of surplus margin that will be required to guarantee security of supply. We also want them to

have a clear idea of the risk that will still be there after the interim repair of the Moyle interconnector. We are interested, too, in the possible level of additional capacity and reduced demand that might be temporarily gained via the aggregation of units and demand-side management, along with the utilisation of the two existing cross-border standby connections.

I understand from an update report from DETI and the Utility Regulator, which was just issued this morning, that work on assessing what needs to be done is already under way. We will need to take time to consider that update, but, from a quick read through it, I am encouraged not only that the problem has been identified but that action will be taken. The update states:

"The likelihood and consequence of a risk to security of supply from January 2016 is such that UR and DETI have concluded that, if measures can be taken within a reasonable cost to consumers to provide additional generation capacity, then they should be taken ... Options to manage the risk are therefore being progressed by UR and SONI, working with DETI. This workstream with an overall plan will conclude in early 2014."

We look forward to seeing that action plan in due course.

As for longer-term needs beyond 2020, the Committee considers the North/South interconnector to be vital to ensuring our security of supply into the future. We are concerned about the impact of planning decisions on the timing of that. We want to see the interconnector being progressed. We cannot continue to rely on Kilroot, Coolkeeragh and Ballylumford.

I note from this morning's update that DETI and the regulator agree that it is imperative that the second North/South interconnector be progressed and delivered as soon as possible. That will not only guarantee security of supply but should lead to reduced energy costs for consumers. Time does not permit me to expand on that crucial aspect, but it is referred to in our report. In the light of the Utility Regulator's recent comments that high prices are here to stay, we must explore every avenue to reduce costs to consumers. I commend the Committee's report to the House.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am a recently appointed member of the Committee. It has done a very good job on the report. Much of it was done before my time, so I can claim little or no credit for a very important and useful report.

The point that strikes me very forcefully is that the issues that would affect security of supply are familiar. They have been known for some time. It is of some surprise to me — I could even say "shock", as it concerns electricity generation — that people did not anticipate or address the time-bound issues that will face us in a matter of a few years. It seems that there was either a manipulation of a crisis to get a desired outcome or a complete failure of strategic and contingency planning. I am not quite sure where the truth lies; indeed, both possibilities may be the reality.

When we hear about the situation in Ballylumford, knowing that there is a direct consequence in the reduction in generation of electricity supply, you would expect people to have considered all the available options. The

Committee drew attention to some in the report, in the various formulations of the report and in the discussion as it moved through the inquiry. The question of the standby interconnectors at Strabane, Lifford and Enniskillen has to be factored in. No one is offering those as the permanent solution to the shortfall. There are three undersea connections between the islands of Ireland and Britain. Not only that, but, if we are talking about security of supply, they bring the advantage of connection to the European grid. We are told that the only option for one point of connection to another on the island is an overground one, but we can do it under the sea. It seems that people were maybe fixed on a preferred single, silver bullet-type solution, despite the fact that the very significant opposition to overgrounding has already had an impact on the timeline. It will be more than challenging, which seems to be the opinion of the regulator and the generators.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. He raises a valid point, because we have interconnection, albeit on half capacity, at Moyle. We also have interconnection between Wales and the Republic of Ireland, which is essential. That can connect to Europe, which, again, is essential, because interconnection is just as essential as generation. However, the very fact that there is water there means that we had no choice but to go under the water. Look at the Moyle interconnector and the problems with faults in the cable and the cost of repairing them. That is why the only option is to go overhead.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Thank you for that. I do not think that there are any cheap solutions. Every possible solution must be looked at, including the aggregation of options to provide the capacity that we need to ensure security in outage circumstances, which does not happen all the time either. The fact that, even at this stage, connection issues remain for those who are involved in wind power generation is mind-boggling. That technology exists but does not seem to be getting applied in a way that will allow us to pursue the objectives that we have set ourselves in the Programme for Government or to use it to address security of supply. I am making a simple and straightforward point. We should look at all the available options, including repairing the interconnector at Moyle. That did work. I understand that it was commissioned in 2001 and operated up to about 2011. We still have not got it repaired, and it is working at 50% capacity. If it were repaired and reintroduced, we would have the safety margin that we require. That is one of the possible available solutions.

We need to be a bit more creative. We need to take a look around us at the available options. We need to look at the potentials for alternative energy, which are very significant and should be maximised and optimised to benefit the economy and security of supply. Large companies operating here have spare capacity that could be offloaded at peak times. All those issues could be brought together so that we can have a cocktail of measures that, between them, give us the optimum coverage and security that we need. They do not all have to be used all of the time, but they are there. We are talking about a new interconnector at a colossal cost with, I would say, even more colossal opposition from public opinion: we are probably looking in the wrong direction for an answer to this conundrum.

Mr McKinney: As we have been hearing, the Committee undertook the report to get a greater knowledge of the

issues surrounding security of supply now and, more importantly, in the period approaching and surpassing 2021. It took evidence from a wide range of organisations. Like Mr Anderson and Mr McLaughlin, I was new to the Committee, so I cannot claim any credit, but it is clear that security of supply has provoked significant interest, concern and, indeed, confusion for all stakeholders. As we have been hearing, there is even contested space around some of the answers going forward.

Much of the feedback given to the Committee was characterised by an absence of information and sometimes by confusion. That is unacceptable, given the magnitude of the problem. If we do not address security of supply successfully, the commercial and industrial ramifications may prove disastrous. The level of energy cost and its availability here has a significant impact or effect on Northern Ireland's appeal to larger businesses. As a result of the Utility Regulator's price comparison report in March, we have seen that electricity prices for large commercial users here are among the highest in Europe and, at some points, are up to 25% higher. It is a reasonable inference that those inflated costs arise out of the grid connection difficulties that we have here, which are the very same difficulties as contribute to the security of supply issue.

The next question, then, is this: is future business in Northern Ireland being put at risk due to rising costs and the lack of clarity on security of supply? Foreign direct investment is a key to our future success. Indeed, it is an Executive priority, but, to achieve that investment, we will need to attract medium-to-high energy usage businesses. At the moment, we have in operation 100 large companies — those with more than 250 employees — a rate that is 40% lower than the rest of the UK. We have heard about regulation and the ingredients that complicate all this, such as the generation capacity at Ballylumford, the Moyle interconnector problem that we have been hearing about, the Kilroot power problems and the restrictions there and the North/South interconnector and the lack of a final decision. All that leads to further confusion and delay. That could be further complicated if we do not make decisions before 2018. All that is too late, as the EU regulations take effect three years before that.

It is the SDLP's view that urgent action must be taken. The energy issue here must be stabilised to satisfy the large FDI companies that are needed here. The sad reality is that, currently, this is not an environment that is financially attractive for large energy users. The ambiguity about the future provision of electricity will hamper investment from that sector. Indeed, the future of the businesses that currently operate here may also be at risk.

6.00 pm

If security of supply and the cost of electricity continue to be issues, large energy users will perhaps try to come off the grid and provide their own electricity. Although, in one way, that may be cost-effective for individual LEUs, their removal from the grid will push energy prices up for those who are on it, thus adding to the existing problem.

It is clear that something must be done, and the SDLP welcomes the issuance of Committee recommendations on the security of supply. Many different courses of action were suggested to the Committee, and it is regrettable that activity, especially that around the known IED impact on

Ballylumford, has been lacklustre and late in coming. We sincerely hope that DETI, SONI and the Utility Regulator take heed of the recommendations in the report so that progress can be made on security of supply immediately. If they do not, I fear that the future of FDI and the growth of large business activity in Northern Ireland may be in jeopardy.

My comments up to now have been made as a Committee member, and I will now speak from a party perspective. The SDLP conference debated energy and is calling for us to have a much wider vision of energy on an all-island basis. We must utilise the potential to maximise wind and wave power, strengthen the grid and envisage, potentially, an island that will eventually export its excess energy.

Mr Beggs: First, I want to address a point that Mr McKinney mentioned: the importance of renewable energy. I accept that it is important, but we also need to have generating capacity for the times when the wind is not blowing. That tends to happen on the coldest days of winter when we have the heaviest frosts, high pressure and no wind, so it is important that we have generating capacity for those occasions. It is for that reason that I have a particular concern about the generating capacity that is scheduled to exist in Northern Ireland in a few years, and I thank the Committee for sharing that concern.

It is estimated that our surplus of electricity will reduce from 600 MW to 200 MW. That is of concern to me, and it should be of concern to everyone. Earlier, Mr Frew indicated that businesses are not as concerned about security of supply as they are about the cost of electricity. If their power is turned off, their primary concern will be power. There is the potential that they will lose business and customers. It is vital that they and their customers have confidence that we can provide a reliable supply.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: Certainly.

Mr Frew: I must seek clarification from the Member. Maybe he did not hear me right, but I said that that is as important as the cost of electricity. I did not say that it was not as important.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Beggs: If the power starts to fail, people will not ask what the price of supply is; they will ask where they can get electricity. It is vital that we ensure continuity of supply. I agree that we must take reasonable steps to control the cost of electricity, but to maintain confidence among the business community and, indeed, homeowners — we all wish to ensure that we have electricity reliably supplied to our homes — it is vital that we have security of supply.

One of the things that concerns me about the very small 200 MW buffer that is predicted is that one failure in any of our very limited number of generators could cause difficulties. There is an expectation that the Moyle interconnector will be back up to full power and be reliable, and I hope that that is the case. However, if, instead of increasing its transfer of energy from 250 MW back to 500 MW, it develops another fault, guess what? We will have blackouts if we hit peak power predictions.

What will happen if there is any fault in any of our other generators in Northern Ireland? Some of you may have forgotten, but, a number of years ago, there was a fault in

the midst of winter at Coolkeeragh, which, I understand, has 600 MW on a single shaft. A single fault in that system could result in power outages in Northern Ireland. It is important that we have capacity and plan well ahead, because you cannot put a power station in place overnight. It is important that we retain a surplus and do not endanger security of supply. It is very important that we ensure supply to all our citizens.

I accept that, as others have said, the other aspect of trying to improve our supply is the North/South interconnector. That has the potential to be a relatively quick solution, but I ask for an update from the Minister and the Department on what exactly is happening. Does our planning system recognise the importance of the issue? It could be moved forward relatively quickly but, if it is not, I welcome the Committee's recommendation that we should look at the potential closure of Ballylumford B. If it were not to close, it could create a buffer and an option for continuing to generate and create a surplus. However, that date is rapidly closing in, businesses and employees will make decisions, and it may not be too long before redundancy terms are offered and key staff may start to take them.

It is important for security of supply in Northern Ireland that there is clarity about what is happening with our generating capacity and the other electricity that can be supplied. That is vital for the future of our citizens and our businesses. We do not want to create headlines around the world should we have power outages here because of insufficient interconnection or generating capacity. I ask the Minister particularly to look at the proposal to close Ballylumford B, given the precarious situation that I see and given that the Committee is expressing concern.

I turn to the other aspect of electricity supply, namely the cost. We all ought to realise that consumers — businesses and private individuals — pay an additional £25 million a year because of our lack of interconnectivity. Therefore, it is important that the issue is addressed and —

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

Mr Beggs: — that we recognise the importance of upgrading our infrastructure, providing that security of supply and reducing our generating costs at the same time.

Mr B McCrea: I see that the Minister is writing furiously, and I suspect that she is a little tetchy about some of the comments. I am sure that —

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Not on this occasion.

Mr B McCrea: I was going to try to be helpful, Minister. I think that the Minister will want the opportunity to explain certain issues.

I have been struck by the number of people who have spoken so far who started off by saying, "I am only new to this, but here is my opinion". I have had quite a bit of interest in it over the past year. I have been to SONI twice, in Dublin and in Belfast. I have had a meeting with the Moyle interconnector people, who explained to me the mechanics of trying to fix it, and there is no doubt that, technically, we can fix this problem. The key question, as Paul Frew said at the start, is this: who pays? It is not about whether we can fix this; of course, we can. The question is whether the consumer or the Government will pay or, with wind power, perhaps the producers. Everybody is dancing around, thinking that, if somebody

else would pick up the bill, that would be very nice. I have no doubt that there will be some solution, and it would be useful if the Minister were able to give us some idea about her strategic way forward to reassure people. Otherwise, there is this idea that the lights will go out in 2016. I have seen the projections, and I have no doubt that, if we do nothing, we will get within 2% of maximum demand and, therefore, be extremely vulnerable.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: Yes.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member recognise that, in the relatively recent past, there was a problem with Coolkeeragh when it was installed and, as a result, its entire capacity was not available in the midst of winter?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am, indeed, aware of that. Not only that, I have been to SONI and seen the demand matching up, transmission lines failing and how you match it through. It is a really complex engineering issue of how you balance supply. It is not something that you can really get to the bottom of unless you are a transmission engineer.

Even the funding of these issues is really difficult. So, when we look at the Moyle interconnector, the question, as brought up by Mr McLaughlin, is this: what do you do when you are out of warranty? What do you do when the cable, having been put in the ground, has passed its warranty and the stuff that you have keeps failing? Who will pay for that? Can you do it with a mutualised industry?

I am not sure what the answer is to the second thing that I have to put forward. Hopefully, there will be some clarity. We talk about the North/South interconnector, and there is no doubt that that is the preferred option of the industry. There is excess capacity in the South, so, if we build the interconnector, we can do it. However, we have the argument about whether it should go underground or overground. As I understand it — I may be wrong on this — the line is not just six miles long; it runs the whole way to Dublin. So, the question is this: if you are going to put the bit that goes under the border underground — this is a point that Mr McLaughlin may wish to follow up, because he raised it — why would you not put it underground the whole way to Dublin? You are going to affect environmental concerns there. Of course, it is six times more expensive to put it underground than overground. Again, the question is this: who should pick up the bill for doing that?

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. He is right in what he says about the cost of putting it overground or underground. However, it is not only the initial cost of the installation; it is the cost of maintaining it, the cost of repairing faults and the cost of finding a fault if it is underground as opposed to overhead.

Mr B McCrea: I am happy to accept the points that Mr Frew has put forward.

In the last couple of minutes that I have, let me say that there are really significant engineering issues. There is a concept, which I had not heard of before, called momentum in power supply. It is about what happens if you load it all up with wind because it does not have momentum. These are heavy engineering issues. People

ask whether we should upgrade our grid. People say that we have nothing but wind, so why can we not use that? I know that the figure may be less than the £1 billion that was talked about — maybe it is £300 million or £400 million now — but the question in all these things is this: if you make that investment and are then not able to export or store the energy, what are you making that investment for? Will the consumer thank you for it?

What is required is a grand strategic plan. I think that, when it is appropriate, the Minister will be in a position to announce that. We cannot just do it on production capacity. We have to look also at reducing demand. We are failing in our duty if we do not look at how we get better insulation into homes. We have to start to look at more novel ways of producing energy. It is not just about wind or tidal energy; it is about geothermal energy and all those issues. It is a strategic play that we have to decide what we want to do. In all these things, I think that there are solutions. It is not that we are not aware of what is going on, but we need to make a decision, sooner rather than later, about the way forward. I am hopeful that the Minister will shed some light on the matter.

Mr Allister: We should be grateful that the Committee has put a focus on an issue that has for too long been avoided. We are now at a point where it is clear that we are staring into a situation of underprovision for our electricity needs. The margin has got to the point where we are flirting with danger.

One could rightly ask how we got to this position. How is it that we have suddenly arrived at this scenario? Part of the answer lies in the fact that there is no clear command structure, as it were, for energy policy. We have a sort of “pass the parcel” scenario, where the Department can pass responsibility to the regulator and the regulator is accountable to dear knows who. Technically, I think that it is accountable to the Assembly, but in reality not really to anyone. Instead of a strategic, driven-forward policy that would protect us, we have a division of responsibility or labour. That is compounded by the fact that, over the years, taking our eye off the ball has been assisted by us becoming besotted with renewables and the pursuit of unrealistic targets in that regard, thinking that that would be the panacea and the answer to everything.

6.15 pm

Meanwhile, this issue has been creeping up on us. We have known for some time that we have got a dodgy Moyle interconnector. We have known for some time that generation has to be cut at Ballylumford and at Kilroot. We have known for some time that the new North/South interconnector is not moving at the pace that was anticipated, but what has been done about any of these things in the mean time? I think that we will arrive at the point where the Department or the regulator or both need to grasp hold of the fact that, to solve our problems, we need to ensure more indigenous generation. We cannot solve this problem by putting all our eggs in the one basket of a North/South interconnector, or maybe improvements in the Moyle interconnector or whatever. If we have a rundown in our generating capacity in Northern Ireland, then we need to address that issue.

A few weeks ago, the Minister said to the House that, if it came to it, she would not shy away from ensuring that there was new generating capacity. I have to say to the

Minister and to the House that it seems to me that we are getting very close to that point. It seems to me that the Department needs to take this issue by the scruff of the neck and ensure that we do not arrive at a point where we are under-generating and the lights are going out.

One of my concerns is that SONI is in charge of all of this. It is now fully owned, in a monopolised situation, by a Republic of Ireland Government-owned company, EirGrid. When hardy comes to hardy, I wonder where their priorities will be in meeting the needs of Northern Ireland or the needs of elsewhere. It is supposed to live under licensing conditions where there is supposed to be operational independence. It reports to the regulator, but those compliance reports are not published, so we cannot see where the compliance with the operational independence is.

There is a multiplicity of issues that need to be grasped with great urgency, but the fundamental one is to get to the point where we generate a greater proportion of our electricity needs in Northern Ireland. If we keep going as we are, we will arrive at a pretty dire situation, and I think that the time has come when the Department needs to start proactively promoting the idea of a new generating station in Northern Ireland, which will bring jobs, security and much-needed generation within the Province itself.

Mr Agnew: We have to accept that the decarbonisation of our electricity is both necessary and inevitable. We cannot resist the tide — or, for that matter, the wind or the wave. I agree with Mr Allister that we must invest in indigenous energy, but in indigenous renewable electricity generation. Ultimately, we are on the road to decarbonisation, and any investment in oil or gas will only be, at best, a short- or medium-term benefit. In the long term, we are investing in an industry that will slowly become extinct.

As we realise the situation that we have, we are unfortunately in a position where what must go in hand with that renewable investment is an investment in interconnection. In the long term, renewables and interconnection are the only solutions to our long-term energy needs, but unfortunately we have a short-term problem. We are now at the stage where neither new renewables nor new interconnection is feasible in the short space of time that we have. We have to ask some of the questions that Mr Allister asked around how we arrived at this stage. It seems to me that some of those issues were around the delay in the North/South interconnector and the unreliability of the Moyle interconnector. In that regard, we have to make sure that we do not make that mistake again going into 2021, and I will come back to that later.

Before we can decide what to do in the short term, we need to fully understand the problem. We learned only today — it is certainly new information to those of us on the Committee, although I am not sure how long the Department has known — that we require an additional 250 megawatts to ensure security of supply. We had been told that a surplus of 200 megawatts was not sufficient, but we did not know how much was sufficient. That helps us to consider our options. Unfortunately, that information was not available to us prior to the production of our report.

What we still do not have — at least, I certainly have not been supplied with it — is a figure for the likelihood of a significant power outage, which is presumably above 200 megawatts. What is the percentage probability of such an

outage or failure? What is the likelihood that that would result in the lights going out in some cases? The Utility Regulator, in its submission to the Committee stated that, if the risk has a very low likelihood and mitigating that risk has a high cost, a different decision might be called for. That relates to some of the possible mitigation measures that could be taken. We need to understand how big the risk is and how serious it is. No one will disagree that ensuring security of supply is essential.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Certainly.

Mr B McCrea: The Member, like me, chaired two all-party groups on energy supply. The graphs that I saw showed us within 2% of maximum supply in 2016, which appears to me a very narrow margin for error. We definitely need to get generating capacity from somewhere.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Agnew: I accept Mr McCrea's point that it is a fine margin. However, we need to know how the probability of risk weighs up against the cost of mitigation measures before we can decide on the options available to us.

It appears that the option of the temporary repair of the Moyle interconnector, which looks likely anyway, is not sufficient to meet our needs because of its continued unreliability. The Ballylumford upgrade seems to be one possible direction of travel. I have questions, and the Minister may have the answers. What is the cost of that upgrade likely to be? This is to get us through a short-term period of a few years. How long will we have to subsidise that upgrade at Ballylumford? It is clear that capacity payments are required. How long will consumers be required to pay those? We need to know that before we can judge whether it is in the best interests of consumers to pay them. If it is a long-term cost for a short-term solution, we should be concerned about that.

There is a real possibility of deficit post 2021. It seems to me that we are, once again, reliant on the North/South interconnector, as we were before. Although I believe that the North/South connector should be progressed as speedily as possible, we know from our planning system that we cannot rely on a positive or quick outcome. It would concern me if we headed into 2021 with an over-reliance on the North/South interconnector providing the solution. As mentioned before, we have to look at some sort of plan B. It is very much my position, and that of the Green Party, that we need increased —

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

Mr Agnew: — renewable production and greater interconnection for the future long-term security of supply in Northern Ireland. However, in the short term, we have to ensure that we find solutions to ensure security of supply.

Mrs Foster: I welcome the debate on what is a hugely important matter, not only for the House but for the whole of Northern Ireland, including electricity consumers. Let me say from the outset that I share the Committee's view on the need to protect our electricity supply. It is, of course, one of the core strands of our energy policy. The Chairman started the debate by saying that there were three drivers, and I totally agree with him. The drivers are the EU emissions directive; the difficulties that we have had with the Moyle interconnector; and, of course, the delay in the

introduction of the North/South interconnector. I want to talk about each of those in turn.

Before I do, I must say that maintaining a secure and affordable electricity supply is essential for business. That was mentioned by a number of Members, first by my colleague Paul Frew, particularly with respect to the manufacturing sector, but also for the wider economy and for individual health and well-being.

I was struck that a number of Members said that this had not been thought about or looked at before the Committee looked at this very important issue. That is not true. I have been very proactive in dealing with the issue, and I have been working with the Utility Regulator, the system operator and, indeed, generators, and talking about and ensuring that our security of electricity supply is maintained now and in the future.

I have been asked by Members of the House to quantify the cost of how much it will take to deal with the gap identified in the paper that came to me last week and that was published today. However, I cannot discuss those figures in public because a lot of them are commercial in confidence until such times as a decision is made. That decision will come, I hope, in January 2014. We could not come to that decision had we not been working up to this point. So, it is wrong to say that we have not been engaged in the issue: we have been engaged in it for some considerable time.

Having said that, I recognise the very detailed work that the Committee has carried through on the issue. It has taken extensive evidence from across the energy sector, including from my officials, the Utility Regulator, the system operator, generators and other interested parties.

Security of supply is a complex issue and does not lie solely within the remit of my Department. It is informed by a number of interests and key players in the market and the dialogue that takes place within an increasingly challenging regime designed to reduce emissions across Europe and meet regulations that restrict how a member state can intervene to encourage increased investment that may be required to protect security of supply. So, we are challenged by the context in which we are discussing the issue.

Stakeholders have also been informed on the scope of discussions on the issue to date through a joint paper on security of electricity supply, which was published by the Utility Regulator and the Department on 12 June. As I indicated, and as was announced, that paper was updated today.

I have no concerns about the security of our current electricity supply. We have a very acceptable generation capacity margin at present. As noted in the 2013 generation capacity statement, it is around 600 megawatts. So, the impending doom is not going to happen tonight. The system operator's winter outlook statement for 2013-14 also concludes that the generation capacity in Northern Ireland will be sufficient to maintain the appropriate level of security of supply over the current winter period.

So then, to the three drivers [*Interruption.*] — if anyone wants me to give way, I am happy to do so. As the Committee's report recognises, there are future challenges for the regulatory context from Europe. It is accepted

that the more stringent EU emissions requirement from the industrial emissions directive will impact on our conventional generation from the end of 2015, affecting both plants, Ballylumford and Kilroot. It is expected that without upgrading works, the Ballylumford B station will not operate beyond the end of 2015, with a loss of around 510 megawatts of generation capacity, and that the Kilroot coal-fired plant will have restrictions on operating hours in order to satisfy the EU requirements. I am pleased that at least one Member mentioned the job impact of the closure of Ballylumford in particular. Mr Beggs is not in his place any longer, but I am very mindful that that discussion is going on.

The result is that our generation capacity will decrease from the end of 2015 to around 200 megawatts. That was noted in the 2013 SONI generation capacity statement and is an issue which officials have been considering in cooperation with the regulator and SONI. Post 2015, a 200 megawatt capacity margin is sufficient for dealing with unexpected short-term generation issues. Sometimes, we have those short-term generation issues but, in the event of a prolonged outage at one of our large conventional generation plants, there is widespread agreement that the 200 megawatt capacity margin is not sufficient.

Consequently, the regulator and SONI have been considering in detail the need for additional generation capacity, at least until the new North/South interconnector is in place. I hear what Members are saying about that piece of work, and we can have the discussion on whether we need to have more generation, even with the North/South interconnector in place, but, at least until it is in place, we need to have more generation capacity. Any proposals to provide additional generation capacity must be mindful of the fact that such capacity may not be required beyond 2017, but that is something that we will look at.

6.30 pm

The Utility Regulator and SONI have identified a requirement for an additional 250 megawatts of conventional generation, and we are having ongoing discussions as to how that will be provided. I welcome the fact that a decision will be made in January 2014, because I accept that there needs to be clarity around the issue. I had a meeting with the new regulator last week, and she was very clear that that will be the case.

As for other options, my Department and the regulator have discussed with the Department of the Environment the possibility of a derogation from the industrial emissions directive for the two plants. However, DOE has consistently confirmed that there are no appropriate derogations available and that, without upgrading works, Ballylumford B is expected to close at the end of 2015, with the Kilroot plant expected to migrate to a transitional national plan, which would bring down the number of running hours.

I do not dispute the detailed evidence compiled in the Committee's report. Clearly, the Committee sought evidence from a range of stakeholders, most of which my Department has also engaged with. In that respect, there is common understanding of the complex issues impacting on security of supply.

To allow for a full understanding of the security of supply margin, as already noted, an assessment has

been completed, with agreement that an additional 250 megawatts of conventional generation is considered necessary post-2015. We are taking that discussion forward, and we will have the decision in January 2014. That will ensure that there is sufficient time for the additional generation to be in place by the end of 2015.

The level of risk posed by the interim repair at Moyle was mentioned. I welcome the fact that there is now agreement on proposals for interim and permanent restoration of the interconnector. That is subject to obtaining the necessary approvals, but the new cables are expected to be in place from 2017, at an estimated cost of £60 million. In addition, Mutual Energy is taking forward full interim repairs to restore Moyle to full operating capacity using the existing cables —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Foster: If he will wait until I finish this point.

As a result, Moyle should be operational by late 2014. The estimated cost for that piece of work is between £2 million and £4 million.

Mr B McCrea: The Minister mentioned something that caught my ear. Did she say £60 million for the two cables? I wonder who is going to pay for that, given that the Moyle interconnector is run by a mutualised company. Where does the bill land?

Mrs Foster: It is £60 million for the permanent repair. The interim repair will cost £2 million to £4 million. Mutual Energy has indicated to me that it is looking into the insurance that it had at that particular point in time for those repairs, and it has yet to come back to me with a full costing, but I do think that there will be some cost passed on. I am not going to deny that, but I do not have the direct figures from Mutual at present. Do I have 10 minutes, Mr Speaker?

Mr Speaker: You have 15 minutes.

Mrs Foster: Thank you. Members commented on Moyle coming back into full capacity and the importance of that, given the fact that comments have been made in GB about its security of supply when it comes to generation and capacity. I think that it was Mr Lunn who said that we cannot depend on generation from GB, as it has its own issues. However, GB is taking forward an investment in nuclear generation, along with additional renewables and a new gas generation strategy. Our interconnection is with Scotland, which has hydropower as well as nuclear energy and gas. Our natural gas is from Great Britain, but it comes in part from Norway, where there are significant gas reserves. Of course, we look at security of supply on a UK and Ireland basis, and we have regular meetings on security of supply issues. In fact, the most recent meeting was in Belfast.

I will move now to aggregated generation and demand-side management. The current and projected contribution from renewables and aggregated generation units, or a reduction in electricity demand, was taken into account in the analysis by the regulator and SONI. They concluded that any feasible additional contribution from those sources is considered insufficient to manage future risks. I had the opportunity to speak to the regulator about the smart meter programme and the smart grid programme, which I very much want to see developed. That is something that we need so that we can allow consumers to better manage

their requirements. I hope that we will see movement on the smart grid in the future. Of course, there are some additional security of supply benefits in enhancing the use of aggregated generation and demand-side management measures, and we should do that as a matter of policy.

To reduce barriers for such initiatives, we need to keep talking to the regulator to try to deal with the legislative and regulatory frameworks that are there.

The Committee report also refers to making better use of existing cross-border electricity infrastructure, which is something that Members across the Chamber made much of, to enhance our security of supply, through utilising the two existing cross-border standby connections at Enniskillen and Letterkenny. However, I understand that those smaller capacity connections, each with a connection of up to 125 megawatts, were installed to provide local support only and would not be capable of handling the large power transfers that would be available on the proposed North/South interconnector. Upgrading those local connections would also require additional local grid reinforcements, which would be more expensive and more intrusive than providing the planned interconnector.

The low likelihood, but unacceptable consequence, of a significant security of supply failure occurring is such that, within an acceptable cost to consumers, additional measures need to be taken to manage the risk. That is what has been decided. I know that Mr Agnew said that it might be a small risk, as opposed to what the cost is going to be, but, obviously, from a departmental point of view, security of supply is a critical issue, and we need to give it key attention.

I want to mention the North/South interconnector. There have been differing views around the Chamber about the importance of the North/South interconnector. Let me reiterate this to the House: it is a critical piece of infrastructure for Northern Ireland and for the Northern Ireland electricity market. Some people are asking why we need interconnection with the rest of the island. It is not with just the rest of the island that we are getting interconnection; there is now an interconnection between Wales and Great Britain. If we are seriously saying that we want the whole of these two islands to be interconnected, we need the two parts of this island interconnected as well.

With regard to the planning, the project has been designated a project of common interest. That designation requires member states to take action to facilitate delivery of the project. I am hoping that that is going to provide an impetus to get us over the line with the North/South interconnector, because it is very important that we have the interconnection not just between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland but between the two islands. So, that is hugely important.

I am running out of time. I welcome the continued growth of renewable generation in Northern Ireland, which now stands at around 15%. Further renewable generation is planned over coming years, which will further reduce our dependence on fossil-fuel generation. However, that comes with the additional need to have a grid infrastructure to deal with those renewable energy areas. Of course, there are issues with that, particularly given the recent price determination by the Competition Commission.

I hope that I addressed most of the issues. If Mr Flanagan has anything further that he wants me to address, I will be happy to deal with those points in his winding-up speech.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister always tees you up well. Before I start, I thank the Minister for her informative response. I also thank the Committee Clerk and all his team for the Trojan work that they have put in to assisting the Committee, particularly the new members, who are trying to get their head round energy. Even those of us who have been on the Committee for two years will admit that we have not got our head round all the issues in energy. So, we are grateful to the Committee staff and to those interested individuals and parties who came before the Committee, or provided written evidence, to try to help us better understand the challenges and issues that we are facing.

I particularly thank the trade union representatives from the generation station who presented to the Chairperson and me to flag up those issue before the inquiry started.

The question that still has not been answered is this: why has the issue not been sorted? The Committee and SONI had flagged up the issue. The Minister says that her Department has been working on it. It is obvious that the Department has, otherwise, it would not have a solution. It has been flagged up for quite some time. So, the question that still needs to be answered is this: why have we not got a solution? It is positive that a report has been jointly published today by the Utility Regulator and the Department that indicates a way forward. However, I do not think that it has all the solutions.

It is important that we return to the Chairperson's opening remarks and discuss why we are here. The reason why we are debating the motion is that, from the end of 2015, the EU industrial emissions directive will result in the closure of three units at Ballylumford B station and reduced running hours for Kilroot power station. That is coupled with an ongoing fault on the Moyle interconnector with Scotland and the delay in the completion of the North/South interconnector. As a consequence, our surplus margin will reduce from 600 megawatts to 200 megawatts from the start of 2016. The result will be that, if there is a prolonged outage of a major power plant, there may not be enough electricity to meet need during periods of peak demand.

We are told that 600 megawatts is considered sufficient but that 200 megawatts is considered too low. Throughout the review, we asked nearly every single person we engaged with what the minimum level of surplus capacity would be to ensure security of supply. We directed those questions particularly to the Department, the regulator and the system operator, but no answers were forthcoming.

We had the report only today. Although it is welcome that the report has been published, from a Committee point of view, I presume that members are disappointed that it has been published only today. It would have helped the Committee to better come up with potential solutions or recommendations if we had known that the figure was an additional 250 megawatts. We have a figure now of 450 megawatts.

The Minister indicates that the proposed cost of that work cannot be released due to commercial sensitivities, but perhaps she could provide it to the Committee confidentially to allow it to —

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for giving way. I cannot give that to the Committee because it is still in negotiation. That is part of the difficulty: there are ongoing negotiations between SONI and the generators.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Minister for that clarification. I presume that she will provide the Committee with any information that she has when she can do so commercially.

The lack of urgency and failure to address the issue has been a concern for Committee members, other MLAs, members of the business community and business organisations. When the Committee talked about potential solutions and raised the issue of cross-border connections, we were always told that the issue is being dismissed because there is a perception that the Committee sees that as a solution to the problem. The Committee does not see it as a solution; it might see it as a partial solution or somewhere where a bit of improvement could be made. The Minister seems to have fallen into the same line of suggesting that the Committee considered the existing connectors as an alternative to the North/South interconnector. It is not that it is an alternative; it is that it might be a potential improvement on the current situation and give us more capacity to increase the surplus. The question remains about whether the two 125 megawatts connections will be enough to supply the required 250 megawatts from 2016. That is one of the things that we would like to see coming out of the work that will be done in January. If the capacity is there for standby, why can it not be used more permanently?

I will quote David Brailsford, the director of British Cycling and the general manager of cycling's Team Sky. I am not much of a cyclist, as you can see, a Cheann Comhairle, but, in the middle of the 2012 Olympic Games, he said:

"It is important to understand the aggregation of marginal gains."

Put simply, it is about how small improvements in a number of different aspects of what we do can have a huge impact on the team's overall performance. The notion of marginal gains is not a new concept, but David Brailsford captured the moment when the British cycling team was doing very well during the Olympics. I think that we must apply similar thinking to this predicament. Surely the answer to the issue of security of supply is not to put all your eggs in one basket but to spread the risk in as many different places as possible. That is what the Committee is trying to do.

6.45 pm

We should not chase one solution but a range of different options that could plug the gap in the short term without impacting on the price that consumers pay, as far as possible.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Deputy Chair for giving way. Mr Allister proposed that we have another large power station. Does Mr Flanagan agree that it is our over-reliance on a small number of large power stations, as opposed to a larger number of smaller generators, that has partly led to this problem, and that investing in renewables across the North would increase our security of supply, not just through increased generation but through the greater number of generators?

Mr Flanagan: I certainly agree with the Member, but I cannot speak for the Committee because it is not a

discussion that we have had. I understand his point, which is that, if we were not so reliant on large, conventional fossil-fuelled generators, we would probably not be in this situation, but that is hindsight for you.

The Committee took a fairly balanced view of the arguments around the North/South interconnector. We have all agreed, and there has been no argument from anyone, that we need greater interconnection between the North and the South, and between Ireland and Britain and the rest of Europe. That is the way that energy is moving. EU directives state that we are going to move into a market with the island of Ireland, the island of Britain and France, so we need to embrace that and work towards it. If we do not, there will be financial penalties. However, the Committee did not take a view as to whether the interconnector should be built overground or underground. That is something that, I hope, I will have time to return when I finish speaking for the Committee. I am probably not speaking for the Committee, but I am trying here.

There is huge potential for demand-side management. Once again, it has been dismissed by the Department, the regulator and SONI because it is not a big-bang solution to the problem. However, I would be very keen to see what the potential reductions in electricity consumption from effective demand-side management would be, through the use of the smart meter technology. It is good to hear the Minister say that we are making progress on that and that there is significant investment in energy efficiency schemes.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. I agree with the concept of making sure that all our eggs are not all in one basket and that we try to get the best out of our present infrastructure. However, to upgrade the other interconnectors between North and South to take a bigger capacity would require a complete rewiring. That would mean all sorts of costs that would probably dwarf the cost of the North/South interconnector. These are not the type of wires that you could tie your shoelaces together and throw your shoes over. We are talking about massive infrastructural cabling, and it is not as easy as just increasing a load when the cable just cannot take that load.

Mr Flanagan: For the Member's information, my shoes do not have laces. I suppose it benefits the Member that I am wearing some shoes today.

His point is probably a fair one. However, the point that we need to embrace is that this is, hopefully, a short-term problem. We do not need to adopt a long-term solution to a short-term problem. Any long-term solution in the form of additional conventional generation, the likes of which Mr Allister appeared to endorse, would add a significant cost to consumers. If this is only a short-term problem, I do not think that a long-term solution of that kind would be in the best interests of consumers.

Industrial and commercial customers and potential investors want to see security of supply. They want to know that there will be electricity for them to use, particularly to manufacture products. The pricing is also a big issue for them, and that is what we are going to look at in part 2 of the Committee's inquiry, but the availability of electricity is the big issue for manufacturing companies. That is why this needs to be sorted out.

I will turn to alternatives to fossil fuel generation. Whenever people talk about renewable energy, their minds seem to drift towards wind, but there is far more to it than wind

generation. Mr McCrea and others listed some of them, including wave, tidal and deep geothermal power, biomass, and a whole range of potential combined heat and power plants from a range of sustainable and renewable sources. Those things need to be considered as part of a wider decarbonisation strategy. The one thing that seems to be missing — we heard this particularly when NIE gave evidence to the Committee — is any sort of plan B in respect of the North/South interconnector.

I directly posed the question to NIE officials: what are you going to do if the North/South interconnector does not happen? They just did not have a solution. It is not something that they have looked at. There seems to be complacency that the North/South interconnector is just going to happen within the time frame that somebody has said it has to happen in. That has not happened in the past, so I do not think that the Committee or the Minister can simply accept that it is going to happen in the timeline that has been laid down.

At this stage, I would like to speak as an MLA. The alternatives to overhead connection have not been fully explored. They are completely dismissed at every opportunity by EirGrid, which claims that it is not feasible, but it is a feasible alternative. The international expert panel commissioned by the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in the South, Pat Rabbitte, found that undergrounding the North's interconnector was a viable alternative.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will. It did say that it was three times more expensive, but that report did not take into consideration the impact on land prices that the building of an overhead interconnector would have.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member agree with me that the undergrounding of the North/South interconnector is financially viable and that fault detection can be facilitated? That was clearly shown by the expert research commissioned by Safe Electricity for Armagh and Tyrone, which presented to the Committee.

Mr Flanagan: I do agree that it is financially viable. It is lunacy for EirGrid or any organisation like it to say that it is not financially viable because, at the end of the day, no matter what the cost is, it will be customers who pick up the tab. It will not be EirGrid; it is going to be customers, so the price of it is really regardless for EirGrid. It is a political decision that we need to take as to whether building it overground or underground is financially viable because, at the end of the day, it is customers who are going to pay it. It is the people who vote us in to do our job who will have to bear the brunt of it, and we need to factor that in.

Around the world, energy security is becoming a bigger issue. Interconnection, particularly on the island of Ireland, is a huge issue. EirGrid is facing serious community resistance everywhere it has gone to try to put in an overhead connection. That is something that needs to be factored in. I do not think that the North/South interconnector will go ahead in the time proposed. There will be huge community resistance. It is unlikely that a decision will come from planning in any agreed time, so we cannot simply say that there is going to be an interconnector by 2017. We need to have a plan B ready to go. I think that further consideration needs to be given to building the underground interconnector. One of the

main problems is that two separate grids exist within the single electricity market. That is a problem that needs to be resolved.

I will respond to some of the things that Members have said. Mitchel McLaughlin, Fearghal McKinney and Sandra Overend all raised the issue of inaction and a perceived lack of information on the issue of security of supply. Mitchel McLaughlin tried to find out what the reasons for that may be. When Sydney Anderson was responding to today's report, he said that the Utility Regulator and DETI have detailed action that is going to be taken. However, what the report actually does is to detail the work that is going to be done to decide what action is going to be taken, so we are not quite there yet. We have made progress, but we are not out of the woods yet.

The final point that I will make about the Moyle interconnector is that the issue of a delay in putting a permanent repair in place was mentioned by a number of Members, including Sandra Overend, Trevor Lunn, Roy Beggs and Paul Frew, who raised the faults in Moyle as an issue. However, we must remember that the Moyle interconnector uses an innovative technology. Other underwater connections using proven technology are much more reliable. I do not know whether that is an argument for or against innovation, but it certainly shows that underwater interconnection can work. It is certainly something that we should not dismiss and that we need to get sorted out as soon as possible. It needs to be done in a way that is going to work but is not going to cause customers the maximum amount of money.

I will leave it there. The issue has been well debated. The Committee has done a very good job in starting to look at the issue of electricity security of supply, and we will continue to support the Minister and her agencies in whatever way we can moving forward.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the first report of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment on its Review of Electricity Policy: Part 1 — Security of Electricity (NIA 145/11-15); and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in conjunction with her Executive colleagues, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the System Operator for Northern Ireland to implement, as applicable, the recommendations contained therein.

Private Members' Business

Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill: First Stage

Mr P Ramsey: I beg to introduce the Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill [NIA 30/11-15], which is a Bill to set a maximum speed limit on residential roads of 20 miles per hour.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

HM Revenue and Customs: Job Losses

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

Mr D Bradley: I beg to move

That this Assembly views with alarm the intention of HM Revenue and Customs to close offices in Newry, Enniskillen and the north-west, leading to a loss of 340 jobs, without carrying out an equality impact assessment or consulting with the public and elected representatives; and calls on the Executive, in the interest of the economy, to make representations to HM Treasury with a view to keeping these jobs in Northern Ireland.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The motion relates to HMRC's immediate plans to reduce staff numbers in three offices: 134 in Newry, 77 in Derry and 24 in Enniskillen. That is a total of 235 jobs, out of 340 staff across the three offices.

The Treasury has claimed, through statements to the media and in written answers elsewhere, that it is not closing down the HMRC offices in Newry, Enniskillen and Derry, but the voluntary exit scheme that is being offered surely amounts to a de facto closure. Voluntary exit is the thin end of the wedge, because, as we all know, when an office loses the critical mass of staff that it needs to operate effectively, closure becomes inevitable. That could mean an estimated loss to local economies of £3 million in Newry, £1.5 million in Enniskillen and £3.4 million in Derry. That is a huge blow to local economies and the economy of the region as a whole.

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

I listened last week to the Adjournment debate in another place and to David Gauke MP, Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, replying to Margaret Ritchie, the Member of Parliament for South Down, and I have to say that I was very much unimpressed by the pattern of contradictions in his reply to the debate. Mr Gauke said that:

"The invitation gives people the option to leave HMRC if that fits with their life choices, but HMRC is not making redundancies at this stage."

The salient phrase is "at this stage", which clearly indicates that if staff do not respond to the exit invitation, something more drastic is down the road. Mr Gauke also said:

"HMRC is reshaping itself to become a more modern, flexible and cost-effective organisation that can deliver better, more personalised services for customers at the same time as increasing tax revenues from compliance."

That is code for HMRC cutting staff. Mr Gauke clearly stated that HMRC is centralising to the larger urban areas. According to him, Belfast will be the eventual single centre for Northern Ireland. So it may be Newry, Enniskillen and Derry today, but Craigavon, Ballymena and Coleraine could be under threat tomorrow.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury makes it look as if HMRC is very civilised in inviting people to participate in

an exit scheme, as if it were some benign offer to improve their lives beyond belief when, in fact, it is the total opposite. It is an invitation to become unemployed, an invitation to seek another job during an economic slump, and, for some, an invitation to face years without the prospect of a job.

Those exit offers are a clear statement of intent, and the closure of the sites, which the Treasury has seemingly made inevitable, will most certainly increase pressure on staff to accept the terms on offer. Having met the staff in Newry on several occasions, however, I can say that their will is strong and that they will not be enticed into unemployment.

7.00 pm

I am firmly of the belief that the tactic of offering exit packages before proper, full consultations and impact assessments have been carried out on the closures is deeply cynical and shows scant regard for the staff. What the Minister and HMRC portray as generosity towards the staff is nothing more than a means of sidestepping their obligations under the equality legislation here.

I have to say that HMRC as an employer comes out of this very poorly indeed. On the day that it visited the Newry office to break the news, there were many questions from the staff but very few answers. HMRC's tactic of avoiding a full equality impact assessment (EQIA), hiding as it is behind an exit invitation, avoids facing up to the effects that this whole direction of travel will have on the groups outlined in the equality legislation, in particular, females. The Minister says that there will be consultation if a decision is taken to close, but that will just add insult to injury.

One has to ask what the point was of the Prime Minister coming here to host international investment conferences and the G8 in Enniskillen if his Government are intent on taking public service jobs back across the water and hurting the economy here. One also has to ask where is the peace dividend in that, and where is the underpinning of the economy and, indeed, the peace process.

I would much prefer HMRC staff to be used to ensure that all taxes are collected from the large corporations and others that evade paying billions of pounds in tax every year than them being thrown on the scrapheap, with their years of experience unused and their loyalty to the service ignored.

HMRC has not yet decided on the outcome of the enquiry centre pilot in the north-east of England and whether to roll out that service, moving away from enquiry centres and face-to-face services towards a telephone service. Yet it is moving in that direction without having made the formal decision. I would be grateful if the Treasury Minister, before following through with these measures in Northern Ireland, could include more information on the pilot study carried out in the north-east of England on the introduction of the reformed service. Critical questions are outstanding on the capacity of non-face-to-face, reduced personal tax services to deal with the range of queries that the centres deal with daily. How long will people have to wait —

Mr Rogers: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree with me that what is at stake is not the jobs alone but the quality of service? When other services such as tax credits were removed from Northern Ireland, it was the cross-border workers who were left with poor services, given the poor broadband etc and the complex cross-border tax system. That is what is at stake.

Mr D Bradley: That is exactly the point that I am about to make.

We have to ask how long people will have to wait on hold before their enquiry is heard. How many cases took more than one call to resolve? How many required a subsequent face-to-face meeting? What was the experience of people and businesses using the new system, and how much will it cost them? There is a clear onus on the Treasury to provide that information before coming to any decision on removing the existing centres. Instead, we get the impression that the Department has made its decision and will find appropriate reasons for it from here on in.

More broadly, we know that tax evasion and avoidance cost the public purse an astronomical amount every year. Surely that is likely only to rise with the closure of local compliance centres. With tax evasion and avoidance costing the economy more than £100 billion a year, HMRC should be seeking to expand rather than cut offices and staff numbers. Surely Treasury should be looking at how local tax centres can be adequately resourced and skilled and given the scope to take on some of those functions. Indeed, we were initially led to believe that the Newry centre would be retained and assume further responsibility for cross-border issues, including compliance and tax cooperation with the Irish authorities. Where better to locate those services than Newry, Enniskillen and Derry in the context of the development of North/South businesses? The North/South Ministerial Council and/or the British-Irish Council should examine that.

In conclusion, I ask the Executive at all levels, especially at the highest levels, to use all the influence they can bring to bear to help to ensure that those important and much-needed jobs are retained. I respectfully ask the House to unite in support of this important motion.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member and his colleagues for bringing the motion to the House. Undoubtedly, this issue will unite the House. It needed to be brought to the House before the Christmas break. I pay tribute to the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), which has been working very hard across the political spectrum to bring the matter to our attention, and the staff, who have had to deal with the news yet again very close to the Christmas break. It came as somewhat of a surprise to those members of staff. It came as a surprise to members of staff in Enniskillen, as in other offices.

On many occasions, we have talked about bringing services out from the centre in Northern Ireland to other places across the region. There is little point in looking to the House to devolve powers to the rest of Northern Ireland if the Westminster Government — our national Government — are reducing their presence here. As I understand it, they did this without the courtesy of speaking to the Ministers involved in the issue most directly. I know for sure that my only communication, when I received it in late November, was as a constituency MLA. Therefore, no prior notice was given to members of the Executive about something that will have a huge impact on various places across Northern Ireland. That says a lot about the much-vaunted respect agenda that was talked about by the coalition Government when they started their Administration. They have the authority to deal with those jobs. That is absolutely right, but respect is about not just legal requirements but dealing with the requirements, particularly here in Northern Ireland, of all the additional

layers, including — and they are mentioned in the motion — the equality impact assessments that needed to be carried out.

The letter that I received from HMRC as a constituency representative states that, as one of the biggest Civil Service departments, it is essential that it plays its part in delivering efficiencies. That is right, and it is laudable. However, if HMRC had come to the Executive and said that it had to make efficiencies, we could have helped it to do so in a very effective way. We could have helped it to bring jobs to Northern Ireland; we could provide a service to the rest of the United Kingdom in an efficient and effective way. That is something that we need to pursue.

Twenty-four PT ops have been identified in Abbey House in Enniskillen. The remaining staff are in compliance and are in a unique area of work in the United Kingdom: the national import reliefs unit. Twenty people are employed there. Mr Bradley talked about the impact that the loss of jobs will have on the local economy. Of course, as well as that, it will be mostly females affected. They will have difficulty in finding suitable alternative employment that fits in, often, with their caring responsibilities, which has to be taken into account.

I have spoken to my colleague the Minister of Finance and Personnel. He tells me that officials in DFP are engaged with colleagues in HMRC. Through Simon, I am going to arrange direct contact with the Minister before Christmas to talk to him about the possibilities that should have been talked about before the decision was communicated to staff.

I want to finish on this positive point: we have a proven record of delivering services here in Northern Ireland for the rest of the UK, whether it is a DSD service or child maintenance service. We could provide more help and assistance for HMRC by keeping the jobs here. We could actually increase the numbers of jobs here, rather than have them retreat back to the, frankly, more expensive mainland. We could deliver the services here.

In closing, I pose this question: what does this say about corporation tax? If we are to get the power to devolve corporation tax to Northern Ireland, we will need people with various skills in HMRC to deal with the issues. Therefore, I think that it is very short-sighted of government — or perhaps something else, which I will not say — to take the skills away. I look forward to having contact with the Minister before the Christmas break.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the proposer, as the Member opposite did, for bringing the motion to the House before Christmas to give us the chance to debate it and to thrash out the issues so that we can send a very clear signal to the British Government that we do not support what they are doing. I also commend the efforts of the cross-party group of MPs that is working together to try to exert maximum pressure on HMRC to reverse the decision and to go through the proper process when making such a decision.

The situation has been handled disastrously by HMRC, particularly in the mouth of Christmas. The way in which it has treated its own employees has been absolutely disgraceful, and it has demonstrated that it has absolutely no loyalty to its employees. I pay tribute to the employees in the locations in question: Derry, Newry and Enniskillen. I also pay tribute to their representatives in PCS, the trade union, because I think that the employees have received

very good representation. That really demonstrates and highlights the positive role that a trade union plays in looking after the needs of its members. I encourage everyone who is an employee of any organisation to consider joining a trade union, because you never know when you will need one.

The work that is carried out by the dedicated staff in HMRC offices locally is of a very high standard. In fact, it is excellent. As a Fermanagh-based MLA, I frequently need to use the services of HMRC staff for a range of reasons, and I always find that local staff are very willing to help in whatever way they can.

Local staff could help an awful lot more if they were given the powers to deal with issues affecting local people, because one of the issues that I find most frustrating is working tax credits and child tax credits for people who live in the North but work in the South. Frequently, there is a delay of between 18 months and two years in trying to get payment for people who are fully entitled to it, and when you ring up looking for help, you are told that it is being dealt with by a complex team somewhere in England that really has not got a clue how the situation in a border county such as Fermanagh works. They do not understand that someone living in Teemore might be working in Ballyconnell and that that is a three-mile journey. They think that you have to get in an aeroplane and travel for five hours to get there. Therefore, if those services could be delivered locally, local people working in HMRC would be much better suited to meeting the needs of people who are facing what is a unique situation.

On how staff are being treated, there is an anomaly, in that people in HMRC here are not given the option of transferring into the standard Civil Service. I think that that needs to be resolved. PCS tells us that, if the jobs do go in my area of Fermanagh, around £1.6 million will be taken out of the local economy through spending power. That is a shocking statistic, and it should make us all work together. That is money that cannot be taken out of the local economy without being missed. If the jobs go, it will have a definite knock-on impact on other sectors.

If HMRC is so confident that what it is doing is right and legal, it really should put that to the test. It should carry out an equality impact assessment, because it is our view and that of the union and its membership that the decision and the proposals will have a disproportionate impact on women. It is completely unacceptable to make decisions and not abide by the laws that govern this place. That is your typical Tory attitude. That is how the Tories are going to rebalance the economy. They are going to rebalance the economy by cutting the public sector to its knees, by not allowing any public sector work to be done locally and by transferring it all to Britain, where people might actually vote for the Tories. There are not too many votes for the Tories in places such as Fermanagh or Derry, so why would they leave workers here? That is an issue that they need to deal with. They talk all this nonsense about how they are going to deliver for everybody. However, they are interested in delivering only for themselves. One of the impacts of cutting back HMRC services so much is that tax evasion will continue to go through the roof. There is no political will in the British establishment to deal with tax evasion. You have to wonder why that is and why it continues to cut HMRC.

7.15 pm

There is a need for us to support HMRC employees locally. We are here to represent them. So, we need to exert maximum pressure on HMRC to support those workers, and we call on it to give local offices the power to deal with local people. I support the motion and commend it to the House.

Mr Elliott: First, I put on record my thanks and those of the Ulster Unionist Party to the Members who tabled the motion, including Mr Bradley. It is a very important subject that is obviously very topical.

HMRC offices are a wee bit like a hospital or a doctor's surgery. You do not necessarily much like going to or attending them, but sometimes it is necessary. That is how I sometimes feel when I go to those offices with a constituent's problem or even with a constituent. I can speak only about the local office in Enniskillen, but that service is vital. It is a vital front line service that people can experience.

I do not know how many of you use the public sector telephony service on occasions. I would be surprised if most of you do not have to use it to try to get through to Departments and agencies. You will know what I mean. It is maybe less difficult for the local Departments, but once you try to contact Swansea about vehicle tax or regional offices about what I still call Inland Revenue issues, or revenue and customs issues, you find that it is extremely difficult to talk to a person. If you can talk to a person, quite often the assistance that they can give you is very limited. I know that it is very difficult, because you are at a distance, they cannot see you face to face, and you cannot point to something on a page and say, "This is really what I want to talk about". You can do that at an enquiry desk in a HMRC office, and, to me, that is vital.

The announcement and the way that it was made are extremely damaging to the communities that are affected. Indeed, I would go as far as to say that they are detrimental to some of those communities and to some families. Today, I met some of the staff who work in these three offices, and it is amazing how many families or husband-and-wife partnerships work there and how their families will be affected if they lose those jobs.

The major impact, however, is to the consumer, the front line service and the wider economy. I know that the union has put together some figures that are extremely helpful and that express how much will come out of the local economies. That should be taken into consideration in Enniskillen, Londonderry and Newry. Newry will be particularly badly affected, in that all the staff there will be offered the voluntary exit scheme.

However, where Londonderry and Enniskillen are concerned, you have to ask yourself this: what is the voluntary exit scheme? Is it, as I believe, just a means to close the offices? Once you reduce the numbers in those offices to the level that HMRC has suggested, it will probably say, "They are not sustainable now, so we can move those 30 or 40 staff to another office. We will combine them and close the office altogether". So, let us not forget, folks, that not just those who may apply for the voluntary exit scheme will be affected; it will have a much wider impact.

What is a voluntary exit scheme? We have seen in the details that it is giving them a period of time to apply for it and then it will consider whether they are accepted. However, in the end, if it does not get the numbers that it requires for that voluntary exit scheme, will it be compulsory exit or compulsory redundancy? I think that it is leading to that and eventually to closure of those three offices. I am not convinced by the argument on voluntary exit. The argument is much wider and much bigger, and it is being disingenuous about how it is trying to promote this and play it out at this time. I have also asked for a meeting with HMRC management, and it has agreed to hold discussions with me on it. I hope to take that forward in the next couple of weeks but, at this time, we should think of the staff in those offices as well, especially coming up to Christmas.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion and congratulate Mr Bradley and his colleagues on bringing it before the House. It is alarming for HM Revenue and Customs to make such an announcement, and I have no doubt that the Executive will make all representation possible to the Treasury on the matter.

There has been a lot of talk about what a voluntary exit programme is. I think that we used to call it voluntary redundancy; it is the same thing. Quite a number of years ago, I had the relief of being able to participate in a voluntary redundancy scheme to get out of a big company and start my own business. The point was that the company wanted 10% or 15% of its staff to leave, so it had to offer it to all staff and then stop the process when it got the required number. That description does not fit very well with the Newry office in particular because it is clearly bound for closure. It has offered voluntary exit to everybody who works in the place, and it clearly intends to close that office. If all the jobs in the office are to go and the office is closed, how can it be called voluntary? Is it implied that those who do not volunteer will be deployed elsewhere? Clearly not. I understand from the union that there is no protocol between HMRC and the rest of the Civil Service for transfer between Departments. It clearly is not a voluntary exercise, and there is a need for a full consultation and equality impact assessment, and that would have happened if HMRC had come clean and announced what this really is.

The point is made that more people use the HMRC online facilities, which leads to less need for a local office service. That is a fact. We cannot demand more efficient government and resist moves to bring it about. However, that begs the following question: is this an efficiency measure? Is HMRC, in fact, efficient? It certainly is efficient at times in hounding the ordinary man on the street for every penny plus daily interest, but how on earth can an organisation that allows tax evasion, as has been mentioned, of at least £70 billion a year and, in other forms of non-collection, perhaps £50 billion on top of that really consider itself efficient? I certainly would not. Flowing from that enormous waste, is it efficient to shed more staff on top of the many thousands who have gone in recent years across the UK?

I noted Margaret Ritchie's comment about the Newry operation, and I am sure that it is relevant to the Enniskillen and Londonderry sites:

"This centre has developed a large degree of expertise and would be more than capable of handling non-site specific work".

According to the union — I have no reason not to believe it — all three offices already handle a measure of non-site-specific work. In Newry, it is to do with a work management and a construction industry scheme for all the UK. Foyle House has an overseas repayment unit that is unique as its work is carried out only at that location in the UK. Abbey House in Enniskillen certainly contains workers in a personal taxation operation, but the remaining 38 staff are employed in compliance work, including a centralised work unit known as the national import reliefs unit, which again is unique because that work is carried out only in that location in the UK. So, what on earth is the rationale for taking such draconian action? I suggest, like others, that HMRC could usefully employ staff in Northern Ireland to do more work that is not site-specific. An organisation as inefficient as HMRC should consider taking on staff to reduce the billions of revenue that is lost or evaded, not cutting jobs. Therefore, I join the proposer of the motion in the call for action by the Executive and for HMRC to deal with the situation —

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for giving way. I very much welcome his support. Given the number of jobs that could be lost here — initially 235 but, as others have said, that could lead to further job losses totalling 340 — does the Member agree that the Executive, at the highest level of First Minister and deputy First Minister, should become involved in lobbying for their retention?

Mr Lunn: I take Mr Bradley's point. I would not like to specify which of our Ministers should do the lobbying, but, certainly, if we could involve the First and deputy First Ministers, that would be good.

The point is that the jobs are not disappearing. Most of them are in specialist work that needs to be done. It still needs to be done somewhere; the point is that HMRC wants to do it somewhere else. Whether it is Belfast or somewhere across the water, like London, it is nearly bound to be more expensive. In these days of instant communication, it does not really matter from the point of view of the efficiency of an operation where it takes place. It could be anywhere. Staff could work from home, as so many people do nowadays. Frankly, the rationale for taking this action defeats me. I do not get it. Specialist units are already set up and could be expanded. Yet, HMRC wants to go in exactly the opposite way, disband the units and take the jobs away. What happened to the decentralisation of government? A principal plank of all government strategy these days is to move jobs out of the big —

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

Mr Lunn: — conurbations and into rural areas. I can see that you are pressing your button, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Indeed.

Mr Lunn: I will stop there. I support the motion with pleasure.

Mr G Robinson: First and foremost, I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I wish to outline my strong opposition to public sector job losses being enforced by the Westminster Government. The House has, rightly, expressed total opposition to the proposed closure of the DVA and the job losses in

Coleraine, which would affect my East Londonderry constituency. The same argument hopefully applies against the closure of the HMRC offices throughout Northern Ireland.

I have a copy of a petition that I received from some north-west constituents who will be seriously affected if the job losses go ahead. Public sector employment is exactly what has cushioned Northern Ireland from more severe damage in the global recession. Until the economy can be further rebalanced between the public and private sectors, we must not sit idly by and allow public sector jobs to be removed anywhere in Northern Ireland. We require answers to some questions. Why has an EQIA not been carried out in line with section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act? Has a proper consultation exercise been carried out? Should the programme not be halted until due process has been observed?

I am always aware that the proposals do not describe some imaginary situation. They are proposals that impact on real people and their families, who rely on these jobs for their livelihood, and, indeed, on the economy of Northern Ireland. If we fight to save DVA jobs in Northern Ireland, we must equally fight to save HMRC jobs. The jobs — 24 in Enniskillen, 77 in Londonderry, 134 in Newry and five in Belfast — are spread across Northern Ireland, so every area will be hurt economically as disposable income decreases to nil. The outcome will be 250 people unemployed, with them and their extended families left devastated. Where is the sense in that approach?

I cannot see the sense in the proposals. Our Prime Minister came over recently to host an economic conference to bring employment opportunities to Northern Ireland; on the other hand, public sector jobs in Northern Ireland are at great risk. We must all stand opposed to any unreasonable public sector reduction that benefits the mainland but damages the Northern Ireland economy. I support the motion and call on the Executive to do all in their power to help save this very necessary employment.

7.30 pm

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. It is very encouraging to hear that we are presenting a cross-party united front on the issue. I will be parochial. I know that other Members will eloquently speak for their area, but I will primarily concentrate on the Newry office.

HMRC has proposed to close the Newry office by 2015, with the loss of 134 jobs, and to remove a substantial number of jobs from offices in Derry and Enniskillen. That will have the effect of making those offices unsustainable in the future. The Newry staff have been asked to sign up to either a voluntary exit scheme by 18 December or a voluntary redundancy scheme by 30 April 2014. Workers can stay on until the closure date in 2015, but they will then face compulsory redundancy. There are no opportunities for redeployment as the workers are imperial civil servants, meaning that they are controlled by London and not by the Civil Service here in the North. Following discussions with their union reps, the staff have agreed to collectively refuse the voluntary exit scheme on 18 December.

Sinn Féin colleagues and I have met staff and union reps on a number of occasions in the office. It is also good to see that our MPs are presenting a united front, with

Conor Murphy, Margaret Ritchie, Michelle Gildernew and Mark Durkan having agreed to seek a meeting with David Gauke, the Treasury Minister responsible. That meeting is, as far as I know, in the process of being arranged.

I believe that HMRC employs around 25,000 staff across Britain and the North, so it would seem reasonable that any need to cut back could be absorbed across the entire organisation. Trevor Lunn said that he was defeated as to the reason why they were doing this. I suppose that they have constituents in the south-east of England and there is an election coming up, so it would not defeat me to realise why this is being done. Obviously, that is a very cynical approach to this.

The proposals for the offices have not been equality-proofed, as HMRC operates out of London and does not see the need to subject its decisions to the NI Act 1998, which requires that equality impact assessments of such proposals. It is also worth noting that the job losses here will mainly affect women and that they are all in nationalist constituencies. Newry has suffered for many years, as have Derry and other areas in the North, from long-term unemployment, and there is no doubt that this will have a devastating effect on our local economy.

Newry, as I know has been stated, is primarily a PT ops work area, so in essence, this is an office closure by stealth. Newry's work includes work management and construction industry schemes for Britain and the North. The Government's own publications indicate that the construction industry scheme is on the upturn. This work will continue, but it is being withdrawn from Newry and transferred elsewhere. It is also interesting to note, when talking to staff in Newry, that, recently, a lot of money has been spent on rewiring for the provision of new, up-to-date IT equipment. I wonder why that is being done when people are being told that they will lose their job. Recently, Paul Gerrard, director of benefits and credits, visited the office and gave a report that was very complimentary of the staff and the work that they carry out.

As I have stated, the proposed closures will have a devastating impact on the local communities and particularly on the community in Newry. It is clear that the offices targeted do not fit with the medium- to long-term plans to remain in those locations. The union is firmly of the view that this is a clear shift away from normal protocols and processes, where, if an office is proposed for closure or if a business in that office is reducing, the examination of all options to avoid redundancies is usually the first step. In this announcement, the option of redeployment has been ruled unlikely. In similar circumstances in the past, ministerial approval has been sought and an EQIA implemented under section 75.

Mr D Bradley: On the issue of redeployment, reading Mr Gauke's response to the Adjournment debate last week, I note that he said that redeployment was open to members of staff but there would be no redeployment within HMRC. If that is the case, where will they be redeployed? There are no protocols to allow them to be redeployed in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for his intervention. Obviously, like many Tories, Mr Gauke does not understand the processes or what is involved here.

The union is also of the view that the numbers targeted in the announcement leave Newry potentially closed, with Enniskillen and Derry as unsustainable.

The HMRC stance is contrary to the Assembly policy on decentralisation. It is not that long since we had the Bain report, which actually encouraged decentralisation. The Assembly policy on decentralisation to encourage economic growth and regeneration throughout the North is ongoing. At a time when the First Minister and deputy First Minister are, rightly, travelling the world seeking investment to underpin the peace process here, it raises the question of how the actions of one government Department can seriously undermine the agenda without due process.

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

Mr Brady: Obviously, the protection of these jobs is essential. I urge the Assembly to form a united front — I know that we will — and retain these jobs.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Members for tabling the motion. As a Member who serves a constituency in which one of the HMRC offices — namely Newry — is based, I take this opportunity to place on record my concerns regarding the proposed closures. Like many representatives in the House, I have received significant correspondence from staff who have taken the time to lobby their MLA and make known their views on what such a closure would mean to them and their families. This is certainly not the news that a family wants to hear, especially in the run-up to Christmas and especially not with all the uncertainty that this type of announcement can bring.

It is not a secret that in Northern Ireland we have a heavy reliance on our public service. It accounts for a significant swathe of our employment. Therefore, when there is talk of reorganisation, redeployment, relocation or, as in this case, actual closure, employees and their families are obviously very concerned. I share many of the concerns raised with me by those affected by the proposals. I want to add my weight to the calls for a proper assessment of the impact that such a closure plan would have on Northern Ireland.

I know that the Assembly has previously worked on issues relating to non-devolved public services and has spoken with one voice in its efforts to minimise the impact of any changes or find alternative solutions. I know that the Executive will have discussed the issue and will be supportive of the motion's aims of retaining the jobs in Northern Ireland. I understand that, in recent days, an increase to the block grant has been secured through negotiations with the Exchequer. Our Finance Minister is working towards distributing those vital extra resources around the various Departments and programmes that could best utilise the additional budget.

It is vital that we ward off these closure proposals and look at how we might retain this public service asset in Newry, Londonderry and Enniskillen. As a Newry and Armagh representative, I trust that the Executive will make every effort to lobby Parliament and prevent the loss of a total of 340 jobs, especially as we look towards the Christmas period. I hope that some of the uncertainty can be relieved and that some time can be bought to properly assess the effects of the proposals. I support the motion.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I, too, support the motion, and I thank the Members for tabling it. This is clearly an important topic for us all. All of us, as elected representatives, should be concerned about any job losses across the North at any time. However, at this time of huge economic deficit and need, it is particularly important that we unite to do all that we can for these and the many more jobs that are under threat.

As many Members have said, the proposal is about the loss of 134 jobs in Newry, with 24 redundancies in Enniskillen, 77 in Derry and five in Belfast. HMRC announced the voluntary exit scheme, as Members mentioned, on 20 November, and it has to be signed by 18 December. On meeting employees today, I understood that they felt that that was very much used as a carrot-and-stick approach and that there were simply no other options for redeployment.

I will refer briefly to the situation in Derry and the wider north-west. In October 2013, the labour force survey showed that 33,000 people in the city over the age of 16 were economically inactive. The employment rate is 51.6%, and 21.2% of 16- to 64-year-olds in Derry have no qualifications, which is a stark statistic. Foyle House in Derry contains 77 workers in the personal tax operation. The remaining 67 staff are employed in compliance work, as was referred to earlier. Workers were shocked to hear that their future there does not extend beyond April 2015. The compliance area includes a centralised work unit, as other Members stressed. Known as an "overseas repayments unit", it is a unique area of work that is carried out only at this location. The part-time work in this area deals with appeals, so, in effect, this work is being withdrawn from the site.

Employees feel strongly and have been very vocal in saying that the normal procedures and protocols have not been applied in this case. Public consultation, an equality impact assessment and the opportunity to redeploy have not been actioned. It is important to reflect that the majority of workers targeted by the proposals are female and have caring responsibilities. It is at variance with the very high hopes that many women in the Civil Service had for the relocation of DARD jobs to Ballykelly. Certainly, that was viewed as an opportunity for well-qualified senior female members of the Civil Service to be located closer to home. Many staff hoped that this would provide opportunities for decent employment.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Member for giving way. Does she agree with me that, whether it is Derry, Enniskillen or Newry, in order to rebalance the Northern Ireland economy, more jobs must come to the west? In the long term, they say that it is questionable whether the Newry office will still be there in 2015. The Tory Government are making the imbalance in the North even worse.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Member for his intervention. Yes, there is a very clear commitment in the Programme for Government to rebalancing the economy. Certainly, on the issue of the regional imbalance, the situation is certainly more stark in the north-west, and pockets in that area need to be addressed. So any proposal for redundancies in these areas is at variance with our Programme for Government commitment. That must be stressed.

Unions have said clearly that their demands are real and achievable. They suggest that, in the specific context of the North, which I have just referred to, Revenue and Customs needs to review the decision immediately. They suggest that any proposals be tested and subjected to full equality impact assessment processes. They require the Assembly and Ministers to enter into discussions with their counterparts across the water and request that a full assessment of the potential economic impact of such closures on the affected communities be carried out immediately. Therefore, I support the motion.

7.45 pm

Mr Eastwood: I am glad to be able to speak in support of our motion, and I am very glad to see that we have unanimity across the Assembly today. This is the second time in as many weeks that we have had to come to this Assembly to fight for public sector jobs to be retained in my constituency.

As you well know, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, and as has already been outlined by Ms McLaughlin and others, our constituency is one that faces a daily uphill struggle in respect of the economy. Large numbers of people are classed as being economically inactive, and we are always at the wrong end of those types of league tables. These jobs in the Duncreggan Road are good, well-paid jobs. Some of the people there, and some of the people in the other offices are married couples. The impact that that will have on their families and on our community is immense.

It takes a special kind of cruelty to announce these job losses at the end of November when people are facing the Christmas period, but it is nothing that we would not expect from a Tory Government, which seem to be hell bent on lowering the size of the public sector, and they do not really care what impact that has not only on the people who work in the public sector but on the level and standard of service that that provides to the community. Nobody can tell me that this will improve the service to the public. Everybody in the House has had dealings with services that have gone to England before. People have talked already about tax credits. It is a nightmare to try to get through that system and get a positive outcome for constituents.

It is a bit of a joke when this Tory Government are presiding over an HMRC that has seen £70 billion a year lost to the Exchequer in tax evasion and another £50 billion a year in tax avoidance. Some people in that particular Cabinet are not too worried about that because many of their friends and supporters are involved very seriously in those kinds of activities, but it is Northern Ireland that has been particularly affected by this announcement.

People will know that I have no problem criticising the Executive when I think that the Executive are wrong, but this is an affront to local democracy. Our Ministers were not even told. We received a letter the day after the staff were told. This nonsense about this being a voluntary exit scheme; there is nothing voluntary about it. I will read from a letter that I received from somebody called Dorothy Brown. She said:

"We have not made a formal decision to close any of these offices".

About three lines down, she said:

"What we are doing is signalling that we do not believe that there is a long-term future for these offices".

That is in the same paragraph. The Assembly and our Executive need to send a very clear message to Dorothy and her masters in the Tory Cabinet that we will not accept that. George Osborne cannot go to the House of Commons at Westminster and tell everybody how great the economy is doing, how things are on the up and that we are all in this together one week, and, the next week, announce job losses in Northern Ireland without even telling our democratically elected Assembly and Executive in this part of the world. I am very glad that all the parties in this Assembly —

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: Yes.

Mr D Bradley: Just on the point of how the staff have been treated by HMRC, the Member will recall that just a short number of years ago, Vodafone, which owed a tax bill of £8 billion, was excused from paying £5 billion of that. If you compare that to the way that these employees have been treated, they may be well paid, but they are not highly paid. The savings that are going to be made here — if we can call them savings — by HMRC are only a drop in the ocean compared to the amount of tax that is being unclaimed by HMRC.

Mr Eastwood: Mr Bradley is spot on. It is an absolute nonsense to suggest that this is any kind of a saving. We need to invest in HMRC. We need to invest in the people who have developed these skills over years and years to try to go after the fat cats in Vodafone and the former Tory party chairman for the money that they owe the public purse and all the people around here who pay taxes.

I implore that we continue the battle and that the Executive and the Assembly unite like we did around the Driver and Vehicle Agency jobs in Coleraine to send a very clear message to Whitehall that we will not accept its cuts to our public service. Let us send the clear message that we are facing a big enough battle in trying to develop jobs and the economy in this part of the world and that we refuse to accept what it is trying to do. We will not take, sitting down, dictats from Whitehall that ignore the democratic process in this part of the world.

Mr Kennedy: I am pleased to speak from the Back Benches in this very important debate. I thank the sponsors of the motion and all the contributors here this evening. This is a hugely important issue for the long-term future of a great many across Northern Ireland who clearly feel very much at risk. I place on record my appreciation for the briefing materials provided by the trade union and the efforts made by its representatives to better inform us of the situation.

Although I am pleased that we as a region are showing signs of greater economic recovery, following and continuing the progress in other parts of the United Kingdom, I accept, and it is important to point out, that that progress remains fragile and that we will not build on progress if we do not protect local jobs. That is absolutely crucial. I do not accept the premise that these are somehow genuine cost-saving measures, because I believe that the proposal fails to take proper account of the negative impact that it would have across Northern Ireland, particularly in my constituency, and the potentially

devastating impact that it would have on those affected at the current Newry site.

It has already been said that we are dealing with many employees who have been working efficiently for a very long time, who have great experience and who have developed specialist skills. I challenge anyone who contends that there are any better-skilled or productive employees in this specialised work elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

I want to make clear my commitment to helping protect those local jobs and to continuing to campaign hard to that end. Earlier today, and last week, I, along with party colleagues, had the opportunity to meet some of the affected staff and their union representatives. We heard at first hand the devastating and very real impact and fears that the workforce has. As has been indicated, many of them who may be affected are husband and wife teams, and, of course, the impact on family life for those individuals would be very significant.

I was reminded that the greatest impact, should these changes and cuts be made, would disproportionately fall on female staff. Again, I think that that compounds the gravity of the situation for the staff involved.

Wearing a separate hat from that as a Back-Bencher, I intend to pursue the issue at Executive level. I have no doubt that there will be cross-party and cross-community support so that a united position on the issue can be achieved in the Executive. Of course, we will make strong representations to Westminster. I very much hope that we can all endeavour to do our best to ensure that those decisions can be reversed. I welcome that the matter has achieved significant — indeed, unanimous — cross-party support tonight. I have no doubt that we will continue to build on that through the Executive and the Assembly.

Mrs McKeivitt: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I first want to apologise for the hoarseness in my voice this evening and for sucking a sweet. It will prevent me from coughing. However, on this important issue, I will struggle on.

It depresses me greatly that, in the month of Christmas, my colleagues and I have had to bring the motion to the House to seek support to protect valued jobs in border areas. We should focus not only on the devastating impact that this will have on individuals but on its economic impact and the effect that it will have on extended families in Newry, Enniskillen and the north-west.

As we all prepare for the festive celebrations and look to the new year with optimism, let us give some thought to the plight of the HMRC staff who have already had their Christmas spoiled and who are looking pessimistically to the future.

Along with my colleagues Dominic Bradley MLA and Margaret Ritchie MP, I have met union representatives and a number of affected workers in Newry, where an estimated 134 jobs will be lost with the proposed office closure. They are, quite rightly, angry about how they are being treated by HMRC. The workers are demanding answers to a range of questions, including why the normal protocols and processes were not applied in this case and whether, in the absence of an EQIA, any assessment has been done of the likely impact on affected local communities and groups. Those are fair questions, and the staff deserve answers.

I happen to agree with union leaders, who have indicated that the move is a no-brainer. It makes no sense to cut resources further, especially at this time, when more than £120 billion slips through HMRC's fingers each year, with tax evasion depriving the UK economy of £70 billion a year and the other £50 billion being lost through avoidance and non-collection. Like them, I believe that the Department needs more, not less, resources at this time.

In a debate last week, David Gauke, the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, said:

"I do not underestimate the fact that for many people this news was a shock and was unwelcome, but I believe that HMRC was right to provide its staff with an honest assessment about the future of their offices or, in some cases, their roles, and to offer them the opportunity to consider applying for a voluntary exit."

For me, that was more than a threat. It was almost an act of blackmail, saying, "This is what we are going to do for the best deal. Get out now". The decision has already been made, and that happened before any assessment or consultation took place. Our job in this House is to reject it and to ensure that the Treasury is not allowed to progress its foolhardy plan.

The SDLP MP for South Down, Margaret Ritchie, has won the battle in the past to keep HMRC in Newry. The SDLP has fought tooth and nail to make sure that those jobs remain here, and it will continue to do so. The Executive must now take up the fight. The First and deputy First Minister have clocked up a few air miles this year visiting the USA, China and Japan, attempting to attract inward investment and jobs here to Northern Ireland. Although I commend them for their efforts, I respectfully request that they add a few more miles by travelling down to Newry, Enniskillen and Derry to see at first hand the devastation that is being caused. That should be followed by another brief trip over to HM Treasury with a view to keeping those jobs in Northern Ireland.

Moving on, I thank the Members who contributed to the debate. I will discuss Mr Bradley's comments. He mentioned the 235 jobs that are to be lost and said that there is a possibility that there could be 340 losses.

He mentioned the voluntary exit scheme and how closure would become inevitable. He also talked about the huge blow to the local economy. He spoke about the Treasury Minister's response to Ms Ritchie's motion in Westminster last week and about how Belfast will be the eventual single centre for Northern Ireland. He also spoke about the equality legislation, in particular the effects that this will have on female workers. He called on the House to unite.

8.00 pm

Mrs Arlene Foster supported the motion and said that she was devastated for the staff who had received the news at this time of year. She also spoke about the lack of correspondence with Ministers and how her constituents had notified her about the job losses. She mentioned the lack of an equality impact assessment and how we could have brought more jobs to Northern Ireland if the HMRC had consulted and engaged with Assembly Ministers. She raised the issue of the devolution of corporation tax and the experience that was required to do that and the effect that it would have.

Phil Flanagan said that a clear signal should be given to the British Government to keep jobs in Northern Ireland. He paid tribute to employees and the trade unions. He encouraged everyone to join a trade union and spoke about how staff had been treated and the effect on the local economy if these jobs were to go.

Mr Tom Elliott thanked the Members for tabling the motion. He spoke about the vital front line services, about how difficult it is to speak over the phone and how one-to-one meetings are a better form of communication. I agree. He said that the announcement was extremely damaging to the communities that needed those front line services. He talked about the amount that would come out of the local economy and the wider impact that that would have. He asked what a voluntary exit scheme was and said that there should be a meeting with the HMRC management team.

Mr Trevor Lunn thanked the Members for bringing the motion to the House. He asked about the difference between a voluntary exit scheme and a voluntary redundancy scheme. He also mentioned that there was no HMRC protocol for the relocation of jobs. He talked about tax evasion, which amounted to £70 billion a year. He spoke highly of Ms Margaret Ritchie's comments at Westminster about the development of expertise in Newry and its ability to handle non-site-specific work for the whole of the UK. He supported the motion.

Mr George Robinson supported the motion and thanked the Members who tabled it. He mentioned the DVA job losses and the fight to retain those jobs and said that the same should be done with regard to the HMRC jobs. He mentioned a petition that he received from the HMRC staff whose lives will be affected if the jobs go, and he spoke about the lack of an EQIA.

Mr Mickey Brady supported the motion and welcomed the cross-party united front. He said that there were no opportunities for relocation of staff and he spoke about the lack of equality proofing. He mentioned the construction industry scheme in the Newry office and the experience that had been gained by the staff there and said that it was essential to protect the jobs.

Mr William Irwin thanked the Members for tabling the motion. He called for a proper assessment of the impact of the job losses and said how much the support of the Executive would be needed. He also mentioned the lobbying to protect the jobs.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin supported the motion and spoke about the huge economic need to keep the jobs. She also spoke about the voluntary exit scheme and about the fact that there were no options for re-employment. She said that the workforce was shocked that their jobs were at risk and she described the effects on the economy and on the workers, particularly the women.

Mr Colum Eastwood was glad of the unanimity across the Assembly this evening.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Member for giving way. I am sure that she will agree with the head of taxation of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, who said that the action that was being taken was being carried out too quickly and without due consideration. Does she agree that the process should be halted until due process is observed?

Mrs McKeivitt: Absolutely. I thank the Member for his intervention. There should be an opportunity for more people to respond, and it is vital that there should be more consultation, particularly with the staff and with Ministers.

Colum Eastwood also spoke about how Ministers were not told. He said that the clear message from the Assembly is that we will not accept that. He said that there should be investment in the skills of the HMRC workers.

Mr Danny Kennedy thanked the sponsors of the motion and spoke about the importance of the issue. He commended the detail of the briefing material from the trade union. He spoke about the devastating effect that the closures would have, particularly on the Newry site, and he made clear his commitment to protecting local jobs. He also spoke of family life and the impact the job cuts would have. He gave a commitment to pursue support for our motion at Executive level.

I thank all who took part in this evening's debate. I hope that, from all of us who united here this evening, a clear message will go out to all those involved in this wrong decision and that the staff of HMRC will be grateful for the debate and for the efforts that will be made by each and every one of us in the near future.

Notice taken that 10 Members were not present.

House counted, and, there being fewer than 10 Members present, the Principal Deputy Speaker ordered the Division Bells to be rung.

Upon 10 Members being present —

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly views with alarm the intention of HM Revenue and Customs to close offices in Newry, Enniskillen and the north-west, leading to a loss of 340 jobs, without carrying out an equality impact assessment or consulting with the public and elected representatives; and calls on the Executive, in the interest of the economy, to make representations to HM Treasury with a view to keeping these jobs in Northern Ireland.

Adjourned at 8.07 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 10 December 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Road Races (Amendment) Bill: Final Stage

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I beg to move

That the Road Races (Amendment) Bill [NIA 29/11-15] do now pass.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Spratt, Chair of the Committee for Regional Development.

Mr Spratt (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): Thank you, Mr Speaker —

Mr Kennedy: Sorry, Mr Speaker, if I could perhaps add —

Mr Speaker: Yes, Minister.

Mr Kennedy: Thank you very much indeed. I do not intend to address the content of the Bill to any great extent. As I have said before in this place, it is a single-clause Bill with a single aim, to amend the Road Races (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 to introduce flexibility into both two- and four-wheeled road racing arrangements in Northern Ireland. I addressed the Regional Development Committee on 9 October regarding the aims of the Bill and the need for it to progress via the accelerated passage procedure. I am grateful to the Chair and members of the Committee for their unanimous support for the Bill.

The Bill was introduced to the House on 18 November, and the accelerated passage and Second Stage debates took place on 26 November. I am grateful to Members for the contributions that they made to those debates and for their understanding and agreement regarding the use of accelerated passage.

Some considerable discussion took place during Consideration Stage on 2 December regarding the possibility of Sunday being used as a contingency day to allow motor racing. One amendment was carried to ensure that, should such a situation arise, my Department would have sufficient powers to satisfy itself that unique and reasonable arrangements for any road racing event will be put in place to minimise inconvenience to the local community. At Further Consideration Stage, two further amendments were tabled and a clear consensus emerged, which I am pleased about and welcome.

I am grateful to Members for the considerable interest that they have shown in a small but important Bill, and I look forward to any further contributions this morning.

Mr Spratt: First, I refer to a comment made by Mr McCallister during the debate yesterday, when he claimed that my Committee:

"dropped the ball on this legislation." —
[Official Report, Bound Volume 90, p200, col 1].

Frankly, that is a ridiculous accusation and further evidence that he and his party colleague have not understood the Bill, the Committee's role in bringing it to this stage or, indeed, the procedures of the House.

The Committee for Regional Development has been integral in bringing the Bill to this stage. A key facet of the Bill was the need to bring it through the accelerated passage process in order that it would progress through the Assembly and receive Royal Assent before 31 March 2014. That could not have happened without the support of the Committee, whose approval the Minister must seek under Standing Order 42, and the support of the House when the motion on accelerated passage was debated. The consequence of approving that motion was that Committee Stage was removed from the legislative process. That was, as I said, integral to the passing of the Bill because it saved significant time. That is not to say that the Committee stopped taking an interest. It did not. Members will be aware that the Committee —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Spratt: I will not. I am sure that you will have plenty of time. I listened to enough nonsense yesterday, and I will just continue. I am sure that you will be able to pick up on any points.

Members will be aware that the Committee agreed with the Minister and his officials that responses to the departmental consultation on the Bill would be forwarded to the Committee weekly. I thank the Department and officials for their help in bringing those to the attention of the Committee. That enabled the Committee to be kept fully apprised of the support for and opposition to the Bill.

I note from the Official Report that neither Mr McCallister nor his party colleague contributed to the debate on accelerated passage. If my memory serves me correctly, they did not even attend that first debate. If they had bothered to do so, they would not have fumbled the ball so significantly during the debate yesterday, when their complete misunderstanding of the Bill and the legislative process was so expertly pointed out to the House.

The Official Report will show that the Committee contributions to date, whether represented by me as Chair of the Committee or by Mr Lynch as the Deputy Chair, have always been sympathetic to the objections

to the Bill. The Committee did not want the blanket time restriction that was proposed during Consideration Stage as that impacted on all road races in Northern Ireland, some of which take place in the early morning or late in the evening of a Sunday. The Committee accepts that the specific amendment on the North West 200, which was made yesterday, is a sensible and sympathetic approach to the objections made by worshippers, objections that were almost exclusive to this race and that area. Again, that view is formed not because the Committee dropped the ball but because members of the Committee, in conjunction with the remainder of the House, participated in and listened to what was, on the whole, a very reasoned debate.

As a result of that reasoned debate, I believe that we now have a Bill with no negative aspects. We have a Bill that meets the requirements of, and is endorsed by, the promoters of road races in Northern Ireland; that provides them with flexibility, should it be required; that helps to secure much-needed and significant sponsorship of road racing events; that will maintain and enhance tourism through the attendance of road racing enthusiasts; that will result in significant investment in the local and wider economy; and that is sensitive to the private and personal needs of residents in and around our race courses.

I do not think that the evidence given to the Committee was in any way suggesting that we dropped the ball in this instance; rather, I think that it was evidence to the House of grabbing the ball with both hands and running with it over the try line.

I want to place on record my thanks to the Committee Clerk, to the Committee staff, to the DRD staff, who made themselves available, through the Minister, at short notice on each occasion that that was necessary, and to the Minister, who also made himself available for consultations and discussions on the Bill on quite a number of occasions. Thank you, Minister. I also want to thank two other people who made very significant contributions to the Committee and, indeed, to the Department, and they are Mervyn Whyte, the organiser of the North West 200, and Mr Alan Drysdale, who is a spokesperson for the 2&4 Wheel organisation. They made very significant contributions throughout the entire process, and I think that we need to place on record our gratitude to them.

Finally, the Committee for Regional Development supports the Road Races (Amendment) Bill that is in front of the House today.

Mr Dallat: This is a good day for the Assembly. Participation in this project was a challenge for all Committee members in the first place, because, at any stage, and I do not want to use the term “hand grenade” but, somebody could have dropped a hand grenade. Thankfully, the attempts to do that came only in the latter stages. We were able to steer the Bill through with the guidance of the Chairman, Mr Jimmy Spratt, and an awful lot of support from the Minister, Mr Danny Kennedy.

If I were asked in the future about the success of the Assembly, I might well use this as exemplar material of how things can be done. Of course, it also included the other ingredients of the dangers that something good, positive and innocent could be derailed, but that did not happen. I think that the Chairman has said it all. Of course, we as politicians want to claim a little bit of credit

for something. Sometimes when it gets to the media, it is not fully understood, as I heard this morning, but the amendment that came here last week was totally different from what came yesterday. That is the reality.

I think that everyone, including Mr Allister, Basil and John, can take credit for participating democratically in an important decision-making process that will bring tremendous benefits and guarantees, particularly to the North West 200. Although I said some time ago that I am not a motorbike fanatic, I have lived for long enough in the Coleraine area to know just how important the event is, and not just for the racing, the 100,000-plus people it brings into the area and all the beds that it fills in not only the triangle but as far away as Belfast and Donegal but for the relationships and bonding that it has created among people from as far away as Stornoway and the continent of Europe.

10.45 am

Mervyn Whyte and his 800 colleagues deserve this outcome. If the process had been derailed, they would not have deserved that. On this occasion, I am very happy to be a Member of the Assembly, because we have done something absolutely positive and constructive. We operated the Committee system in the way in which it should be operated. We received the support of the Minister, who exercised extreme wisdom in handling the Bill. I am very happy.

Mr McCarthy: I reiterate what our Chairman and Mr John Dallat have already said. I came late to the issue, but I totally respect everything that has been said. I hope that we have all shown — when I say “all”, I mean from the Minister down to the Chairman, members of the Committee and all Members of the Assembly — sympathy and respect for, and been cognisant of, people’s requirements on a very important and topical issue. Like John, I am proud to be part of what we have produced today. On behalf of the Alliance Party, I support the Final Stage of the Road Races (Amendment) Bill.

Mr McCallister: At the risk of intruding on this Assembly love-in, I want to point out a few things to colleagues. Mr Spratt quite rightly said that I did not take part in the accelerated passage debate, nor did I vote. Mr McCarthy was busy shouting “shame” at me. He might have enquired after where I was before he shouted that. I was at the funeral service of somebody relatively young who had died of cancer.

I reiterate the point and my belief that the Regional Development Committee, which is not exactly known as the most overworked Committee in the Building, dropped the ball with the legislation. It is quite obvious that it dropped the ball when you consider the fact that the only real scrutiny that the Bill came under ended up coming from these Benches, especially from Mr Allister. That was the only scrutiny that came to anything. The Bill would have gone through the House unamended otherwise.

On 6 December 2010 — almost three years ago to the day — the Planning Bill was introduced in the Assembly. That was only a few months before the end of the previous mandate. It went through Committee without getting accelerated passage. The Bill as amended had 255 clauses, 15 Parts and seven schedules. A total of 121 amendments were tabled at Consideration Stage and

24 amendments at Further Consideration Stage. That is Committee scrutiny. That is an example of a Committee doing its work and making the time to debate and —

Mr Speaker: Order. I appreciate that the Member is making his contribution, but let us get back to the Bill.

Mr McCallister: Contrast that with the Road Races (Amendment) Bill, which was given accelerated passage. It did not need to get accelerated passage. It could quite easily have undergone a standard six-week Committee Stage. Mr Spratt, as Chairman, dropped the ball. He said that there were no issues in the Bill and no controversy with it. He and his colleagues then had to bring an amendment to the Bill, which the Minister accepted more because he had to, not because he particularly wanted to. He was not particularly glowing about the amendment at Consideration Stage.

Mr Allister, quite rightly, highlighted the shortfall and the issues on protecting people's human rights. He persisted with that until the whole House, quite rightly, accepted that amendment at Further Consideration Stage. Yet, Members got up and said that the Bill had nothing controversial about it and that it needed virtually no scrutiny.

When I contributed to debates on the Bill, I made it quite clear that I believe in the North West and in the economic driver that it creates. The very reason why I tabled the amendment yesterday was to add more flexibility. I was surprised that the Minister would not want that level of flexibility. Effectively, what we have done is create a Bill that is entirely dependent on getting accurate weather forecasts.

Mr Wells was questioning whether I had ever been to the North West. Of course, I have been on many occasions. My previous career was quite weather dependent at times, so I know a little about and have experience of the inaccuracies in and difficulties with getting good weather forecasting. So, the Bill is now totally dependent on getting the weather forecast right.

It will be interesting to hear in the Minister's summation whether the meeting that was scheduled for 23 October with the Isle of Man representatives actually took place. I certainly get the sense that, instead of looking to one of our near neighbours with huge experience of running one of the biggest road racing events in the world, there was almost a hint in earlier debates of people saying, "What would the Isle of Man know? It does not have as big an impact". Pretty well a lap of the island is used, so everything comes to a standstill, because there is such a huge economic driver.

Did that meeting actually take place? Has there been any real contact with or advice from the Isle of Man on this matter? I think that, if so, we could have had a much better Bill. We have managed to rush this Bill. Yes, it gives a modicum of flexibility but not nearly the flexibility that we need or should have and that would be desirable to run the event, considering that there is an economic driver in the area of £4-45 million. We have all accepted that.

So, I think that the Minister has introduced a Bill whose broad principles we all supported. He has also managed to get the Committee to effectively abdicate its responsibilities and to just let the Bill go through with accelerated passage when there was no reason for it and no immediate timescale pressures. The Bill will

go through with no departmental amendments and no Committee amendments, yet Mr Spratt still maintains that the Committee has not dropped the ball on it. I think that it is fair to say that all the evidence points to the contrary, so you will not have the flexibility that is needed.

I warn that I suspect that, at some point, a future Minister and a future Assembly will end up having to revisit this legislation and to look again at the 1986 order. They may end up having to make changes to this legislation. So, we are probably going to legislate in haste and repent at leisure. I think that this makes an important argument for the significance of having an opposition in this Assembly, whether that is a lone voice, two voices or three voices. Without it, we would have had no scrutiny of the Bill.

Yesterday, the Minister said that he was glad that my colleague, Mr McCrea, and I were not organising the North West. To be fair, I am glad that the Minister is not organising the North West, given the issues with A5, the fact that the bus lanes are barely moving and all the issues with —

Mr Speaker: Order. I have given the Member quite a bit of latitude, but he is straying well outside what we are discussing this morning. I implore the Member to come back to the Bill.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Speaker for his guidance, and I hope that will apply to all Members, including the Minister.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member is coming very close to challenging the authority of the Chair. The Member will know that I give all Members and Ministers quite a bit of latitude. It is Final Stage, and, of course, Members have quite a bit of latitude, but not to stray totally and absolutely outside Final Stage.

Mr McCallister: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Bill, as it is, will give very slight comfort to the North West 200 organisers regarding how they organise it, but it does not go nearly far enough in giving the flexibility that is required to run something so important. We still come back to that. I hope that I am wrong, but I confidently predict that we will revisit this legislation at some point in the future or that some future Assembly will have to look at it again, combined with the 1986 order and the number of days, if we are to truly build the North West 200 and create the flexibility that is needed to make a successful world-class event. To continue to build on that reputation, you will need more flexibility than the Minister is giving through this Bill.

I will leave it on that note, because the Assembly will not change the Bill. It has been offered opportunities to amend the Bill and make it better, but it has not gone for that. When we have to revisit this, perhaps others will take a different view.

Mr B McCrea: I will make just a few points. I was disappointed that, as we tried to exercise our democratic mandate, which is to put forward points of view that are not necessarily agreed with by the majority, people chose to make attacks on the person instead of engaging in the argument. I know, Mr Speaker, that you are very strong in advising that that is not the appropriate way forward.

A number of things might be worth pointing out. The Chair of the Committee, although it was pointed out to me that he was speaking in a personal capacity at some stages, made

some comments, and this is taken from the official record. He said:

“Among the in excess of 860 responses to the departmental consultation on the Bill were a number of objectors, mainly the ministers and congregations of churches on the routes of race meetings.”

He went on to opine:

“The views of those congregations and parishes are important, and I take comfort from the assurances that we received from the Minister and race organisers that all efforts will be made to ensure that there is continued dialogue and that all arrangements are appropriate for residents, churches and businesses affected in the areas.”— [Official Report, Bound Volume 89, p377, col 2].

That raises this question: why were the amendments that took effect not tabled by his Committee, by him or, frankly, by the Minister rather than being left to others to propose? If he had such resolute reassurance that he did not need to table the amendments, why did he make that statement? So, there is a question when the Chairman takes issue. He should be bigger than that and should have confidence in his position, his party's strength and his Committee to take on a difference of opinion and deal with it appropriately.

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

During the debate — again, this is in the official record — I noticed that the Minister said that Kieran McCarthy and John Dallat, who spoke pretty highly of him, were part of a fairly interesting club: the Morris Minor club, I think it was. He need not have worried: loyally, they came to his aid, despite the slight and the audacity of challenging things. I am only reading from the official record.

11.00 am

Later, I heard Mr Dallat say on the Bill, “I am honoured to serve under the chairmanship of Mr Jimmy Spratt”. It is just wonderful to see such a love-in, but I wonder where the scrutiny comes in. I wonder when people ask, “Are you sure that you are right, Mr Chairman?”

I have not yet had clarity on this point, but no doubt the Minister will, with his usual aplomb, wit and, shall we say, occasionally derisive comments, take the opportunity to address it. The minutes of the Committee state that, when the Minister spoke before the Committee on, I think, 9 October, there was to be a further meeting on 23 October to get more information from the Isle of Man authorities. It is not clear whether such a meeting took place, whether there is a record of such a meeting or what impact it had on deliberations. Those are the proper things; proper scrutiny should take place. So, when it comes to this issue, I join my colleague Mr McCallister and — I do not know whether I can call him my colleague — my friend in this particular debate, who stood up and pointed out that this was not a simple, one-issue item.

Mr Dallat: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Have we just heard the announcement of a new love-in in the Assembly?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member should know that that is not a point of order.

Mr B McCrea: It is surprising, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, for someone in such an exalted office as Deputy Speaker not to know what is and is not a point of order.

Mr Spratt: It is on the record.

Mr B McCrea: It is on the record; you are quite right, Mr Spratt. No doubt a period of re-education will get Mr Dallat back properly on track and totally supportive of everything and everyone.

I come now to the point that it is not correct to talk down people in a democratic chamber who have an alternative viewpoint. It is absolutely the point of democracy that nobody has a monopoly on truth, nobody gets it right all the time, and there is always room for a counterproposition to be put forward. Yet there are those who say that, if we had all behaved, we would have got this through without any fuss.

That takes me to the point made by Mr Kinahan. He opposed amendment Nos 1 and 2 and supported amendment No 3 — I do not know whether I have got that the right way round — and, in the official record, said, “Surely the churches are not going to make much of a fuss about this”. Actually, they did, as I understand it. They came back in the consultation to say that they were concerned about this. I am happy to be corrected if I have misquoted the Member. I do not have the notes here, but that was the gist I took from his statement.

There was a point to Mr Allister's proposition the first time round, which is that, although we are supportive of the North West 200, all our citizens have rights. In particular, churchgoing people may well have felt that their rights were being dealt with in an inappropriate way. That is why we supported the original amendment and why we supported the further amendment yesterday. This is a pluralist democracy, where everybody's rights should be accommodated as far as possible. I think that, had he not stood up and made the point, we would have had a less good Bill than we have today. I say “less good”, but I am not even sure that the Bill is particularly good. In his submissions, the Minister said that he wanted flexibility. I do not see flexibility in the Bill. We all join in that laudable aim, but I am not sure that the Bill will do what it sets out to do.

As I understand it — again, the Minister will no doubt take me to task if I have got this wrong — if you wish to defer Saturday racing because bad weather has been forecast and to move it to Sunday, Thursday is the last available date on which to do so. That means that you are looking some considerable time in advance for a weather forecast. It is even earlier, I suspect, if you wish to say that the weather will be really bad on Saturday but may be even worse on Sunday, and you are making the decision to substitute for a Friday. I am just not sure that our weather is sufficiently predictable for a 24-hour notice period to be practical and workable. That is why my colleague attempted yesterday to make an amendment that said that we needed more flexibility on this. The overriding concern is about whether we can marry the rights of the individuals who live in the area with the economic benefit that comes from such a prestigious event.

The issue is this: we did not do proper Committee scrutiny of the Bill. We had the time to do it. There was still time to do it. As I understand it, it had to be finalised by the end of March to make sure that we would have time for Royal

Assent. There was plenty of time. One of the issues that I look at when people mention accelerated passage is what steps the Minister or the promoter of the Bill will take to make sure that we do not have to use accelerated passage in the future.

I place it on record that we do not support accelerated passage. Whether we have the votes to stop it or not is another matter. Mr Dallat said about the Bill that he would quote it as an example of what is good about the Assembly: I will quote it as an example of what is bad with the Assembly. If we do not need to go through accelerated passage, we should not do so. When you look at the 860 people who responded to our consultation on the Bill, which I am addressing fully —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. There is a very thin line between moving to the point on which the debate should properly be taking account of the decisions of the House as we have processed the Bill, which included endorsing the approach of accelerated passage. Those votes and those decisions have been taken. There is also a very thin line between revisiting the discussion on individual amendments. We should not do that either, because decisions have been made by the House. We are finalising the Bill, we have had our discussion, we have made our decisions, and we are where we are. I ask the Member to stray on that side of the debate rather than revisiting decisions that have been made already by the House and with the authority of the House.

Mr B McCrea: I am grateful for the Principal Deputy Speaker's direction in the matter. What I was merely trying to express in the summation, in the final consideration of the Bill, is why we still have some doubts about its efficacy.

The issue is that the Bill set out to provide some flexibility and, I suspect, some succour to the organisers of the North West 200, not entirely but principally, and I do not believe that we have achieved that. Part of the reason why we have not been able to achieve that is that we have not had the full time to consider all the eventualities. However, I will not stray into any further issues on the matter of the Bill, save to say this: if your argument is strong enough, you can win the argument. It does no one any credit to belittle, deride or in some other way dismiss those who are trying to make an honest and heartfelt contribution to the debate. It may well be that some Members do not understand the point, in which case they are entitled to ask for clarification. When they do so, it is really disappointing that people will not take an intervention, particularly when a Bill is going through by accelerated passage.

I make the point that this is a democracy, and this is proper legislative scrutiny. It is our right to stand up and hold you to account. We were honourable in our intentions, and we wanted the best for all the people of Northern Ireland. Frankly, for people to make personal attacks is beneath them, and they need not expect us to remain quiet if they do so again. This party will challenge any bad legislation that comes this way. It will take on any individuals who cannot stand by their argument but resort to personal attacks.

Mr Allister: The Bill, in its final form, is not all that I would have wished it to be. I would have wished, in particular, for its protections of Sunday to be stronger. However, by virtue of the amendments made, it undoubtedly emerges from the processes of the House as a better Bill than it was when it entered. I am grateful to have had the opportunity

to make some contribution to that. I am equally grateful for the evolution of support that eventually made possible some of those changes, specifically for the North West. As I said, although the Bill at Final Stage is not all that I would have wished it to be, it is undoubtedly a better and more protective Bill than it started out. That has to be a gain, and for that I am grateful.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the contributions that we have heard this morning. I will deal with those first before making some final remarks about the legislation. Mr Spratt, as Chairman of the Committee for Regional Development, explained the detailed process. I am very satisfied that the Committee afforded the Bill the necessary scrutiny and cooperated at all times, particularly on the difficult issue of accelerated passage.

In my role as Minister, it is never my first option to go for accelerated passage to carry through legislation. Mr McCallister and Mr McCrea questioned the need for accelerated passage and felt that it should not have been granted. I have tried consistently to bring Members' attention back to the nature and starting point of the Bill: to create contingency and flexibility, principally to deal with bad weather. Some people got carried away and simply did not understand — it appears that they still do not understand — the concept of the Bill. To ensure that the 2014 race programme would benefit from the flexibility of contingency days, I sought accelerated passage, and, happily, the Committee and the House, through debate and democratic process, agreed.

I understand that it is sometimes unavoidable that Members cannot be in their place to contribute to every debate, but it weakens the argument of those opposed to accelerated passage if they are not here. I understand from what Mr McCrea has just said that he is opposed to accelerated passage on every occasion and that accelerated passage is a no-no for NI21. However, members of NI21 did not take the opportunity to oppose accelerated passage when the motion was before the House and could be debated and fully explained. In fact, the need for it was fully explained in contributions from me, the Committee Chair and others. I make that point.

Mr Spratt also paid tribute to race organisers, such as Mervyn Whyte and Alan Drysdale. I pay tribute to all those involved in the sport and in the various sports, but I want to particularly single out and add my tribute to those two individuals — Mervyn Whyte and Alan Drysdale — because they, very helpfully, offered advice and assistance to me and my officials.

11.15 am

Mr Dallat said that this was a good day for the Assembly and that he would remember it for a very long time. I have tried to approach the matter sensibly and with sensitivity because I am aware of the sensitivities around some of the issues, and we have sought to address them. I believe that the 1986 order gives the necessary discretion to the Minister to act appropriately if faced with an application for emergency conditions to be applied, and I have no issue with the fact that the amendments now incorporated in the Bill will give comfort, particularly to members of congregations and churches on the course of the North West 200 and churchgoers in the general area. However, the debate got slightly lost in concentrating on one single event race — the North West 200. I remind the House that

this legislation is designed to provide flexibility for all races that require consent under the Road Races (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. Therefore, it will apply to other events.

Mr McCarthy also welcomed the anticipated passing of the Bill, and I thank him for his contribution.

I will now turn to the contributions from Mr McCallister and Mr McCrea. We had an opportunity last night, during Further Consideration Stage, and I offered the advice that both Members should reflect on the contributions they made at Consideration Stage and those they were making at Further Consideration Stage. It appears that Mr McCrea has read Hansard, of a type, but he does not appear to have learnt from it. Fundamentally, I think that he and Mr McCallister — and I say this with as much charity as I can muster — have not properly understood the *raison d'être* for the Bill or what it seeks to achieve, and I regret that very much.

Mr McCallister and Mr Crea referred to the Isle of Man. I thought that I had gone to some trouble to state, on several occasions, that the Isle of Man legislation is different. There is contingency for Sunday racing in the Isle of Man in the event that races are cancelled in the first week and the middle Sunday is used. So, it is not a direct comparator. I can confirm that my officials engaged with Isle of Man officials. They found that discussion useful, and it is one that they intend to carry forward into the future if there are lessons to be learned. Happily, we do not have the monopoly on that.

Mr McCallister and Mr McCrea found themselves in a hole, and it was a pity that they kept digging. It appears that they want to continue to dig even this morning. That is a matter for them. I am satisfied that the granting of accelerated passage was necessary. I am satisfied that the measure in the Bill is sensible and one that has been handled with some sensitivity. I do agree with Mr McCrea's comment that nobody gets it right all the time. The trouble for Mr McCrea on this issue is that he did not get it right at all. He went from Basil the defender of liberty to Basil the weatherman, neither of which showed that he or his colleague had appropriate understanding of what we have been seeking to achieve.

I welcome the fact that Mr Allister acknowledged in his contribution that improvements had been made. The Bill may not be ideal or to his absolute liking, but I think that he will at least recognise that his voice was heard and listened to.

The concept of contingency days for motor racing on roads, which the Bill introduces, will help to ensure the continuation and potentially the growth of our unique and popular national and international road racing events.

I pay tribute to my departmental officials, who have worked extremely hard throughout the process. I thank them for that. They should shortly be able to begin to work with the sport's governing body and race promoters to inform them about the identification and use of potential contingency days and to agree procedures to address them.

I believe that the Bill will add much to the rich and very proud motor racing heritage enjoyed in Northern Ireland. It remains for me to thank Members for their positive contribution, and for all their contributions, to the debates on the Bill throughout its Assembly passage.

I commend the Road Races (Amendment) Bill to the House.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I put the Question, I have to say that I presided over a significant part of the Bill, and I commend the level of debate and interaction that there was. Although debate got tetchy at times, it was a very good example of the Assembly going about its business.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Road Races (Amendment) Bill [NIA 29/11-15] do now pass.

Private Members' Business

Special Education

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

Mr Craig: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the importance of close collaboration between the health and the education sectors in addressing the needs of young people with special educational needs in a holistic manner; and calls on the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure that the appropriate and effective mechanisms are in place for 0-6-year-olds to provide early identification of needs, that multidisciplinary approaches to addressing need are in place for all pupils with special needs, and that each child has a designated coordinator appointed as part of the statementing process to ensure that the delivery of these integrated services optimises the life chances of the pupils.

I take great delight in moving the motion. Before I start, I will quote from the Programme for Government. The purpose of one of its priorities is to:

"stimulate interventions that break the cycle of deprivation, educational under-achievement, and to address health inequalities and poor health and wellbeing".

I want to outline some of the things that have been developed around special education in the past two years in my constituency, because it is one of the key issues that we need to tackle in the education system. Over those two years, the Resurgam Community Development Trust has led the development of a cross-sectional partnership project to create a greater understanding of the needs in the communities of Hillhall, Tonagh, Old Warren, Knockmore, the Lagan valley and Hilden, and there has been collective agreement on the way forward to address the underachievement needs there.

To start that project off, we asked Barnardo's to produce a report on the issues with underachievement in our constituency. One of the startling things that came out of that really good piece of work was the fact that, the earlier that underachievement is tackled in a child's development, the better it is for the child in the long term. The thing that was really startling was that underachievement needs to be tackled almost at birth. I think that that surprised almost everybody on the project. Everybody was of the opinion that those things could be sorted out in either the preschool or primary school years of a child's development, particularly for children with special educational needs. However, it became very clear that that is not the case. There has to be intervention much earlier in the child's development for there to be any success come the child's school years. That was the clear evidence that was shown to us.

Thankfully, the group has now moved on. Basically, it consists of all the health, education, community and

voluntary sector, council and political representatives coming together. One thing that we discovered is that, in health, for example, there are some very good initiatives out there to tackle special educational needs, even at the preschool stage. In education, for example, there is also some very good work being done on the matter. Even in the Department of Justice, there are some very good initiatives to tackle issues of underachievement and special educational needs.

Mr P Ramsey: Does the Member agree with me that, in going forward, arrangements need to be put in place to give greater confidence to the parents of children with special educational needs? Their views need to be respected and acknowledged, as they are the people who are under the main stress as the parents of a child with special needs.

Mr Craig: I thank the Member for his intervention. I totally agree with him. What I was coming to was that what really astonished all of us was the fact that Departments clearly do not talk to one another. There was a lot of cross-contamination in the work that was being done with a lot of the families. Many of them did not have buy-in to some of the work that Departments were potentially trying to do with them. We have tried to bring all that into a more coordinated approach to intervention. More importantly, the involvement of the local community is key in all that to try to get parental buy-in. If we do not get parental buy-in in the interventions, we find that there is a very high level of failure.

I should point out that that is our experience locally. We thought to ourselves, "Is that the case right across the board?" Unfortunately, it seems to be the case. I commend both the Department of Health and the Department of Education. I went to the bother of looking up what they have done. The Health Department, in the past number of years, has invested £25 million in the Sure Start project, investing £15 million since 2006. Of that, £3 million has been spent on development programmes for two- to three-year-olds. Another issue that quite clearly came out of the research that we did was that Sure Start is targeted at the 20% areas of deprivation. Deprivation is the key target driver in that project. One thing that became very clear was that pockets of underachievement and deprivation were not being picked up.

11.30 am

The other thing that became abundantly clear to us all was that children with special educational needs do not fall into the deprivation factors at all. The one thing that we have seen over the past number of years is the rise in autism and other disability factors. It is no respecter of income, and a lot of interventions are not being targeted at the children who need them.

My colleague, who works with the Health Minister on the autism strategy, knows that there are other issues around autism. Why is it that we cannot identify that a child has autism until that child has reached the age of three? There are plenty of children whose condition can be identified earlier than that. However, as I said, a lot of good work is going on in that area, and I am not criticising the Health Department. I am not even criticising the Department of Education on this one. Between them, those Departments have invested over £210 million in early intervention, out of which Early Years, the organisation for young children,

got £3-6 million, so money is being put into this area. What we are not seeing is a coordinated effort where everybody comes together.

I ask the Minister to take that on board because, in many respects, there is a lot of reinventing the wheel, especially when it comes to people with special educational needs. I will give an example of a young child who I know. Unfortunately for him, he has limited sight, which introduces severe difficulties. That aspect of his life was identified when he was one and a half years old. The doctors and others put interventions in place to help that child at that stage, but what did we find when it came to his education? In his preschool days, there was no intervention and he could not get any statement or intervention from the education system until the day he walked into his primary school.

The difficulty with that is not only were the primary school and the education system reinventing the wheel around that child's special educational needs, because they had to reassess him even though all the medical evidence was there to prove the issue that he had, but it took almost a year for that process to be completed. From what I am hearing, that is one of the faster processes, not one of the longer ones. For the first year of his education in primary school, that child was debilitated in having no help or support.

There is no joined-up thinking between the Health Department and the Department of Education when it comes to these things. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. A lot of good work is going on and there is a lot of investment in helping children who underachieve or have special educational needs. Let us get a joined-up approach. Let us take a look at what we are proposing in the motion, which is that there needs to be someone to coordinate the help for each child right through their educational career and even before it. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome and support the motion and agree with and support many of the points that Mr Craig made. Early years intervention and special educational needs are two of the most critical issues in any education system and, taken together, they present us with a hugely important subject and a worthy cause for uniting all parties in dealing with the issue.

Undoubtedly, the early years of a child's life are of critical importance to their future social and educational development. Indeed, where a child may be disadvantaged, early interventions are known to reduce such barriers to learning that would otherwise affect their chances of success throughout life.

One example of such valuable interventions is in dealing with speech and language difficulties. As was illustrated quite recently and vividly to us by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, these communication difficulties are one of the most common problems in the early years at school and have a huge impact on accessing the curriculum and the learning process. Importantly, the college also identified huge issues relating to periods of transition within the education cycle, which represent potentially vulnerable periods for children with speech, language and communication needs at all ages. We know that the transition from primary to post-primary

is demanding for many of our young people, so it is little surprise that those with special educational needs may find that transition hugely difficult and an unsettling experience.

We recently considered the urgent and persistent need to deal with the crippling effects of poverty on our education system as a whole. We know that a child from a socially disadvantaged background is half as likely to achieve as their more affluent peers. Similarly, our young people with special educational needs (SEN) face a huge challenge in achieving all that they can in school and, ultimately, later in life. With that in mind, it is incumbent on the Health Minister and the Minister of Education to do all in their power to ensure that all children have access to the necessary services that will provide —

Mr P Ramsey: I agree with the Member's comments, but I would go further and put it to the House that there should be a statutory duty on the Health Department and the Education Department to ensure that there is a more integrated and personalised individual approach for every child. That would give the peace of mind to parents that I mentioned earlier.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member. Indeed, when talking to Mencap representatives, they put that point to us. Perhaps it is for the two Ministers to consider whether something like that would be valuable.

The ability of the system to identify, target and address the needs of children who require help is central. Both the Minister of Education and his health colleague deserve praise for the way in which they have improved the culture of cross-departmental and cross-agency practice in recent years. I have no doubt that the outworkings of the completed SEN review will help to build on those examples of good practice and, indeed, target and strengthen areas that need urgent attention. We must be conscious of the reality that, for every point of effective cooperation, there is a gap in collaboration that is equally damaging.

I recently attended a meeting of the all-party group on learning disability, where many brave and wonderful young people shared their experiences of the learning process. It is clear that, while we may get many things right when it comes to their needs, there is certainly room for improvement. A common thread running through all their experiences was the need for an urgent look at the existing collaboration between Departments, specifically Education, Health and DEL, and, indeed, an examination of where legislative arrangements could be strengthened.

One particular experience shared with the group was the perspective of a parent — a very passionate yet frustrated voice — who felt totally disconnected from the process. Her son is now in his early 20s. All his life, she has fought tirelessly for her child to receive the necessary help and support from government agencies. She was immensely proud of her son and what he was able to achieve as he grew older. With the right support and intervention, he was able to enjoy many aspects of life, including the learning process. But, as is all too often the case, as he approached adult life, the interventions, financial support, advice and life-altering services were removed because he was now considered an adult, and hence no longer suitable for the type of intervention that had been hard won as a child and an adolescent. The Department of Health, the Department of Education and, indeed, the

Department for Employment and Learning all walked away from the table. That young man was left to fend for himself. His parent, having tirelessly campaigned for adequate provision for years, has now lost faith in the system and the hope that her son can continue to grow and develop.

We must surely move away from the prescriptive, minimalist approach to intervention. We must surely aim to provide whatever is necessary for as long as it is necessary, and, indeed, before primary school, as Mr Craig mentioned earlier. Lifelong learning and the right to education, adequate training and employment support should not cease just because you reach a certain physical age. Too many young adults have been cast aside in that fashion, their fortunes left to the capacity of voluntary and community organisations such as Mencap, which, despite Trojan levels of work and dedication, are simply not strong enough to fill all of the gaps.

The Minister and the Department should continue to build on the good work that has been done to date in collaboration with the Department of Health. In conjunction with the forthcoming SEN review, or perhaps as a distinct venture, the two Departments should seriously consider reviewing all current provision for early years intervention in an effort to bring forward effective and efficient proposals for the early diagnosis and screening of children who present with special educational needs. Bearing in mind the need to progress effective area planning throughout our school system, perhaps that could be done in partnership with the area planning group in an effort to amplify the extended schools programme so that those services may be targeted and sustained in areas of high socio-economic deprivation.

Mr Rogers: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this very important debate and I congratulate the Members opposite for tabling the motion. We must have a strategy in place for early identification of needs for children aged nought to six. We must adopt a multidisciplinary, holistic approach to addressing the complex needs of children with special educational needs.

It is essential that our special children have access to the various therapies that help to facilitate that learning.

As I listened recently to a therapist and the vice-principal of Knockevin Special School speak about the value of music therapy, I could see the emphasis on that holistic education for all children but especially for those with special educational needs. Education cannot be reduced to a mechanical process. To fully address the outstanding challenges of supporting children with special needs, we need to see an integrated and collaborative response between the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health. I welcome the fact that the Minister of Education is here today, but it would have been nice to see the Minister of Health here as well. I have long believed that adequate investment in a long-term early years strategy is essential if we are to create the building blocks for all our children's educational future. Current funding and investment arrangements favour education at secondary or third level rather than at the early stage of learning, yet I firmly believe that a child's development hinges on high-quality early childhood education.

The SDLP wants to see adequate investment in early years learning, namely from nought to six. The early years of a child's life are critical, and early interventions

can help them to overcome significant challenges and reach their full potential. There is a pressing need to address those who have special needs to make sure that an early assessment is made of their educational requirements. Children and their families have a range of needs. Naturally, parents want to see the very best for their children, and they deserve the very best.

With regard to language acquisition, all children are born with the potential for learning language. Understanding how language develops in a young child can help to encourage effective learning, which, in turn, can make them more creative members of society. Speech and language difficulties are the most common problem in early years and have a huge impact on access to the curriculum. It is essential to have speech and language therapists working with all school staff, if we are to get this right for our children. If there is a hiccup in a child's development and a special learning need is not identified or if it takes too long to get a diagnosis, many years can be lost in that child's development.

It really annoys me to hear of a child with autism who was not diagnosed until they were 11 years of age or of a child who, despite the best efforts of teacher and parents, was in P3 before a statement was complete and an individual education plan (IEP) in place. However, my frustrations are minuscule compared with those of the child and their parents. In the child's case, those frustrations may manifest themselves in other ways; for example, through behavioural issues or children withdrawing socially, which can lead to low self-esteem. Such children are at a greater risk of being bullied in school. These children are some of the most vulnerable in our society, and early intervention is imperative. By assigning a designated coordinator to each child, we could enhance and streamline the statementing process and target support when and where it is needed. We could give that support to parents — the primary educators.

If a child has a sight defect, it will be picked up on by a health visitor. The child will be assigned an optician and may get glasses, and, possibly, in a few years, the defect will be corrected. Why can we not have the same approach if a child has a special educational need? Are we really going to put our children first? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. Someone's telephone is interfering with the sound. Members should be aware of the restriction on the use of telephones in the Chamber.

Mr Rogers: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

Are we really going to put our children first? If we are, it will cost money. We will need the dedicated help of all those professionals — occupational, speech or music therapists — working along with school staff. With all due respect to our teachers, they were not trained to be speech therapists. I go back to the conversation that I had yesterday with the music therapist who every day switches the lights on for children who have severe learning issues. Music therapists reach those pupils. Children with no language can, after a time, begin to babble. They can then work with speech and language therapists to develop the basics of language. Minister, I cannot stress enough the importance of those professionals in addressing special needs. It is high time for the Department of Education, along with the Department of Health, to coordinate a strategic and integrated approach to supporting children with special educational needs, irrespective of which

school they attend. That must be done at early years. Our young children cannot wait.

11.45 am

Mr Kinahan: We, too, welcome and support the motion, although we feel it could be much stronger. Before I say a few words as Deputy Chairperson of the Education Committee, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, may I point out that we need to find a way forward whereby comments made on behalf of the Committee fit more into speeches and allow Chairs and Deputy Chairs to have a bit more time? Can we look at that in the future?

Before the summer, the Committee received numerous briefings on collaboration between the health and education sectors, a subject raised again today. In June, we heard from the College of Occupational Therapists and learned about the importance of intervention as early as possible — sometimes, at birth. We also heard how they work with 21% of primary-school children with special educational needs, some 4,500 of whom have formal special educational needs statements. This excellent college highlighted the importance of collaborative working through multidisciplinary teams.

The Committee awaits the possibility, in the form of a regional model, of interventions involving multidisciplinary teams. Occupational therapy can make a significant difference, often through simple measures that help a pupil to be ready to learn and, just as importantly, feel socially included in school. The Committee noted the ongoing work of the children and young people's strategic partnerships, which are designed to provide a framework for agencies to develop integrated services, especially for those with special educational needs or physical disabilities who are undergoing educational transitions.

The Education Committee recognises the need for simplification and easier access for parents of schoolchildren to health services. The Committee would, I believe, have no difficulty endorsing today's motion.

As the Ulster Unionist education spokesman, I welcome the motion, especially the call for collaboration between the education and health sectors. However, we should also include welfare, OFMDFM and even the Finance Minister. As others have said, we need also to include the Department of Justice and DEL. We need to get everybody working together. However concerned we are, we need this show of agreement to make that happen, and Departments must try to ensure that all the gaps are filled.

Almost the first matter that I remember being discussed when I started on the Committee was early years. That is now 20 months ago, and we are still nowhere. We need a joined-up solution and a lead Department for those with special educational needs. I hope that today's motion means that the DUP and Sinn Féin have found a way forward. It is about time. I fear that it could be all about posturing, but I hope that I am proved wrong.

There seems, at times, to be a real reluctance by the two major parties to agree something with all of us and not just each other. Last week, we heard a call for agreement on school hours. We will wait to see whether that really happens or whether there will just be a deal. When the Committee was discussing ongoing funding, it also discussed agreement. Again, it seems that this will end up as a deal rather than including everyone so that we

find a way forward. I sometimes think that the DUP and Sinn Féin have the Medusa touch: anything they look at turns to stone and goes nowhere. I hope that today's motion marks a change and shows a way forward. The UUP wants consensus, which means everybody working together and agreeing the way forward. If the spirit of the Belfast Agreement were followed, maybe we would be doing the right thing for Northern Ireland. I bang on about that because I really want this folly to stop and to see the Assembly find a way forward. Today's motion is about finding a way forward for children who need our help.

I go back to the motion. We need as flexible a system as possible so that parents, teachers and schools can rely on the gaps being filled and getting the service that they want. We want multi-agency support integrated throughout all Departments. The Mencap brief called for multi-agency support —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member is now out of time.

Mr Kinahan: — and a robust system. We support the motion.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Sorry, the Member is now out of time.

Mr Kinahan: Compliments of the season and "Happy Christmas" to everyone.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Lunn: At least Mr Kinahan finished on an optimistic note, which partially made up for what he said before. I will try to be a bit more optimistic.

I support the motion. The Committee has discussed the issue several times over the years, so we are on familiar ground in recognising that the need for close collaboration between Departments is vital for the development of our children. It was suggested more than once that a departmental reorganisation may reasonably include establishing a Department for children. Mr Kinahan mentioned a lead Department, but we need something to draw together the input from Health, Education, DEL, Social Development and possibly other Departments. That input is available but is not well-coordinated.

The motion is specific in demanding that the Health and Education Ministries jointly provide the mechanisms for pupils aged nought to six to identify needs early and provide the multidisciplinary approach that is so vital to give all children the best possible opportunities. Mr Hazzard referred to the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. The college has provided a useful brief today, which I do not think that all Members got. However, I commend it to Members and the Minister; I am sure that he got it. The college points out what it perceives as the inadequacy of the training of teachers at undergraduate and graduate level and for classroom assistants, specialist careers advisers and teachers in the wider school workforce. It advocates ongoing training and acknowledges a funding requirement and perhaps a problem. However, surely to advance the skills of everyone involved in the area would be a worthwhile investment.

The college also makes the point, with which we all agree, that the earliest intervention is the most effective. It then points out that the code of practice around diagnosis and support does not apply to non-statutory, voluntary or private preschool units. That is surely a damaging

omission. All children should have access to the same level of expertise and screening. Although I admire and acknowledge the good work of the private nursery sector, generally that difference should be addressed.

It is now well established that speech and language difficulties add dramatically to the problems of behavioural withdrawal and isolation in children. They cause lack of confidence, problems with interaction and relationships and increase the risk of bullying by other pupils. Most basically, they inhibit a child's ability to learn and progress.

The motion refers to statementing and the need for a designated coordinator for every child with a formal statement to ensure delivery of an integrated service. I totally agree with that proposal and with all the other principles suggested by the royal college. Here I perhaps agree with Mr Kinahan that it is time that we prioritised this area in more detail. Money spent in early interventions will surely pay dividends in later years and, most importantly, give all children equal development opportunity.

I note that 4.2% of Northern Ireland children are statemented. That is double the national average. I wonder why that is so. I wonder whether the problems that cause the need for statementing are different or more exaggerated here than in equivalent areas across the water. In inner city areas here, the figure rises dramatically: in one area of Belfast, 53% of children are statemented. I find that incredible. That is over 10 times our average and 20 times the national average. I wonder what that says to the community where it occurs, what encouragement it gives them or how it improves or diminishes their self-esteem or their ability to work with the children. We all know that so much of this relates to what happens at home. It would be interesting for the Department, at some point, to compare those figures with what happens in similar areas across the water and perhaps investigate, if it is a health issue, why it should be so.

In the 15 seconds that I have left, I want to endorse Mr Rogers's comments about music therapy. It is well proven now that that works tremendously well in some cases. I know that there is a very active association here that tries to promote it. I wish it well, and I hope that music therapy is something that can be prioritised, because it has been proven to work many times.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That is 25 seconds.

Mr Newton: I support the motion. I deeply regret Danny Kinahan's remarks, his claims about posturing and the very negative approach that he took.

Mr Craig: I thank the Member for giving way. I listened to the naysayers and doomsayers. However, I recommend to the Member the autism strategy that the Minister of Health has put together. His is the lead Department for the strategy, but he is working closely with the Minister of Education. The strategy, which is coming out very shortly, is a prime example of how the health and education sectors can work together to help people with special educational needs. Therefore, a lot of good work is going on in the background, and, through the motion, we want to see that extended.

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

Mr Newton: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I agree: that coordinated approach is what we are calling

for. I have relatives who work in the sector, and I know about the care that they provide and the concerns that they have about those in their charge.

Children with special educational needs deserve all that we can do for them. We have a duty of care and a responsibility to them and their parents. The importance of education in the early years of a child's life cannot be overvalued, as has been said by everyone who has spoken. It is the early years of children's education that are the most important, because that is when they develop their physical, intellectual and emotional well-being and, indeed, their social contact and interaction with others. It is vital that we provide them with all the support that we can. The key to success — this has been said by other Members — is early diagnosis. It is about providing parents with information and support and taking that approach. It is somewhat encouraging that the education and library boards across Northern Ireland now recognise the importance of early identification.

I think that early recognition is an aspiration, an objective and an ambition, but parents who have come to me recently do not see its outworkings. They do not see the practical aspect of early identification. That prompted me to ask questions of the Minister recently, and I passed his response to the parents who had raised issues with me. I have to tell you, Minister, that they did not recognise what was on paper as being transferred into actions.

I have a list of 10 questions that were submitted to me by a parent, and I will raise a few of them. The parent asked, "Why was my request for extra help and an assessment denied for five years? Why was my child subjected to years of bullying, being called 'stupid' and 'thick', with other little girls not letting her join in their play? Why was the special needs teacher allowed to teach the more capable children and hand my daughter paper and crayons and tell her to sit quietly at the back of the classroom and colour in? Why, after my daughter was tested in P5, was I assured that the extra help that was needed would be given?" It was given for six weeks and then stopped. When the parent contacted the school, it started again for a few weeks and then stopped again.

This parent also asked, "Why was my daughter's report not sent from the primary school to the secondary school, as requested? In fact, it disappeared, and I had to provide my copy to the secondary school". When you get parents speaking to you about such matters, it obviously raises concerns. There is the ambition and objective to deliver, but we are not actually seeing it as it rolls out to the parents and pupils.

I congratulate my colleagues on bringing the motion to the House. I know that the whole House shares those concerns. However, we do not need to just share them; we need to see them being transferred into action to support the parents and the pupils.

12.00 noon

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The motion addresses the need for better collaboration between DE and the Health Department. It also deals with the need to address some of the shortcomings in the current SEN framework. Children with special educational needs make up almost 20% of our school population. The early identification of need is key to making progress in

the early years of nought to six. Ensuring that assessment happens early in a child's development is critical for him or her to reach his or her individual potential. Many families do their best to cope with multiple complex needs in the learning disability spectrum. Health needs to complement Education in assisting them by having coordinated support plans in place for the child and family. Parents should not have to wait for months — in some cases, for years — to get an assessment or the much-needed specialist support that they deserve. The proposer of the motion gave a good example of that when discussing the young pupil with sight problems.

Some schools are delivering support to SEN children, but that is not always the case. In many of our ELBs, capacity and training in our schools needs to be increased to support teachers, staff and, indeed, parents. Health and social care trusts, alongside education, should have in place multidisciplinary teams working in tandem to continue to explore options on how better outcomes can be achieved. As the motion states, a designated coordinator should be in place for the child. That would allow the process to follow the child throughout their early years, right through to the transition from primary to post-primary.

Equipping those involved with expertise, knowledge and skills is fundamental in delivering targets in the 0-6 early years strategy. I commend some of the good work that classroom assistants do in our schools. More and more classroom assistants find it difficult to gain employment in schools, because some of the schools state that they need previous experience. That is an issue for some of our well-trained classroom assistants. Obviously, they provide a good contribution to the classroom.

Bureaucracy needs to be reduced so that schools, staff and parents can understand exactly what is expected of them. However, funding for this by both Departments should not be a barrier to implementing the delivery of integrated services. Therefore, I welcome any commitment from both Ministers that the proper funding element to provide the integration of services will be in place to support and develop proposals.

The overall effective partnerships, with wrap-around services and additional support, need to be jointly planned and delivered strategically by Health and Education working in a coherent and holistic way. That should not be aspirational; it should be an integral part of a child's life. Parents should have confidence in the system. They should not have to continue to fight for the help that their child with special educational needs deserves. I am sure that many of my colleagues in the House will agree with me that a large part of our work in our constituency offices involves working with, assisting and communicating with parents, schools and library boards so that a child gets the support that they are entitled to through their statement of special educational needs.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's response, and I agree entirely with what has been said in the House. I totally agree, too, that another key aspect or element of this is transport. Transport is an equally important issue in addressing special educational needs. I support the motion.

Mr Moutray: At the outset, I commend my colleagues for bringing this important matter to the House. As a parent, I believe that there is little that is more important than

seeing our children progress educationally and socially through their school years. Progress and success for children can and does happen at different rates. However, I genuinely believe that real life chances can only be achieved if children, on the basis of their specific needs, can obtain adequate educational support when they most need it. I have spoken with a number of educationalists, including Dr Peter Cunningham of the Ceara special care school in my constituency, who tell us that early detection is one of the most important factors in ensuring that educational provision is tailored and suited to the needs of the children.

Unfortunately, in years gone by, the existence of SEN often went unnoticed. With more information available, more training for teachers and more parental awareness of it, improvements have been made, but there is always scope for more improvement. There is still a gap, and, certainly, the Minister of Education has recognised this in his most recent publication, 'Every School a Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion' in January 2012. The gap that is clearly evident in early detection still causes our children and young people to miss out on an educational experience that helps them to realise their full potential in life. Therefore, the crux of the DUP motion is for further health professional intervention. This is something where joined-up government can really make a difference in the lives of children and young people with special needs and disabilities.

Children's needs cannot be put into boxes. They cannot simply fall into a broad category that entitles them to a static set of resources. Indeed, in a modern society that prides itself on caring for and assisting the most vulnerable, it is time that a holistic approach was used to tackle this problem. It is time that the Department of Education worked hand in glove with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure that there is early diagnosis and identification of needs and, subsequently, the implementation of multidisciplinary approaches to address the needs of each child. In addition to the identification and implementation of a strategy for addressing the needs of children and young people with special needs, our motion goes that extra mile for those children in that it proposes that each child should be appointed a designated coordinator as part of their statementing process to ensure that each child reaches their potential in life.

We only have to think of the high-profile case in the news yesterday of the world-famous singer Susan Boyle, who, in her mid-50s, has been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome. Speaking on the matter, she said:

"It is a relief to finally receive a diagnosis".

She went on to say that she has always had an unfair label put on her and that it is a condition that she has had to live with and work through. She now feels more relaxed about herself because people will have a greater understanding of who she is and the things that she does. Unfortunately, in Susan's case, it was very much a case of a misdiagnosis. In earlier life, she was identified as having had a shortage of oxygen to her brain at birth. We can see clearly that Susan Boyle has reached great heights and has gone on to be a world-famous singer, but, had this been detected early in life and the appropriate tailored help afforded by the statutory authorities, Susan Boyle, in

herself, would have been a much more confident person and, quite possibly, would have been able to handle her climb to fame in a completely different way.

It is well recognised that the early years of a child's life are paramount to him or her achieving life's potential. Indeed, we all know more than ever about the importance of positive and supportive environments and their impact on brain development and the way in which the first years of a child's life can shape the rest of their life. Over 20% of our school population is made up of children with SEN or disabilities, and it is paramount that the needs of this large number of children are not forgotten. To this end, I support the motion.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I inform the House that it will be possible to conclude the debate and take the vote before the lunchtime recess.

Mr McKinney: I support the motion. The requirements of young people with special educational needs must continue to be a priority for the Department of Education and the Department of Health. That area demands considerable focus given that, we understand, 20% of our children in schools have a special need of one type or another.

The early identification of needs is of the utmost importance, so that difficulties can be addressed promptly, reducing the need for long-term intervention and, indeed, allowing for accelerated development paths and sustained progress for children. My party colleague Sean Rogers has spoken of concerns about the processes of diagnosis and subsequent treatment, and the length of time between both is crucial to a child's development. However, it holds true that we must address the role that early intervention, multidisciplinary approaches and the effective delivery of integrated services play in determining the prospects and life qualities of children with special educational needs. The link between those two factors reinforces the fact that joined-up government is required to properly and thoroughly help children with special educational needs to develop and to address the wider social inequality spectrum in healthcare.

We have seen, for example through the Allen report among others, that it is imperative that children are given the best start in life to break the cycle of disadvantage that can lead to poor life outcomes, and the best start cannot be provided through one medium of care. A child will not wholly thrive through positive intellectual development only, nor will they thrive just by means of positive social and emotional reinforcement. It takes an amalgamation of both. It is for that reason that joined-up government, particularly between the health and education sectors, is of the utmost importance to the development of any child with a special educational need. So, while we support and welcome the collaboration aspect of the motion, we ask for it to go much further. We need a cross-departmental and cross-ministerial approach.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McKinney: Yes.

Mr Storey: The key issue that we wanted to include in the motion was that a designated coordinator is appointed as part of the statementing process, because that is key to the delivery of the service. I would take it even further than the statementing process and say that a coordinator

should be in place for the entire identification of the needs of our children.

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

Mr McKinney: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. That would send a positive and powerful signal to the children and the parents, but it would send an even more powerful signal to the wider public and parents in general if two Ministers sat down together and agreed potentially to incorporate some sort of a statutory instrument to make it work together and make sure that we addressed the needs that we have all been addressing.

The independent report on early intervention from 2011 provides other evidence and argues that early intervention, combined with support within the remits of health and education policy, can reduce the effects of poverty and deprivation, not just now but generation on generation. That is another important consideration. Let us look at further evidence. The Fit and Well strategic framework says, among other things:

“facilitate whole-government synergy to address the range of key socio-economic factors which influence health and wellbeing”.

Once again, a common theme expressed by that document is the need for a joined-up, close partnership between Health and Education to ensure positive intellectual, emotional and social development.

While we commend today's motion, we express significant concern about the absence of that statutory instrument that I am talking about for both the Department of Health and the Department of Education to work together on issues such as those that we are addressing. Others are already following that route. I note the significant efforts of the Scottish Government to ensure that their education and health services are more fully integrated. We have seen that a collaborative response from both Departments will be necessary to address the requirements of young people with special educational needs. However, there remains no duty to ensure that engagement. The SDLP supports today's motion calling for that closer collaboration plus a joined-up government approach, which is essential if we are to provide children with better life prospects and, in a broader sense, begin to address the health inequality problems in Northern Ireland.

I refer the House to statistics that Members will have been reading over the past while. If you live in one of our most socially deprived areas, there is a real chance that you will live nine years less than somebody who lives in one of our more advantaged areas. We have to address that. The SDLP urges the Education and Health Ministers to explore the creation of a statutory duty to provide joined-up services for those who are, after all, the most vulnerable.

12.15 pm

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion and thank those who tabled it. The motion brings to the House something that touches the lives of so many vulnerable young people, young adults and their parents across Northern Ireland. It is timely because, surely, if anything emanates from it, the Minister would have time to bring in changes ahead of next September.

Those who teach and work in special schools have my admiration and deserve the admiration of every Member. I include teachers and staff who work with children with special needs in all local schools. Their dedication and service to the young children in their care is nothing short of amazing. However, children with special needs and requirements are being failed by a system that has not evolved with time and is not capable of dealing with the modern problems and challenges that the parents of so many young children have to face almost daily. It is not acceptable for parents to leave their children at the school gate and then spend the day worrying about the care being provided to them. It is not the fault of the teachers, principals or staff in the school; the fault lies squarely with the bureaucratic machine in the boards and the Department.

I would like to use the short time that I have to speak to focus on provision for children with diabetes. The Minister will be aware that I wrote to him on behalf of parents of children with type 1 diabetes who had contacted me. I also wrote to the Health Minister on the issue. The Minister of Education, in his response, confirmed that the number of primary-school children with diabetes has been steadily rising and currently stands at 142. I will give one example. I have been helping a young mother who, despite calling at the school during the summer months to explain her son's needs, has yet to receive adequate support. Her son, who is in primary 1, requires regular syringe-driven injections, but no help or support was put in place. This young mother was left to worry about her son when she left him to school. She told me that it appeared as though her son was expected to know how to operate the insulin pump and when he was required to do so. No one was available to help her son with his injections, meaning that she was not able to leave the local area for fear of receiving a telephone call. Sadly, she is not alone.

When I wrote to the board on behalf of parents, it referred to the April 2008 guidance, 'Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs'. This was sent by the Department to all schools. Maybe the Minister can confirm whether it has been updated in the five years since. Updated policies are of little use if they sit on a shelf in the Department.

Special needs come on many levels, but meeting the basic needs and requirements of a child who has a medical problem should surely mean that he or she receives better treatment than is currently available. The motion rightly identifies that, by getting it right in the early years, we can ensure that the education experience of young children with special needs, far from hampering them, enables them to reach their full potential. I therefore support the motion and the urgent review of the current arrangements.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Members opposite for bringing the motion to the House. It is a very important issue and one that is close to my heart.

The importance of the early years from nought to six cannot be overstated. They are integral to the outcomes for our children in later life. Investing in early years provision will improve outcomes for children and save us money in the long term. Other Members have outlined some of the evidence to back that up. Cooperation and integration, which the motion also calls for, is equally essential. We must have joined-up services between Departments and government agencies.

The motion rightly calls on the Ministers of Health and Education to work together on the issue. We have to recognise that the Minister and Department of Education's remit starts, at the earliest, at age three, where there is Sure Start provision. However, for most other children, it will not be until age four. That is why in 2010, as a researcher for an MLA, I sat on the all-party group for children and young people and was presented with the draft early years strategy by a DE official. When I asked what collaboration there had been with the Department of Health on the strategy, I was told that it was a Department of Education strategy. This was the 0-6 early years strategy, and, as it was a Department of Education strategy, it started at age three. It was going to miss out three years of the development of our children's lives. That should be an embarrassment to any of those involved in the production of the strategy, and the fact that it was presented shows the intransigence in our current system about cooperation between Departments. Action needs to be taken on that. I am not convinced that what followed it — the Learning to Learn framework — has resolved that problem; it has simply removed from the paper the fact that early years strategy should cover ages nought to six, not three to six.

I believe that we need a statutory duty for Departments to cooperate. That is why, as soon as I was elected, the first thing I did was to initiate a private Member's Bill to put a statutory duty on Departments to cooperate in the devising of strategies, such as the early years strategy, that have a direct impact on children's lives. The silo mentality that exists between our Departments at times cannot continue and must be tackled.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does he agree that the omens are not good for joined-up government? A few years ago, the I CAN Centre in Ballynahinch Primary School, a fantastic facility for youngsters with speech and learning difficulties, was allowed by the Departments of Education and Health to disappear. There was a 70% success rate in that school, but both Departments walked away from it. The omens are not good for what you suggest.

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

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for the intervention, because it highlights my point exactly. Indeed, if we look at the justice system, we see that around 50% of people in prison, I think, have speech and language difficulties. It shows that, had those issues been tackled, we could have saved money in our criminal justice system as well as having better outcomes for those individuals and better outcomes for our society.

The call for a statutory duty to cooperate has been a strong one. It is something that Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI), an umbrella organisation for over 150 children's organisations, has been campaigning for. Indeed, it has supported me in the development of my Bill. The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) has produced a report in conjunction with Queen's University that calls for a statutory duty to cooperate, and Members will have received a briefing from Mencap today that calls for the same thing. I will also quote from the Children's Law Centre, which said:

“the lack of a statutory duty to cooperate is having an increasingly negative impact upon the manner in which inter-departmental resources are prioritized ... This in turn is having a significant adverse impact upon equality and inclusion.”

I know that equality and inclusion are two things that the Minister puts at the top of his agenda. I call on him today to give a commitment to support, in principle, my Bill to make cooperation a statutory duty. I am happy to work with the Minister and his Department, as well as with the Health Minister, to get the Bill right. I think that its principles are sound, and I hope to bring it forward in the new year.

I have seen the problems with a lack of joined-up working on special educational needs in my own constituency. At one point in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area, the average time between referral to an educational psychologist and the first appointment at stage 3 of the code of practice was 309 days. That is an unacceptable waiting time. On a personal level, I have also seen some good practice at Bangor Central Nursery School and, indeed, at Bangor Central Integrated Primary School.

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

Mr Agnew: We have to ensure that that good practice becomes common practice. I believe that we need legislation to make that happen.

Mr O’Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Fáiltím roimh an deis na ceisteanna seo a phlé inniu agus dearcadh mo chomhghleacaithe Tionóil a chloisteáil. I welcome the chance to debate these issues and to hear my Assembly colleagues’ views.

I am committed to ensuring that we meet the needs of the most vulnerable pupils in our society and acknowledge the importance of close collaboration between the education and health sectors to meet those pupils’ special educational needs. Minister Poots also recognises and supports the need for close cooperation between our two Departments and their associated agencies, particularly in addressing services and support for children with SEN. It will be worthwhile for some Members to be aware that Minister Poots and I and our officials meet on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of issues, including SEN.

I am pleased to report that there are already good examples of cooperation and engagement between the education and health sectors at departmental level in initiatives such as the autism strategy, which some Members referred to, and the Bamford action plan. My officials are also involved in the Public Health Agency’s review of allied health professional support for children with statements of SEN.

As regards legislation, the 1995 Children Order provides that health and social services authorities shall assist any education and library board (ELB) with the provision of services for any child with SEN in the authority’s area. The 1996 Education Order provides that an ELB may request the help of health and social services authorities for children with SEN. Clearly, therefore, statutory frameworks are in place to support collaborative working.

As regards practice on the ground, the code of practice on the identification and assessment of SEN recognises

that effective action on behalf of children with SEN will often depend on close cooperation between education and health and social services.

A number of the examples that Members referred to do not need a change in legislation. Rather, it needs to be ensured that the legislation that is in place is being enacted in schools. Mr Newton posed questions on behalf of a parent. Although I cannot validate the authenticity of the circumstances that were referred to in those questions, I can say that you do not need a change in legislation to protect that child’s rights. The school in question is failing that child under current legislation. That school needs to be challenged through both its board of governors and principal on how it treated that child in the past and how the movement between primary school and post-primary school was handled. You do not need a change in legislation to protect that child’s rights. Rather, the legislation that is currently in place needs to be enacted.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for giving way. I concentrated my efforts only on those children in mainstream education who have special educational needs. However, a constituent of mine presented to the Minister a report — he referred to it as the Emma report — based on his child’s educational experience at primary school. The recent questions came from another parent at the same school. The Emma report dealt with a child’s previous experience. It should have raised questions in the Department that a parent felt sufficiently strongly to spend a considerable amount of time putting together a fairly detailed report.

Mr O’Dowd: Although I am not dismissing his claim, I assure the Member that, if he speaks to me privately and identifies the school that he claims is allowing a child to be bullied in the playground and excluded from education, with a teacher feeling that it is appropriate to exclude that child and set a piece of paper and a colouring pen in front of them, I will deal with that personally, because it is unacceptable.

The point that I am making is that we, as Assembly Members, can introduce legislation. That legislation has to be implemented on the ground. Current legislation excludes the practices that are being delivered in that school and, when we, as elected representatives, become aware of such a case, we have a duty to ensure that that legislation is brought to bear on any school that is failing children. That is the point that I am trying to make.

12.30 pm

Mrs Dobson made points about medical interventions for children. The guidance was updated last year. Again, I am not shirking my responsibility, but, during Mrs Dobson’s speech, she said that she did not blame the teachers or principals of the schools, and 99.9% of the time, she is absolutely correct. However, in the instance that she referred to, again, it is the school’s responsibility. The school or a teacher in the school is refusing to administer insulin to that child. They have the guidance, they have the legislative protection and they have the training available, so I suggest that you go back to the parent or challenge the school on that matter. That does not require a change to the legislation. I have to say that the vast majority of schools will cooperate in medical incidents, but a number of schools or teachers refuse to. I have not been shown

any legislative or insurance reason why schools should not. That is my view on that.

Regarding early intervention, my Department's 'Learning to Learn' policy framework, which was published in October, seeks to ensure that all children have equal opportunities to achieve their potential through high-quality early years education and learning experiences. A key policy objective is to identify and help to address barriers to learning and reduce the risk and impact of social exclusion and the need for later interventions.

Mr Craig referred to a case where a child moved from early years into primary school and was left behind because of a lack of intervention, but, as part of the SEN capacity-building programme, SEN early years pilots link with the Learning to Learn strategy and involve multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary and dual agency work, and those are under way. The pilots aim to improve the capacity of early years settings to be able to identify, assess and meet the needs of children with SEN. Where those needs cannot be met by the setting alone, multidisciplinary support can be requested. Education Training Inspectorate evaluation of the pilots will take place in 2014 and will be used to inform a future model of SEN best practice for early identification, assessment and provision across early years settings.

Another key aspect of early intervention is the Sure Start service, which is delivered to the top 20 most disadvantaged wards, moving to the top 25 most disadvantaged wards and super output areas. Sure Start works with parents and children aged nought to four to promote the physical, intellectual, social and emotional development of preschool children to ensure that they can flourish at home and when they get to school. Sure Start is delivered through close cooperation with the Health Department, the Health and Social Care Board, the childcare partnerships and the local health and social care trusts. Sure Start's integrated approach to service delivery is a prime example of education and health working collaboratively and is fundamental to the service's effective operation.

Statements of SEN will include details of any relevant non-educational needs of, and provision for, the child, as agreed between the health service, social services or other agencies and ELBs. It is important to note that the statutory assessment process is multidisciplinary in nature. Professional advice is sought from parents and from education and health services.

It is also important to note that not all pupils with SEN, including those with statements, will require multidisciplinary interventions. The ELBs have, for many years, worked closely with their counterparts in health to bring about good educational and health outcomes for children. Multidisciplinary teams run by the health and social care trusts work in close collaboration with their respective ELBs. Initiatives such as the multi-agency support teams (MASTs) in schools provide a holistic service to meet the needs of children with SEN. Services provided under MASTs have proven to be valuable sources of universal, targeted and specific support to parents, education, staff and pupils. This initiative, involving health trusts and ELBs, is one good example of effective transdisciplinary working across two agencies.

I accept that the experiences of parents coming into our constituency offices regarding supporting their children

through the statement process or getting their children through the statement process is not always universally good. We have to continually ensure that our services, as I said in response to Mr Newton, the legislation, practices, policies and all the multidisciplinary teams that we have on the ground mean something to parents and that they are making a positive change to young people's lives on the ground.

We have reviewed the SEN legislation. We are proposing to bring forward a paper to the Executive. That is most likely to be after the Christmas break, and we hope to receive agreement from the Executive to move towards publishing legislation in February. That will then go through the necessary Committee and legislative procedures. The discussions thus far with the Committee on the matter have been positive. I hope and expect that that positive engagement will continue. I believe that there may be differences on emphasis, and we may have different points of view on many matters across the House, but I hope that we can reach cross-party agreement on the next steps for SEN legislation.

I am relaxed about a legislative imposition on cooperation between the Departments — other Departments will speak for themselves — but I am not in favour of legislation for the sake of legislation. I believe that the Department of Health and the Department of Education are working very well together in supporting our young people with special educational needs. Of course, we can improve the services on the ground. When there are failings, they need to be highlighted, and they need to be corrected. New legislation will not always be the way forward, as I have pointed out in a number of examples. If it is the will of the House, as we are processing the SEN legislation, to place a cooperation clause in the legislation, and it is there for the benefit of young people, I can assure Members that they will not face any resistance from me.

Mr Storey: I thank all those who have taken part in the debate. I will try to sum up in an appropriate manner the comments that have been made and the reasons why I believe that it is important that we brought the motion to the House today.

As we approach the Christmas season, it is right and proper that we remember the birth of a child — a child who would change the hearts and lives of many, for centuries to come. It is, therefore, appropriate that, on the final day of the House's deliberations before the Christmas recess, again, the focus of our attention is on the needs of children. As parents, we value the children who are at the centre of our lives. As someone who became a very young grandfather, a few weeks ago, I can assure you that the birth of a child brings great joy into a home and into a family.

I believe that, yesterday, in the House, we saw what encouragement and hope can be given to children and parents who face very challenging circumstances when a Minister listens and is not prepared to accept the status quo, and when a determined effort is made to find a resolution. I refer to the statement that was made in the House yesterday by my colleague the Health Minister.

This time of the year is about the season of goodwill and peace on earth; maybe that extends into the Chamber. There are always those who take the opportunity to cry, and, unfortunately, we had an example of that. I will come to that in a minute or two. There are, however, good

examples within the system, and references have been made to them by my colleague who proposed the motion and by others in the House. So, let us not undervalue the huge amount of work that is done by many within the educational system, in Health and in other Departments, who endeavour, every day of the week, to ensure that they make an invaluable contribution to the lives of our young people.

I think of those in Castle Tower School in my constituency. The Minister and I had the opportunity to visit that school; in fact, it was the most enjoyable day that I have ever had with the Minister. I was not responsible for this, but a pupil decided that the Minister's tie needed to be straightened and gave it a good, tight pull. Maybe many's the time that I wished that I could do that. In Castle Tower, we saw things that were challenging and circumstances that were very difficult for parents and for young people, but we saw dedication beyond the call of duty.

I also think of the day that I visited Fleming Fulton School. I do not think that I will ever be able to get out of my head or mind the huge challenges faced by those who work in such an environment. However, we saw everybody — the health trust, the education and library board and the Department — working together to ensure that the needs of those children were met.

Despite all of that, we had a contribution from the Ulster Unionist Party. I suppose that all that I can say about Mr Kinahan's comments is that every Christmas needs a Scrooge, and he fulfilled that role. He should apply to the Grand Opera House, and perhaps next year he will be in the pantomime — that is about as much as his comments deserve.

I commend Mr Craig and other colleagues for the way in which they presented the motion to the House. Mr Craig referred in his opening comments to the Programme for Government, his experience of the work of the Resurgam Trust and Sure Start. It was vital that we did not produce the motion in isolation. The help that we received was encouraging. I commend those who helped us with the motion, some of whom are in the Public Gallery. I welcome the support from organisations such as Mencap, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, the Royal National Institute of Blind People in Northern Ireland, Children in Northern Ireland and others who contacted us and made correspondence available to us, as they have done for other Members. They also met us, and their sharing of experiences and examples of the frustrations and issues has benefited those whom they represent.

Mr Hazzard made a very valid point about "access to the necessary service". We need to progress that in the weeks and months that lie before us. Another point — I think that it was made by my colleague Mr Moutray — was about appropriate and correct diagnosis. In the past few days, we have heard examples of late diagnoses, such as in yesterday's very high-profile case to which Mr Moutray referred. We have also heard of young people who have not been appropriately assessed, which has led to huge frustration for their parents and others associated with the family.

Mr Rogers's comment that young people cannot wait is true. A situation in which a child or young person waits five years for an assessment of their need is just not acceptable. Through the debate, we can ensure that there

is collaboration. From comments made by the Minister in the House, the Health Minister and others, I believe that there is already a will to ensure that there is collaboration and that an approach is taken which is constructed in such a way that it is, ultimately, to the benefit of all the young people involved.

I welcome the fact that Trevor Lunn agreed with the appointment of a coordinator. When putting the motion together, we wanted there to be something of substance. It is very easy — we all do it — to come to the House with a motion, and, if it is not dealt with by a Minister who happens to come from your party, it is easier to say that it is his or her responsibility. However, with this motion, we are asking the Health Minister, who is our party colleague, to buy into the process of the appointment of a coordinator. So it is not a case of our saying that it is up to others and sitting on the outside waiting to gripe and complain if it is not right, as others do.

I remind Members that we have a five-party mandatory coalition, so when it comes to discussing the Budget, roads, health, education and other issues, there should be a collaborative approach. I am glad that Minister Kennedy is more often in the company of my colleagues when he prepares to go to the Executive table than he is in the company of Mr Kinahan.

12.45 pm

However, I do not want the motion to become a negative. It must be a positive that sends a message out to parents, schools and organisations that spend weeks, months and years lobbying with passion on behalf of the young people whom they serve, that this Assembly can put in place something that is meaningful and tangible. I take the point that the Minister made about legislation. Let us not just make legislation for the sake of it. As a result of the motion, we should, perhaps, suggest that a working group should be set up with those who have an interest to work with the all-party working group on children and young people and all the organisations that currently have an interest in this particular issue, along with the Health Minister, the Minister of Education and others to ensure that we have a strategic way forward.

Mr Newton mentioned the case of a parent whose request for an assessment was denied for five years. I welcome the fact that, in his response to the debate, the Minister of Education agreed to look at the specifics of that particular case.

Let me conclude with a comment by Mencap about today's motion:

"Mencap particularly welcomes the recognition given to the need for appropriate mechanisms to provide for early indication of needs of children from birth to six years old and the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach and the appointment of a designated co-ordinator as a part of the statementing process to ensure the delivery of services which are holistic and integrated."

That sums up the motion. I trust that, as a result, the Assembly can put in place something that is meaningful for our children, whom we love and for whom we have a duty to provide.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the importance of close collaboration between the health and the education sectors in addressing the needs of young people with special educational needs in a holistic manner; and calls on the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure that the appropriate and effective mechanisms are in place for 0-6-year-olds to provide early identification of needs, that multidisciplinary approaches to addressing need are in place for all pupils with special needs, and that each child has a designated coordinator appointed as part of the statementing process to ensure that the delivery of these integrated services optimises the life chances of the pupils.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question Time will be at 2.00 pm. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 12.47 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Regional Development

Mr Speaker: Question 10 has been withdrawn.

Transport: Integrated Projects

1. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister for Regional Development what potential he has identified for saving money through organising a public sector-wide programme to share transport resources. (AQO 5220/11-15)

4. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his plans to develop integrated transport projects, such as the pilot scheme carried out in the Dungannon area. (AQO 5223/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 4 together, because they are related to the same subject. I will give a joint response to both Members, so I ask your indulgence.

My Department is coordinating a cross-departmental pilot project to test the concept of improved integration of publicly funded transport services in the Dungannon area. One of the project's key aims is to improve passenger services and to identify the potential for making operational efficiencies through the better use of vehicles, drivers and technology. Members will be aware from previous discussions that that work is quite complex. I believe that the Committee for Regional Development also recently heard from the various stakeholders about how complex the issue is. As a result, the project is taking a measured approach to testing various opportunities for integration during the pilot period, which is similar to the approach that has been adopted in other jurisdictions.

The areas that will be examined include better integration of Translink and Southern Education and Library Board school transport services; Translink services and the rural community transport partnerships' demand-responsive services; rural community transport partnerships and school transport services; Southern Health and Social Care Trust and Southern Education and Library Board services for pupils and adults with special needs; Southern Health and Social Care Trust and rural community transport partnership services; and the overall demand for public transport services for people with similar needs to ensure the better overall use of resources.

As changes and improvements are introduced to services during the pilot, there will be ongoing evaluation of the new arrangements and an evaluation report will be produced by late 2014. In addition to identifying the processes and arrangements that have worked well for operational efficiency and in improvements to services for passengers, the evaluation will also consider the areas that have been more difficult to resolve and will make proposals on how those can be addressed in the long term.

Alongside the work on the evaluation report, it is envisaged that the Departments that are involved will undertake an economic appraisal to examine the options for the wider implementation of the concepts that are tested during the Dungannon pilot. That would include the costs, benefits and proposals on the preferred delivery options for public transport in the future.

Recognising that user requirements can vary considerably across different geographical areas, it will be important for the economic appraisal to make an assessment of how the approach in Dungannon could be implemented on a wider scale across other areas. That may result in a number of other pilot projects being developed across a number of other council areas in the future.

Account will also need to be taken of how any constraints, such as legislation, funding and current delivery arrangements, can be addressed to provide for a more effective and joined-up approach to the delivery of public transport services. The economic appraisal will also be completed by late 2014.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Kieran McCarthy, I inform Members that the Minister has come to the Table to ask for more time on a particular question. Under Standing Orders, Ministers can ask for more time, and they are granted more time. The Minister had two minutes, but he now has three. I just clarified that to the House, because I saw some Members looking at the clock, but the Minister came to the Table to ask for more time. I keep saying to the House that, sometimes, the nature of a question means that Ministers need more time.

Mr McCarthy: Thank you very much for that very important information, because I was one of those who was looking at the clock. I was just wondering when I was going to get a space to put a supplementary question to the Minister. He mentioned rural community transport on a number of occasions, and that is my concern. He mentioned Dungannon, which is a bit away from Strangford. Nevertheless, will he make a commitment to use any savings that he makes in the process to bolster community and rural transport throughout Northern Ireland?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Let me say to him that this is not simply about saving money; it is about providing better services as we move into the future. I think that that is a very important consideration. Obviously, the evaluations and the detailed analysis will need to take place over the next few months. We are looking particularly at the Dungannon pilot as an opportunity for other places. However, let us see how that goes.

I am not sure about the main thrust of his question, which implies that we are simply doing this to save money. It is not purely or exclusively for that reason, nor should it be, but it is to offer better and, hopefully, improved services to the rural area.

Mr Speaker: Ian Milne, whose question is grouped, is not in his place. I call Dominic Bradley.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur air: an raibh aon teagmháil aige leis an Aire Oideachais ar an cheist seo? Considering the fact that the Minister of Education is conducting a review

of school transport, has the Minister of Education been in contact with the Minister about how that review might feed into the current issue?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. As I think I indicated in my answer, certainly, at a local level, health trust level and education board level, significant cooperation is taking place between my departmental responsibilities, including Translink and others. That is a good thing, and I think that it is very necessary. I understand the point that the Member makes, but that is at a more high-level engagement, which is probably not immediately necessary until we begin to see the evaluation and the results of the roll-out about how progress is being made.

Narrow Water Bridge: EU Funding

2. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the recent developments regarding Narrow Water bridge, whether his Department is able to assist the Executive in preventing the loss of the additional EU funding. (AQO 5221/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The failure to secure the necessary additional funding for the Narrow Water bridge project, despite extensions being granted to do so, presents the Executive with a stark reality in EU funding terms. That reality is, quite simply, use it or lose it. The latter option must not be allowed to happen. My Department is ready to assist the Executive to avoid the loss of that funding. In that respect, my Department has a proven track record in drawing down and effectively spending out European funds.

My Department has recently been approached by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), which is now urgently seeking to divert the unspent Narrow Water bridge funds to contingency projects and plug the funding gap. The SEUPB is seeking projects that meet the specific requirements of the INTERREG IV funding programme in as much as they can demonstrate clear cross-border benefits and that could be delivered within the EU prescribed timescales. One such project relates to the upgrading of the Enterprise train running between Belfast and Dublin. Last week, officials from my Department had discussions with the SEUPB, DFP, Translink and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport with the intention of preparing a project application.

There are, of course, still several hurdles to overcome before any project can be formally funded, including securing the obligatory SEUPB and INTERREG steering committee approvals and a letter of offer. With that in mind, I intend to discuss those procedural issues with the SEUPB in the next few days to facilitate progress.

The Enterprise project is well positioned: the economic appraisal has been approved; the project is mature; and Translink has great experience in delivering those types of project. I can, therefore, answer my colleague with a definitive yes to the question about whether my Department can assist, and I will, in the expectation of cooperation and collaboration from everyone, make sure that those funds are not lost to the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that. He highlighted one scheme that the money could be redirected to. Would that utilise all that money, or are there any other projects

that he may be able to put the money into, including the southern bypass in Enniskillen?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. At the end of the day, all politics is local. The work to the Enterprise would be the most significant project that is potentially available to us. I am, however, aware of others. I believe that a scheme is being brought forward by the authorities in the Republic of Ireland for the maintenance of the Boyne viaduct. Of course, the Boyne will always have special significance to those of us here. The late lamented comedian, James Young, used to say, "We won the battle but they got the river". At least they are looking after it, I suppose.

So, other projects are available. The work on the Enterprise service seems to be the one that we, as a Department, are most interested in moving forward. The Member mentioned the A4 road scheme around Enniskillen. It is not currently a candidate for this funding, but he constantly reminds me of the pressing need for it on a constituency basis, and I have not forgotten about it.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree with me that the bridge provides an enormous opportunity for the Down, Newry, Armagh and Louth area? Will he join me in encouraging all parties in the Executive — our party is willing to provide funding for the bridge joining with all parties in the Executive to ensure that the European money is used for the bridge?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question. I understand her position, but I have to say that the situation has now moved on. SEUPB has withdrawn its letter of offer, and, as such, the bridge project is no longer on the table. What is essential, in my view — I hope that it is a view shared by my Executive colleagues — is that we proceed to ensure that European money, which can be expended on projects in Northern Ireland and in a joint nature with the Irish Republic, is fully utilised. I have to say respectfully to the Member that we must concentrate on proceeding, on that basis, to ensure that that European money or its benefits are not lost to the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Rogers: Minister, as regards our disappointments about the A5 road scheme and the Narrow Water bridge project, what discussions have you had with your counterpart in Dublin? What are your plans for developing the cross-border infrastructure? You have talked about the Enterprise, but what about the southern relief road in Newry?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question, and, indeed, I have had discussions with my counterpart in the Irish Republic about both projects. The Member knows that the status of the A5 project remains as a delayed project, rather than an abandoned one. The issues around the Narrow Water bridge project are now well documented and should be fully understood. I know that the Member, though disappointed, will now have an understanding of the situation that we find ourselves in. I am attempting, in cooperation and consultation with both Translink and Irish Rail, to bring forward the Enterprise project. I believe that significant benefits could be accrued by moving forward with that project, and I hope and expect that we will have the full cooperation of the Irish Administration.

Transport: DARD Cooperation

3. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Regional Development what level of cooperation his Department has with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in the provision of community transport. (AQO 5222/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development cooperate in the provision of community transport in rural areas by funding and administering the assisted rural travel scheme, which allows members of rural community transport partnerships who hold a concessionary fare pass to receive free transport when using Dial-a-Lift services provided by the partnerships. The scheme allows free use of community transport for those over 60 years of age in areas where public transport is limited.

The scheme aims to assist with meeting Programme for Government targets by making a positive contribution to tackling poverty and social isolation. It is consistent with the regional transportation strategy and with DARD's tackling rural poverty and social isolation framework. Last year, the scheme provided nearly 200,000 journeys. DARD funds the subsidised fare element of the scheme. My Department funds the operational costs incurred by the rural transport partnerships (RTPs).

My Department, the Public Health Agency, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and other agencies cooperate in a special initiative; a project to maximise access to and uptake of services, grants and benefits in rural areas. The project contains five strands, including rural transport, with an objective to deliver and develop a range of actions to address rural poverty and social exclusion. That links with the primary objective of my Department's rural transport fund, to reduce social exclusion by improving and providing transport opportunities for people with reduced mobility in rural areas.

2.15 pm

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. My party's position and mine is that this service needs to be protected. Will the Minister give the House a concrete assurance that he will not only maintain but increase the £3.2 million per annum that is provided to RTPs, which is minute in comparison with the amount given to Translink every year?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I assure him that we will continue to evaluate the services that are provided. I am encouraged by the numbers using the service and its quality. I need no convincing of its importance to rural communities. I very much hope that we will have ongoing support for it, particularly at Executive level.

Mr Dallat: Does the Minister agree that in many rural areas a Translink bus that is not linked with community transport is about as useful as an ashtray on a motorbike at the North West 200? Is he satisfied with the cooperation that he is getting from the Department of Agriculture to make the integration more complete?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary. I understand entirely the point that he makes about better cooperation, collaboration and integration of services. The rural community can in many ways be isolated, and it is important that we make

strenuous efforts to improve that and ensure that our public transport systems are not based only in urban centres, particularly Belfast. I am keenly aware of the need to work with others, including the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and my officials seek to do so on an ongoing basis.

Mr Storey: What discussions is the Minister having with Translink to ensure that access to public transport is a priority and also that there is a joined-up approach? In my constituency of North Antrim, people who live in rural areas and have poor access to public transport find it difficult to connect with the rail service from Ballymoney or Ballymena. What discussions are being had so that Translink, rather than depending on RTPs or other public —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to finish.

Mr Storey: — sector bodies, plays its key role in rural transport?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I understand absolutely the need for a coordinated approach and for Translink to be the leading proponent of that coordination. The Member will know that we have sought to improve park-and-ride facilities at various locations for bus and train users. We will continue to try to roll out and improve that campaign. We are aware of the need for coordination and cooperation. That is very much the remit of Translink, my remit as Minister and the remit of my departmental officials.

Mr Speaker: Question 4 has been answered.

South Antrim: Road Maintenance

5. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on road maintenance in the past 12 months in South Antrim. (AQO 5224/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not maintain records or analysis of maintenance spend on a constituency basis. However, I can advise the Member that maintenance responsibilities for the South Antrim constituency are shared between the eastern and northern divisions of Roads Service.

In 2012-13, expenditure on structural maintenance, which includes resurfacing, surface dressing, patching and structural drainage, was approximately £23 million in the eastern division and approximately £25 million in the northern division, elements of which will have been directed to South Antrim. In the past 12 months, for example, my Department completed approximately 20 kilometres of carriageway resurfacing at locations in the South Antrim constituency at a cost of approximately £2.6 million. They include the A57 Antrim Road, Antrim; Station Road, Whiteabbey; Monkstown Avenue and Beverley Road, Newtownabbey; and the A6 Belfast Road, Islandbawn.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. A major road project that is under way is the dualling of the A8, and, as a consequence of that, a lot of traffic is being diverted on to small, minor B roads, and the increased traffic — probably of the wrong type — on those roads has had a major impact on their condition. Is there any plan to resurface those roads after the completion of the total project?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his point. Of course, the A8 scheme is very valuable and important to that particular region. It will have the capacity to open up and improve access to places such as the port of Larne. I suppose that there is a consequence. You cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs. There will obviously be a consequence to some travelling habits.

The current budget for overall structural maintenance to date amounts to some £104 million. We very much hope — I say this optimistically, in case the Minister of Finance is listening — that we can perhaps take more in January monitoring to help us with that, because current calculations are that we need £129 million a year simply to maintain the roads that we have. That is not to build new roads such as the A8 or the A2 or, as we move forward, the Magherafelt bypass or, indeed, the A26 at Frosses. So, as well as the impressive list of projects that we intend to bring forward, there is the job of maintaining the structure of roads. Of course, increased traffic on the more minor roads will perhaps create worrying conditions. So, we will seek to get more money and to use that wisely.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister's staff for their work in south Antrim. We have a lot of great things going on for us, and I know that he will do more for us, particularly on the A8. Can the Minister detail what the out-turn has been for structural maintenance in 2011-12 and 2012-13?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his encouragement and comments, particularly to my staff. The structural maintenance expenditure was £120 million in 2011-12 and £109 million in 2012-13. After a less than successful October monitoring, this year will depend on the outcome of January monitoring. I suppose that the downside of that is that it leaves less time at the end of the year to undertake work. It is an issue that I continue to raise with Executive colleagues, particularly the Finance Minister.

Whilst we are a Department that is willing and able to spend money relatively quickly, it would make more sense if we were allowed more time to better plan that expenditure. That would certainly help those on the ground — the many contractors, and those in the road construction industry — who now face the prospect of a late surge in contracts having to be carried out by the end of the financial year. So the Member's point is well made.

Cycling: Budget

6. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Regional Development how the budget for cycling in Northern Ireland compares to the budget for cycling in other regions in Europe. (AQO 5225/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I do not hold information on the budget allocated for cycling in other sub-member-state regions and, therefore, cannot compare that with the funding allocated in Northern Ireland.

In the current Budget period, over £4 million is earmarked to fund active travel demonstration projects in Belfast, Londonderry, Craigavon and Strabane. In addition, £50,000 has been committed to undertake a feasibility study into a cycle/pedestrian footbridge over the River Lagan, close to the Gasworks site, to Ormeau Park.

While those investments in promoting sustainable transport are important and welcome, I believe that they are not enough. I want to encourage walking and cycling

as feasible, reasonable and safe modes of travel, and to invest more in cycling as a key element of transport strategy and delivery. As the Member will know, I have therefore established a new cycling unit in my Department to promote that and to deliver the effective coordination and management of a range of cycling initiatives.

Officials in my Department are currently exploring budget and resource requirements to ensure that the necessary funding is secured to deliver the Department's objectives. Given that the unit has been set up in-year, the annual budget is estimated at around £800,000 for staffing and promotional costs. Discussions are under way to identify what additional resource budget is required and the capital funding necessary for infrastructure measures.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his answer. I find it startling that he has made no attempt whatsoever to benchmark public investment in cycling in Northern Ireland against any other region in Europe. I am not sure how he is going to encourage cycling and walking if he does not know whether the investment he is making in both is adequate.

Does he accept that significant, bold and courageous public investment was required for the successful development of cycling as an active and sustainable mode of transport in places such as Amsterdam and Copenhagen? How exactly is he going to deliver that here in Northern Ireland?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I am sorry that he has been something of a wet blanket about the news that we have established a cycling unit. As I understand it, the Member is the chair of the all-party group on cycling. I would have thought that it was incumbent on him to further encourage me and speak with his Executive colleagues so that we can get the maximum money available to us.

I am in favour of a cycling revolution. I want to see more people cycling. We have an ideal opportunity next year with the start of the Giro d'Italia being hosted in Northern Ireland. We can promote that as an event, but we can also promote cycling as a legacy project for the Giro d'Italia. I am enthusiastic. I do not want to be a weeping Jeremiah by saying that we cannot do that. We want to move forward, and I am keen to see progress. The chair of the all-party group on cycling needs to give it a good shove, too.

Mr Spratt: I congratulate the Minister; he has got on his bike a few times in the past. He will know about the Committee's interest in the matter. It has brought great economic benefits, and it is a cross-cutting issue for health and other areas of government. Has the Minister had any discussions with other Departments about increasing cycling and its economic benefits to the economy in Northern Ireland?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Chair of the Regional Development Committee for his encouragement and positive attitude. There are huge benefits for the environment, health and sport. I have been engaging and attempting to engage with other Departments about those benefits. The Health Minister is interested in seeing how cycling can improve healthier lifestyles, particularly for young people.

However, the bottom line is that we have to invest in that, which means more money. That means that I have

to win that argument around the Executive table. If the joined-up approach that we are adopting and the potential improvements to health, the environment and sport, as well as to transport and sustainable transport in the future, can be argued successfully, it will mean that additional resources on a par with other places can be expended. The best example that we can look to is London. Mayor Boris Johnson's cycling revolution has transformed public transport and sustainable modes of transport in our nation's capital. I look forward to doing that over here.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister will be aware that there is a very progressive cycle scheme in Dublin. I ask him for a progress update on the proposals for a similar bike scheme in Belfast. Does he have any concerns about the scheme?

2.30 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Indeed, I have had the opportunity to see at first hand the experience in Dublin. We have, in part, funded Belfast City Council to introduce a scheme of that nature in Belfast, and my officials are working with council officials to make it happen as quickly as possible. It will have benefits for commuters who are, hopefully, already using public transport and the quality service that is now available to them on buses and, indeed, trains. As they arrive in Belfast, they will be able to hop on their bike and cycle round to their office or their place of work. That is the joined-up logic of this. It works in other places, and there is no reason why it will not work in Belfast and other parts of Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: Order. That concludes oral questions to the Minister for Regional Development. We will now move to topical questions to the Minister.

Nelson Mandela: Funeral

1. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he or a representative of the Executive will be in attendance at the funeral of the former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. (AQT 501/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his topical question. There has been no Executive guidance on the arrangements for Nelson Mandela's funeral. I am able to confirm that no discussion has taken place at Executive level, whether through written correspondence or whatever else, on the funeral arrangements and Executive representation.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that. I noted in press reports that the deputy First Minister was going to officially represent the Executive. Can he give us some information on that report?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Initially, it was my understanding that Martin McGuinness was to attend the funeral in a personal capacity. Of course, the Member will know that, yesterday in the Assembly, the House had the opportunity to pay due tribute on the passing of Mr Mandela. I am not aware of what approach is being taken on the funding of his attendance, nor am I aware of the position that either the Scottish or Welsh First Ministers are adopting. My understanding is that the former Prime Ministers, the current Prime Minister and the Prince of Wales are

to attend and are to represent the United Kingdom as a whole.

I think that many people across Northern Ireland will, understandably, feel that it is not appropriate for the deputy First Minister to attend alone, purporting to represent Northern Ireland. I certainly find myself sympathetic to that position. That we have also learned that Mr Gerry Adams will attend some events does not improve that situation. I am also unaware of whether the First Minister declined an invitation to attend, and I am unaware whether he was content with and agreed to the deputy First Minister representing the Executive and the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: Let me say to the whole House that Members should read Standing Orders on topical questions. Topical questions need to relate to the Minister's responsibility in the Department, and I do not know how the funeral of Nelson Mandela fits in to the responsibility of the Regional Development Minister. So, I just warn the whole House that topical questions need to be on the responsibility that the Minister has in his Department.

TEN-T: Criteria

2. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether, given the TEN-T open day on 13 December, the European Commission has released any details of the preferred criteria. (AQT 502/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. The Member will know that I have engaged substantially with my counterparts in the European Union, including Vice-President Kallas and other senior representatives. The chair of the Transport Committee, Brian Simpson, has been particularly helpful on all these issues as, indeed, have the Northern Ireland MEPs. I am pleased with the progress that we have been able to make on the TEN-T proposals. We did not win every battle, but, substantially, I share the view of my counterpart in the Irish Republic that, given the challenges that faced us with TEN-T, we have come through it pretty well.

Mr F McCann: The Minister is aware that several members of the Committee will travel to the event. Does his Department have any suitable projects lined up to maximise the potential drawdown of funds?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. On an ongoing basis, my officials seek to identify suitable projects whereby we can attain grant aid. With grant aid for the projects themselves, opportunities appear to be a little more limited, but the funding of studies and consultation exercises and the preparatory work for a lot of important schemes can get EU funding, and we will seek to do that not only as a consequence of next week but as we move into 2014.

Door-2-Door

3. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister for Regional Development about the long-term plans for the Door-2-Door transport scheme that ended on 31 March 2013, given that Disability Action is providing an interim service. (AQT 503/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for coming to topical questions. He was, unfortunately, absent for the detailed answer that I had for questions for oral answer, but anyway.

Disability Action continues to provide transport services with grant support from the Department. It is an interim scheme until such times as the Department considers how best to address the transport needs of people with disabilities. Of course, the Member will know that there has been no reduction in the budget for the Door-2-Door service since it ceased on 31 March 2013.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Thank you, Minister, for your answer thus far. Could you give us a time frame for when the service might be restored? If Disability Action is now doing the interim service, surely it needs to know whether there will be extra funding available or whatever.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I hope that I have been able to allay his concerns about any reduction in funding. There has not been a reduction in funding. We continue to assess how best we can provide the service. It is being provided by Disability Action, and we are looking at whether, into the longer term, we should continue in that way and, if not, how we tweak it and improve it. It is not a question of cutting it, and the important thing is that its budget spend has not been reduced. We are satisfied with the way it is being handled at the moment, but we need to give ongoing consideration to these things.

Senior SmartPass

4. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether, given the worries of senior citizens as reported on Radio Ulster today, he will support the Hands Off campaign and give a categorical guarantee that the Senior SmartPass will remain come hell or high water. (AQT 504/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am very grateful to the Member for his question. I note that he did not indicate a personal interest.

I am aware of the huge benefits of the concessionary travel system that we have. It is greatly used and allows many people to travel. It improves social interchange, and there is huge benefit to the local economy as people make journeys. Let me be absolutely clear that, on my watch, I do not intend to fundamentally overhaul the concessionary scheme that we have. I hope that that will give considerable comfort to the campaigners out there, whose concerns I understand. Not on my watch, not under an Ulster Unionist, will there be a cutting or a withdrawal of the services that are available under the current concessionary transport system.

Mr McCarthy: I am delighted that the Minister has given a commitment that, on his watch, the Senior SmartPass will remain. That is very welcome. Along with the Minister, I applaud the Assembly for instigating —

Mr Speaker: Is there a question?

Mr Lunn: There is, Mr Speaker.

We all take credit for the instigation of a SmartPass for our senior citizens in Northern Ireland. Does the Minister agree that, without the SmartPass, a lot of senior citizens would be housebound, out of sequence and a drain on our health service?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his comments. I agree: the concessionary fare scheme and the SmartPass have afforded people the opportunity to

reach out and remain active in the wider community. Whilst success has many fathers, all of us can take pride in the fact that we treat our senior citizens, in particular, in this fashion. One would always want to do more and to seek to improve it, as undoubtedly we will. We are mindful of the costs involved, but, nevertheless, it is a scheme that is working and is popular, and I have no plans to overhaul it.

Mr Speaker: Steven Agnew is not in his place to ask topical question 5.

Sandbags

6. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of sandbag provision in Roads Service and NI Water, given that some difficulties were experienced during recent storms. (AQT 506/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his topical question. Obviously, we are into winter. We are mindful that, whilst the conditions at the moment appear to be very mild, we can take nothing for granted. That is certainly the case as we go forward. The Member will know that the issue of sandbags is one that, with the cooperation of councils, my Department has been working to achieve progress on. I am always interested to hear if there are difficulties in a particular area, but, generally, I welcome the increasingly coordinated approach between my Department, its agencies and local government on that.

As this is the last opportunity we know of that the House will meet formally and perhaps my last opportunity to say so in the House, I want to say how much we appreciate the efforts of those who will provide the winter services, who will be watching the clock and the weather forecast, perhaps not able to enjoy fully the Christmas hospitality with their family. I pay tribute in advance to the efforts of everyone concerned, to the more than 300 staff, plus the private operators, who will seek to provide a public service to the people of Northern Ireland by keeping the roads open and keeping people safe.

Mr Hilditch: I welcome the Minister's words on the Department's arrangements with councils. Will the Minister assure us that all sections of the Department are on message, particularly in eastern division, as we approach that time?

Mr Kennedy: I am happy to give that assurance. I know that the staff in my Department and its agencies are geared up and adopt a very professional attitude. I am pleased that increasingly good relationships now exist with councils. I hope very much that, as we approach the heavy winter, we can work together successfully.

2.45 pm

Social Development

Housing Executive: Overpayments

1. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has apologised or plans to apologise to any of the four contractors who, he publicly claimed, had overcharged the Executive by an estimated £18 million in a ministerial statement on 10 June 2013. (AQO 5235/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):

The figure quoted in my statement to the Assembly in June this year was the figure provided to me by the chairman of the Housing Executive. The latest investigation by Campbell Tickell, the report on which was released on 21 November, reports that there are overpayments estimated to be in the region of £9 million to £13 million. That is still a substantial overpayment. As far as I am concerned and as I have said before, it would not matter whether it was £5 million, £10 million, £15 million or £20 million — it is too much. Let us not forget that this is taxpayers' money that could have been used to build much-needed social homes. Therefore, in answer to the question, no, I have not apologised nor do I have any plans to apologise.

Mr Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Mr Nesbitt: I acknowledge the Minister's answer to the question of whether he had apologised or had planned to apologise to the four contractors who, he said, had overcharged by an estimated £18 million. If the Minister will not apologise, will he give an assessment of the damage, financial and reputational, to the four companies from his quoting a figure on 10 June that he now realises was wrong?

Mr McCausland: I am not sure whether the Member was listening to what I said. Therefore, perhaps it is necessary to repeat for his information that the figure that was quoted initially was that provided by the chair of the Housing Executive. The second figure was the figure quoted in the report by Campbell Tickell. There is a piece of work that is still ongoing in which the contractors and the Housing Executive together need to come to a final figure for the level of repayments that will be required.

Mr Nesbitt: That was not the question.

Mr McCausland: I find this difficult to deal with because the Member does not seem to be able to listen. There is nothing to apologise for, therefore there will be no apology. Work is ongoing because there are a lot of lessons to be learned from the Campbell Tickell report. There is also work to be done in coming to a final conclusion and agreement on the amount that will have to be repaid. It is clear that I am saying that there will have to be repayments.

Mr Weir: In light of the fact that failures have been identified and it seems beyond doubt that, whatever the disagreement over the amount, mistakes were clearly made, will the Minister confirm what action will be taken by the board of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive?

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for the question, which gets to the heart of a core issue here. The Campbell Tickell report was commissioned by the Housing Executive. The board of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive accepts the findings of the Campbell Tickell report and regrets the failure to resolve the issues raised at the time when they were first discovered. The Housing Executive board has also agreed that the failing to recover overpayments over the period 2009-2012 was unacceptable and that it needs to be confident that adequate controls are now in place to prevent overpayments in future contracts.

It is clear that there are significant issues to be addressed in the Housing Executive's management of contracts. I welcome the chairman's decisive action to establish

a dedicated team to deal with these issues and his proposals to create a new department focusing solely on maintenance contract management. I have assured the chairman that he and the board have my full support in dealing with this regrettable situation and taking forward the wide-ranging programme of change and transformation that is required.

I already meet the chairman regularly and will continue to keep this item on the agenda. I welcome the fact that the Housing Executive board is behaving in such a responsible way. Its attitude is unlike that of others, who seem to have a cavalier attitude to millions of pounds being overpaid.

Mr Eastwood: I doubt very much that anyone has a cavalier attitude to millions of pounds being overspent, but, given that we have heard today that the difference in the figures is between £5 million and £9 million, how can the House have any confidence that the Minister's figures are correct?

Mr McCausland: The key point is the Member's use of the term "the Minister's figures". I repeat: the figure that I reported to the House initially was that provided by the chairman of the Housing Executive. The second estimate was that produced by the company Campbell Tickell. The final figure of overpayments to be repaid will be finalised only when the process has been concluded between the Housing Executive and the companies that were the contractors involved in this regrettable situation.

Mr Allister: Not only is the £18 million figure now discredited, but we now know from the Campbell Tickell report that it came with a very severe caveat. That report confirms that the £18 million figure was given as a broad-brush estimate in need of refinement as more evidence was generated. Why did the Minister give no mention of that in his rush to headline the £18 million figure in the House? Does he not think that he had a duty of care to the four contractors, before naming them, to at least enter the caveat that was presented with the figure?

Mr McCausland: Again, it is important to recall exactly what was said. The word that was used at the time was "estimate". It was an estimate that was provided to me by the chair of the Housing Executive on the basis of figures that had been given to him. I made it clear at the time that this was only an estimate. However, the fact is — I have said this already this afternoon — that it does not matter whether it is £5 million, £10 million, £15 million, £18 million or whatever: when millions of pounds have been overpaid to contractors by the Housing Executive, any responsible person will recognise that that is a serious issue. Any sensible person will appreciate that the Minister in the relevant Department has a responsibility to make it known to the Members of the Assembly. There would have been cries from all quarters if there had not been a report of such a serious situation. I did the responsible thing and the right thing by making that information available to the House.

Fuel Poverty

2. **Ms Brown** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the levels of fuel poverty for people aged 60 and over. (AQO 5236/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The 2011 house condition survey shows that fuel poverty affects 42% of households — about 295,000 households — in Northern Ireland. The survey

recorded that there were 135,170 households in fuel poverty where the householder was aged 60 or over, and that represents 46% of all fuel-poor households. Some 83,190 — 52% — of the householders aged between 60 and 74 are in fuel poverty. Some 51,980 people — 60% of householders aged 75 and over — are in fuel poverty. It is quite clear that, as folk get older, there is a higher level of fuel poverty. I welcome the fact that the Member has raised the issue.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he tell us what measures are in place to provide assistance to vulnerable older people in south Antrim?

Mr McCausland: For many years, our flagship scheme has been the warm homes scheme, which has helped over 117,000 households in Northern Ireland to improve the energy efficiency of their home. We also have the boiler replacement scheme, which provides a grant of up to £1,000 to help householders to replace older, less efficient boilers. Those schemes operate right across Northern Ireland, including the south Antrim area.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister is aware that, every week, a large sum of pension credit is unclaimed by people aged 60 and over. Can the Minister give us some idea of what he is doing to address that issue?

Mr McCausland: The Member raises the issue of income. Fuel poverty is impacted mainly by three factors, one of which is income. That brings us to the area of benefit uptake, which we have made a priority in the Department over the past two years, with the result that we have gotten to a much better situation than previously. In fact, in one year, we trebled the income brought into Northern Ireland through benefit uptake over the previous year, which was a considerable achievement. It was done through more targeted interventions in raising awareness of the benefits that people should be claiming. There was clear evidence that there was not necessarily the level of awareness among older people that there should be, and they were one of the sectors that we felt needed a particular intervention. So, work has been done in working with organisations that deal with older folk. However, there is a whole series of targeted interventions, looking at particular areas such as folk living with cancer, elderly folk and young families. That sort of more-targeted intervention is the best way forward. There will be general awareness raising, but there is also the targeted approach.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answer and congratulate the staff in Antrim and Newtownabbey councils for the work they do in this field. Does the Minister accept that the rates of fuel poverty, as previously measured, have fallen only 2% in recent years, from 44% to 42%? Does he believe that this is indicative of his Department's failure to address the issue effectively?

Mr McCausland: The point is more indicative of the Member's failure to understand the nature of fuel poverty, which is not the responsibility of one particular Department but of a number of Departments. For example, in large parts of Northern Ireland, in the west of the Province, people do not have access to gas. That is an area that Arlene Foster, my colleague in Enterprise, Trade and Investment, is taking forward to ensure that gas pipelines move to the west of the Province. One of the key factors in the higher level of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland is that

we are so heavily reliant on oil, whereas, in GB, there is a much greater reliance on gas. Therefore, that impacts on the west of the Province. It is one of the biggest problems we face.

We have also worked extensively to deal with the energy efficiency of homes, with energy inefficiency being the problem. For example, last week, I had the opportunity to visit some building sites in Stuttgart, Germany, to see the work that they are doing to make their houses much more energy efficient.

So, it is about raising income, and our benefit uptake programmes are quite effective in that regard. The cost of fuel is not within the remit of my Department, but spreading the gas network will help. It is also about the energy efficiency of homes, and the more we can do in that regard, the better. That is why a pilot is being done in Springfarm in south Antrim on the best way to retrofit homes. All that will contribute to reducing the level of fuel poverty.

Mr Rogers: Will the Minister advise the House whether he has any plans to help those with long-term sickness or cancer with their fuel poverty concerns?

Mr McCausland: I have already mentioned that with respect to our benefit uptake campaign. I also mentioned that income is an issue in reducing fuel poverty. As regards people who are suffering from cancer, we have made that a focus for the targeted benefit uptake campaign, and that was one of the more successful interventions. So, we can do something there, but, in respect of a specific intervention for people suffering from cancer, our other programmes are entirely open to people who have that unfortunate condition. The boiler replacement scheme and the warm homes scheme are generally available. That is the one thing that is particularly relevant and most helpful to people with that particular problem.

Campbell Tickell: Procurement Process

3. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister for Social Development what methodology was used for the procurement of the Campbell Tickell report. (AQO 5237/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The chairman of the Housing Executive, in his press release dated 10 June 2013, stated that the board of the Housing Executive had commissioned an independent review into how the organisation has been dealing with planned maintenance contracts over the past five years following evidence of substantial overcharging. The initial processes of appointing the consultant at that time were managed by the chairman.

3.00 pm

The Member may wish to note my answer to a question for written answer — AQW 24342/11-15 — in which I explained the procurement process followed in the appointment of Campbell Tickell. However, for the benefit of the Member today, I can advise again that the procurement process followed was in line with the appropriate procurement guidance for the direct award of contracts, also known as single tender action, and the use of consultants.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer up until now, but it is

my understanding that the process that the chair of the Housing Executive followed was done over a short period — a matter of days — and did not follow the tendering procedures that were set down for awarding contracts.

Mr McCausland: The Member's first point relates to the nature of the process. I was not party to that process, but I have already stated that I am reliably assured that the appropriate procurement guidance was followed, that there is guidance for the direct award of contracts, or single tender action, and the use of consultants, and that that was followed.

On the timescale involved, it is important to bear in mind that this was something that needed to be done quickly. We are talking about very substantial amounts of money. It was important that the Housing Executive moved quickly to show its concern about the situation and that it got information to clarify how the situation had arisen. In answer to an earlier question, I spoke about the course of action now being taken by the Housing Executive in the light of that report. I think that it is that outworking of the report that proves that the chairman and the Housing Executive took the right approach by moving forward on this as a matter of urgency.

Mr Dallat: I listened very carefully to the Minister's response, but surely he must understand that at this stage the Tickell report is so discredited that the only honourable thing for the Minister to do is to put his hands up and say, "Look, it's rubbish".

Mr McCausland: Campbell Tickell, the company concerned, has previous experience in this field. It has reported on a wide range of matters, including fraud, mismanagement, financial malpractice, complex financial issues, and governance and management issues, and it previously conducted a statutory inquiry for the then Housing Corporation that looked into mismanagement in a specialist housing association. So, this is a field in which it has some experience, and I suspect that it probably has more experience of it than Mr Dallat has.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his response. In my opinion, the Campbell Tickell report simply did not come close to the forensic investigation, for example, that was carried out by ASM Horwath into Red Sky. The Minister may be aware that, in addition to the Campbell Tickell report, one was produced in conjunction with the contractors. It led to four sets of individual accounts by two independent cost consultants, one of whom was appointed by the Executive and the other by the contractors. Will the Minister try to bridge the apparent massive contradiction between that report —

Mr Speaker: I urge the Member to finish.

Mr Cree: — and the one produced by Campbell Tickell?

Mr McCausland: Let me assure the Member that there are not two reports. There is only one report. Whatever may have appeared in a press statement from somebody or other, there is no second report. A process of work is being taken forward by the contractors and the Housing Executive, but the only report — the one that was commissioned by the Housing Executive board, the one that has been endorsed and accepted by the Housing Executive board and the one that was presented to the Social Development Committee — is the Campbell Tickell report. It is a report

that people would be very foolish to dismiss out of hand in the way in which some people want to.

Earlier, I used the word “cavalier”, and there seems to be an almost cavalier approach to some of this. The issues that have been identified in the Campbell Tickell report are very serious, substantial and substantive. They need to be addressed, because they get to the bottom of why the situation arose. They get to the bottom of how it was that there were such serious shortcomings in the Housing Executive and why, in that context, it was possible for such substantial overpayments to be made.

Housing: Armagh

4. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his plans for the housing stock in the Armagh district. (AQO 5238/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A range of improvement schemes are programmed in the Housing Executive Armagh district office area for 2014-15. They include kitchen replacements at 48 dwellings at Woodford and Caramoyle; external cyclical maintenance at 291 properties at Armagh town and Charlemont; double glazing at 144 dwellings at Tandragee, Armagh town and Poyntzpass; and heating replacements at 73 dwellings at various locations in Armagh town and rural areas.

A total of 18 Housing Executive properties are also included in the proposed stock transfer programme in the Armagh district area: six at Hillside Avenue and Hamiltonsbawn, and 12 at Drumhillery Park, Middletown. That transfer process will begin in mid-2014.

In addition, a number of newbuild schemes are programmed to be delivered in the Armagh City and District Council area during 2013-14 to 2015-16. Those include 28 units of supported housing and 36 units of general-needs housing. The Housing Executive is in the process of formulating a new social housing development programme for the three year-period from 2014-15 to 2016-17. Subject to my approval, the programme will be published on the Housing Executive website in January 2014.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive response. Can he tell us whether there are any winter checks on older properties that do not have proper insulation?

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive is carrying out an ongoing programme on the energy efficiency of all of its property stock. I referred to that earlier. It is part of a wider piece of work, first, to identify the value of the stock. If the value of the stock is to be established, its condition needs to be known. Secondly, the Housing Executive wants to identify areas where there are particular problems of energy inefficiency that might be addressed through the work that is being taken forward in Springfarm Heights. Quite a number of rural properties have old stone walls and a low level of thermal insulation. The question is how best to address that. The work that is being carried out in Springfarm Heights will, hopefully, help to determine the best way to address that to the benefit of tenants.

Mr Speaker: Order. Before I call Mr Beggs, I am sure that he is conscious that this is a specific question that relates to a specific constituency area, namely Armagh district. I have no doubt that he has no intention of widening out the

question. It is important that I say that before I call him, but let us not prejudge the Member. [Laughter.]

Mr Beggs: The Minister has indicated that some 36 new general-needs housing units will be built in the Armagh area. Can he advise the House how he ensures that that plan adequately reflects the changes and requirements that may result from the Welfare Reform Bill?

Mr McCausland: One issue that I have raised in the past couple of years with the Housing Executive when it brings forward its social housing development programme is, indeed, the potential impact of welfare reform and the need, therefore, for a number of smaller properties that are suitable for one or two people. The first time I raised it, I did so because, when I challenged the Housing Executive about that, officials actually admitted that they had not taken any account of welfare reform in designing the programme. They were sent back to redo the job and came back with a revised programme. That now features in their programme; there are more smaller properties to address potential need in the longer term and difficulties that might arise from what is commonly referred to as the bedroom tax.

Lurgan Town Football Club: Grant

6. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of how the funds that have been awarded to Lurgan Town Arena Football Club for new facilities will benefit the Lurgan area. (AQO 5240/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The grant of £461,000 that was awarded to Lurgan Town Football Club will allow the club to provide a new and larger clubhouse; a half-size 3G pitch, which will be available for use by local schools; replacement floodlights; and associated site works. Not only will that help the club to increase the number of young people who participate in sport, but it will allow it to engage further in the local community by running education, health and social awareness programmes.

I had the opportunity of visiting the ground in Lurgan some time ago. It is a club with 380 members, many of whom come from neighbourhood renewal areas. The club has 40 volunteers, which very much ties in with our Department's commitment to support volunteering. I am pleased to say that the club's 3G pitch is already oversubscribed. So, it is an excellent example of a local football club playing a role in the wider community context.

I encourage neighbourhood renewal areas to consider always the inclusion of sport and sporting facilities and programmes in their overall programmes. Sometimes, neighbourhood renewal partnerships may overlook sport, but it has an important role to play in health and in addressing young people's needs.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for that very positive news. I will perhaps push him further and ask him to indicate when the Mourneview and Grey estates' multi-use games area, which is also in Lurgan, will be completed.

Mr McCausland: I am pleased to assure the Member that the Mourneview multi-use games area is being constructed by Craigavon Borough Council with funding of £145,000 from the neighbourhood renewal investment fund. I am aware of the many delays that the scheme has experienced, first, in finding a suitable site and, more recently, in finalising the legal arrangements with the

Southern Education and Library Board and completing the tendering exercise. I understand that the contractor is due to go on site after Christmas, and it is hoped that, weather permitting, the project will be completed by the end of March 2014. That will be good news for people in the Mourneview area.

North Belfast: Social Housing

7. Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the number of people on the social housing waiting list, including those in housing stress, in North Belfast. (AQO 5241/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As at 1 December 2013, a total of 3,884 applicants were registered on the waiting list for the North Belfast constituency area. Of those, 2,255 were deemed to be in housing stress with 30 points or more.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will be aware that there is a narrative amongst some members of the media and amongst politicians that the housing need in the North Belfast constituency is overwhelmingly nationalist. Will he confirm whether that is, indeed, true?

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for her question. I will take the opportunity to explain that that narrative is totally false, unfounded and erroneous. When people register for housing, they can self-identify as Protestant or Roman Catholic, or, indeed, they can choose from a range of other options including none, refused, unknown, mixed or other religious group.

The figures for those in North Belfast who self-identify as either Protestant or Roman Catholic are, in many ways, quite similar. For example, there are 1,479 people from the Protestant community and 1,489 people from the Roman Catholic community on the waiting list in North Belfast as of 1 December. So, there is a difference of less than 1%. Therefore, the housing waiting lists for Protestants and Roman Catholics in North Belfast are roughly equal. You will find that, over time, there will be slight fluctuations and the figure may go 1% one way or the other over a period of months as people come on and off the waiting list. However, the figures refute very much the damaging and what I would describe as almost corrosive narrative that suggests that there is an overwhelming demand in one community and virtually no demand in the other community. The housing waiting lists in the two communities are virtually the same.

Sometimes, people argue that we should deal with people who refuse to identify or whose religious identity is unknown. However, that takes away people's right not to self-identify. Even when you look at that, however, and you attempt to allocate people to a particular group on the basis of where they have chosen to live, you see that if someone from Ardoyne, for example, has put down Ardoyne as their choice of area, they are probably not from the Protestant/unionist community.

Likewise, if somebody puts down for mid-Shankill, they are probably not from the Catholic/nationalist community.

3.15 pm

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

Mr McCausland: Even if you do that, it makes virtually no difference. The needs in the two communities are almost exactly equal.

Mr Speaker: That concludes questions for oral answer to the Minister for Social Development. We will now move to topical questions.

Pledge of Office

Mr Lunn: The Minister was severely critical last week of the sentence handed down by the courts to Thomas Beresford, the loyalist bandsman. How does he reconcile that criticism with —

Mr Speaker: Order. I warned the House that topical questions should be questions on the responsibility of the Minister within his Department. I am prepared to let the Member finish, because sometimes questions and supplementary questions grow legs.

1. Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development how he reconciles his severe criticism last week of the sentence handed down by the courts to Thomas Beresford, the loyalist bandsman, with his obligation under the Pledge of Office to support the police and the courts and to uphold the rule of law. (AQT 511/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am sure that there will be some reflection afterwards about whether questions of this nature are appropriate. I am sure that the Speaker will want to consider that in due course. However, I will just make two points to the Member. First, on that occasion, I very clearly spoke as a local representative, representing the interests of people from the community. Secondly, I said in the statement — if the Member had read it all, he would have known — that there should be respect for the law. That was clearly stated. My comment was purely on the extent of the punishment that was handed out to the individual in the context of that being the very first instance of someone being brought before the courts and then sent to prison for months for playing a piece of music.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for his answer. He was critical of the court's decision, and he can hardly divorce himself from being the Minister when it suits him in such situations. Given his intention to crack down on benefit fraud, how does he expect to be taken seriously, when he can be so selective in his support for court decisions and his adherence to the Pledge of Office?

Mr McCausland: The Department for Social Development deals with a lot of complex and difficult issues that matter a lot to people, such as housing, welfare, community regeneration, addressing dereliction and addressing town centre regeneration. I am disappointed that the Member was unable to find anything within that broad remit about which to ask a question. I would take his question more seriously if I had seen a pattern from him of challenging some Ministers from the other side of the Chamber about some of the things that they have done, but I have never heard him do it yet.

Public Realm Works: Investment

2. Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the investment by his Department, since he became Minister, in town and city centre public realm works. (AQT 512/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for the question, which is on one of the very central areas of work that my Department undertakes and one that is highly valued by local communities, councils, traders and residents. Improving the public realm in a town or city is a fundamental part of any regeneration programme. During my time in office, I have approved funding of £66 million for 177 public realm schemes across Northern Ireland. For example, some schemes have been completed in Belfast city centre phase 1, costing £28 million; Station Square in Portrush, £1.3 million; Lurgan town centre, £1.8 million; and Queen's Quay in Londonderry, £688,000. Those schemes have involved making improvements to pavements, roadways, street lighting, furniture and public art. All the schemes have been widely welcomed by the local community, residents, visitors to the towns and cities and local traders, because they have had a positive social and economic impact on those areas.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his response. Does he agree that the financial investment that he makes in our town and city centres — not least the difference it has made in my town centre in Lurgan — is beneficial to the communities and makes them a more attractive place for people to come to shop?

Mr McCausland: The Member has focused the issue very much on traders. It is true that, over the past five years, traders right across the Province and, indeed, right across the United Kingdom and further afield have faced difficult trading conditions. However, the investment that the Department has made to transform town and city centres has helped to support businesses and improve the vibrancy and the footfall in towns and cities. Creating attractive, open and shared places is one of the best ways to encourage families to return to them and spend more time in our high streets. Other things, such as internet shopping or out-of-town centres, are drawing people away from town centres, but this work helps to draw people back in and to sustain town centres.

Portadown and Lurgan have seen, on average, a 34% increase in footfall; Belfast experienced a 55% increase; and Newcastle experienced a phenomenal increase of nearly 300%. That increase in footfall has also led to an improvement in business confidence; for example, the Belfast Streets Ahead scheme resulted in private sector investment in 20 refurbishments of premises and 64 new businesses opening in the area. Work to progress new schemes in partnership with councils in towns such as Ballymena, Bangor and Newtownards and in Belfast's Bank Square are well advanced, as everyone has seen that investing in our public realm really helps to make our towns much more family-friendly and, thereby, supports the town centre and the traders therein.

Mr Speaker: Seán Lynch.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. During Question Time, the Minister mentioned that he had been in Stuttgart last week to look at —

Mr Speaker: Order. I apologise to the Member. I have jumped to his question far too soon.

Mr Lynch: You caught me on the hop.

Welfare Reform Bill: Financial Penalties

3. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he believes that any progress will be made on the Welfare Reform Bill before the end of 2013, given that the Westminster Government have said that the Executive will face a penalty of £5 million a month if the new year deadline is not met. (AQT 513/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for his question, because it is appropriate that, at this final Question Time of 2013, we have this item on the agenda. The Member will be well aware, as, indeed, are other Members, that I have been working extensively with Executive colleagues to progress the Welfare Reform Bill through the Assembly and to achieve the best possible outcome for the citizens of Northern Ireland.

At the last meeting of the Executive, it was agreed to reconvene the Executive subcommittee on welfare reform, and a meeting of that subcommittee has been scheduled for next Monday, 16 December. It really is a one-item agenda. I do not know what else there will be on the agenda other than one item, and that is how we move this forward. I had certainly hoped that we would have made swifter progress. I hope that we can make progress after the meeting next Monday. Given the Christmas recess, the earliest that any Bill can be brought back to the Executive for decision would be 16 January. If we meet that deadline, I could expect the Bill to receive Royal Assent by the end of March or early April. However, as you have rightly pointed out, the clear message from Westminster, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Secretary of State and the Treasury has been that, if we miss the January deadline, penalties of approximately £5 million a month will kick in.

Mr Hilditch: I welcome the Minister's answer. Perhaps he will give us another message: dare I ask him whether he feels that that is a good use of the limited block grant that we receive?

Mr McCausland: The one-word answer to that would be no. It is not a good use of our limited block grant. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has written to the Finance Minister highlighting his concerns about the delay in the Welfare Reform Bill for Northern Ireland and indicating that the UK Government can make adjustments to the Northern Ireland block grant for the additional costs to the Exchequer of annually managed expenditure (AME) spending controls that are not achieved. The Treasury has estimated the cost to be around £5 million a month since April 2013; £50 million to £60 million by January 2014; and well over £200 million a year by 2017-18. The Chief Secretary has stated clearly and categorically that it will be necessary to begin to make departmental expenditure limit (DEL) adjustments unless the reforms are implemented by January 2014.

The fact of the matter is this: when you start to take £5 million, then £60 million and up to £200 million pounds a year off the block grant, it cuts into the money that other Departments have to spend. It will not come off my budget; every Department here will be affected. That means that there will be an impact on classrooms, teachers, schools, hospitals, nurses, social services and operations. Whatever it is across the realm of health and education, there will be a significant impact. People should get that clear in their mind. This is not out there floating about in

the ether; it is a reality. It is important that people grasp the nettle and we deal with the issue as a matter of urgency. We have a very good package of measures that I have been able with Westminster and through discussions with OFMDFM. We need to put those measures out for open discussion, which is what the wider community wants, as the voluntary and community sector has acknowledged. The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) made that very clear, and others have also said that to us.

Mr Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mr McCausland: We need to be in a position to move forward on this.

Housing: Insulation

4. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister for Social Development what he learned on his recent visit to Stuttgart to see what is done with houses with poor or no insulation, in particular houses with concrete skin or no-cavity walls, and whether the lessons would be useful in our circumstances. (AQT 514/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I found it very informative to see the difference that it made to the energy efficiency of the properties that we visited. They were retrofitting properties built in the 1960s and early 1970s, so they were about 40 years old. The properties were being substantially retrofitted with a high level of insulation. There are other things that follow on. If you insulate, you must do other things to make sure that the house functions properly. There were good practical examples of what can be done.

I have already mentioned the pilot work at Springfarm in Antrim, which will benefit not only Northern Ireland but the whole of the United Kingdom. This issue should have been addressed some years ago because this work has been ongoing in GB for some time. It has certainly been under way for quite a long time on the continent, where people deal with much colder conditions than we have in Northern Ireland. The extent of the installation was very significant. There are lessons to be learned from the way in which they build properties. I was pleased that we had with us people from the Construction Industry Training Board, the Federation of Master Builders and the Housing Executive. Connections are being developed between experts in Northern Ireland and experts in Germany, and we can learn from each other. They can gain in some ways from us, and we can gain from them. We want this to be done. It should have been done a long time ago because it is not right that people are left languishing in properties that are cold and damp.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his fairly elaborate and comprehensive answer. He is aware that there are homes in this part of the country that have poor insulation. What measures will he put in place to deal with this, particularly as it also affects relatively new social houses, such as those at Mount Eagles in Poleglass, which have deteriorated recently as a result?

Mr McCausland: I suppose that there are three elements to this. The first is the technology, and I have spoken about that. We have a clear idea of how that should be taken forward. Previously, work was done to retrofit houses by, for example, putting an inner skin on walls, but that did not

work. The effect lasted for maybe a year or two and was not long-lasting. So we need to get the right technology. Secondly, there is the issue of social housing, and the third is private ownership. In respect of social housing, we have made this a target for the Housing Executive, and that is why it is involved in all these schemes. It is measuring the energy efficiency of its properties, which I referred to earlier, so that it knows the type of properties that need work. Some are fine, some have old solid stone walls and there are even some Orlit properties and old corrugated bungalows. We need to get the issue of social housing dealt with. There is also the more complex issue of private owners and what can be done to support them. That will have to be taken through, not just the technology but how that may be supported in some way and what sort of business case might be constructed around that.

3.30 pm

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It seems that, at every Question Time, in particular during topical questions, issues are raised on the Floor of the House that are totally irrelevant to the question. Ministers are often questioned about the ministerial code of conduct. Ministers have responsibilities for a constituency and for their constituents. Is it right that we continually hear some Members trying to trip up a Minister or ask questions about some statement that he has made that had nothing to do with his Department but was made when he was acting as a constituency MLA? Is it right that those questions should be allowed?

Mr Speaker: That is an important point of order. On two occasions during Question Time this afternoon I cautioned Members who were asking topical questions that had nothing to do with the Minister's Department. I will be looking at this, and, if Members persist, I will not call some of those Members at Question Time. Members know exactly. They should go away and read the Standing Order on topical questions, and they will see clearly that the topical question must relate to the responsibility of the Minister who is running his or her Department. That could not be any clearer.

Yes, we have some Members who want to trip up Ministers. We have to be careful. *[Interruption.]* Order. Yes, the House has a responsibility to hold Ministers to account, but it is account within the Department that they are responsible for; that is where it ends. All Members need to be careful, especially when it comes to topical questions. That is a point of order, and I thank Lord Morrow for raising it. However, Members can be warned only so many times, and then they have to be dealt with.

Mr Milne: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I apologise to you and the House for not being in my place for my question. I was unaware that the two questions were grouped, so I apologise.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for coming to the House and making the apology. I keep saying to the whole House that Members who come to the House to apologise can certainly set an example for the House and other Members.

Mr Agnew: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In the same vein, I apologise for being absent for topical questions. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Agnew: I appreciate the House's good humour on it, but it is certainly not the standard that I expect of myself.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member — *[Interruption.]* Order. I thank the Member for coming to the House and apologising. I often say to the whole House that I am happy to receive confessions in here or in my office. Once again, I thank the Member. I ask the House to take its ease as we move into the next business.

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

Private Members' Business

Sexual Orientation Strategy

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

Ms Lo: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes that a sexual orientation strategy was subject to consultation in 2006; further notes that public commitments to publish a document by the end of 2013 were made by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in Together: Building a United Community; expresses its deep concern that this document does not appear to have progressed to date; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to publish a cross-departmental sexual orientation strategy as a matter of priority.

On behalf of the Alliance Party, I propose the motion calling for the publication of a sexual orientation strategy, a commitment made by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) that, we are concerned, is now grossly overdue. I am very disappointed that no Minister from OFMDFM will be here to respond to Members' speeches.

Northern Ireland does many things well, but, when it comes to equality issues, we so often fall short. A consultation took place in 2006, and a strategic action plan was drafted to identify and tackle human rights issues relating to sexual orientation. This was shelved in 2007, following devolution, along with the shared future and racial equality strategies. It is not unreasonable for OFMDFM to want to take ownership of the strategies under devolution, but seven years is too long to produce our own version. Let me explain.

In 2010, the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy consultation indicated that Ministers were fully committed to publishing a sexual orientation strategy. At the end of that year, it was confirmed by junior Minister Newton that a strategy would be published. In 2011, junior Minister Bell told the Assembly that the final consultation process would take place in early 2012, with a view to publishing a strategy before the end of 2012. In October 2012, the Department outlined that a draft public consultation document was under consideration and would be published in the near future. In February 2013, Minister Bell outlined to the Assembly that the Department remained committed to publishing the strategy and that it was currently under consideration. The announcement of the Together: Building a United Community strategy committed OFMDFM to publishing a sexual orientation strategy once the consultation process had been completed. If that sounds like a history lesson, I apologise, but it is important to stress the length of time that we have been waiting for a strategy.

I wonder just how many consultation processes the Department intends to conduct before we see a strategy. No doubt we will get reassurances that the delay has been

to ensure that the strategy is comprehensive. However, the fact that there is apparently no policy reason for the delay suggests that this is a political issue. I hope that I will be forgiven for cynically enquiring whether the delay is a result of our two main parties failing to reach agreement on the strategy.

We tabled the motion for two reasons. One was to highlight the worrying delay from OFMDFM. It is very concerning that, seven years on, the strategy is yet to materialise. However, our primary motive for tabling the motion is to stress why we need the strategy. In many ways, the past decade has witnessed great changes in Northern Ireland, changes that we should be proud of. Yet, we still have some distance to go. Equality is about the absence of discrimination. It is about ensuring that people are treated the same, regardless of difference. From homophobic bullying in schools to tragic incidents of hate crime and suicide, far too many lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT) people are being subjected to discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

That is as outdated as it is wrong, and it needs to be addressed. OFMDFM is in the position to make a strong statement that the Assembly is genuinely committed to promoting equality for LGBT people in Northern Ireland.

We need to increase our understanding of the issues affecting some of the most vulnerable people in our society. The benefit of the strategy is that it provides a mechanism through which Departments can coordinate their actions to address the issues and promote equality of opportunity for LGBT people in a joined-up manner. The lack of a holistic approach from Departments has created a vacuum in which no action plan has been established to address homophobic crime, bullying, harassment, suicide, stigma and provision of services. Piecemeal protections are not sufficient on a strategic level. There needs to be a joined-up action plan. How do we monitor progress and assess the gaps if we have no targets?

Stigma is a large part of the problem. We live in a society in which, for example, the story of a young Olympic diver announcing that he is in a relationship with another man makes the front pages of the newspapers. Why should someone's sexual orientation be deemed newsworthy? We need to change attitudes so that it becomes normalised.

What do we want to see in the strategy? The structure of the strategy is important. I have already stressed the need for an action plan, but there is also a need for resources to be built into the process alongside mechanisms for delivery to ensure that the strategy is effective. Additionally, the Rainbow Project recommends a time frame of three to five years, which is considered to be an adequate target to achieve the actions outlined. Through consultations with the wider LGBT sector, it is suggested that, although key themes and proposed actions have been identified, the strategy must be seen as a living document that will regularly need to be reviewed and updated.

Although key legislation is in place to protect and support LGBT people, such as section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which includes sexual orientation, many are unaware of their rights. It is therefore important that the strategy seek to develop a campaign for raising awareness of those rights. Violence against people who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual is often invisible or under-

represented in available data. There is a need for relevant Departments and bodies to ensure through training and awareness that staff better understand how and why the violence occurs.

One of the biggest threats facing LGBT youth is homophobic bullying. Schools should refer to homophobia by name in all anti-bullying policies. They must educate pupils and staff in how to recognise and tackle that bullying. There is also a gap in providing relationship and safer-sex education to young LGBT people. That must be addressed.

A 2006 Rainbow Project report indicated that there was greater misuse of drugs and alcohol in the LGBT community, particularly as a coping mechanism. Health bodies should work in partnership with the sector to develop targeted campaigns and necessary services. There are also issues with mental health. Appropriate training is needed, and increasing the capacity for community-based provision needs to improve. There are other key themes, such as access to services, same-sex parenting, older LGBT people, rural LGBT people and attitudes in sport and leisure, that need to be referenced.

From my own experience, I know that people are generally far more accepting of diversity now than they were two decades ago. Thanks to the excellent work of the Minister for Employment and Learning, we have seen the development of the LGBT awareness programme for workplaces. That is being conducted by the Rainbow Project so that people who identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual are protected and supported in their jobs.

3.45 pm

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

Ms Lo: Northern Ireland's recognition of same-sex —

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

Ms Lo: — relationships through civil partnerships is another good example of how far we have come. I urge the House to support our motion.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):

I welcome the opportunity to speak on this matter and, perhaps, to put it in the context of what I believe is a universally held frustration among members of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister at the number of strategies and initiatives that are not coming forward in as timely a manner as we want. I put on record my gratitude to the members of the Committee who have helped me in trying to push the Department to open up that blocked pipeline.

We have a list of outstanding issues at the Committee, which are matters that were raised with the Department and not answered in a timely manner. On that list of outstanding issues is a letter complaining about the lack of response to outstanding issues. This Saturday, 14 December, is the anniversary of the issue that is at the top of that list, because the Committee asked a question regarding the implications for OFMDFM of the Department of Education's common funding scheme that should have been answered on 14 December 2012. So, as I say, we are a few days away from an unwelcome anniversary.

Ms Lo mentioned the fact that a consultation was conducted seven years ago, in 2006. I took the opportunity

to revisit that consultation and its questions. I think it is useful to remind the House of what those questions were. First, consultees were asked whether they agreed with issues noted as the main issues facing the LGB community. Those issues included health, employment, crime and justice, partnership, and housing issues. They also included the issue of inequality of access to goods and services; on economics, access to employment and job protection; and, on violence, the need to support victims of domestic and homophobic violence and the need to prevent such violence in future. Surely, there is nothing there that we could disagree with. There is nothing major missing from that list, and there is nothing on that list that anybody would want to remove.

Next, consultees were asked:

"Is the vision stated on page 16 a strong vision?"

It is a vision:

"To have a society in which the diversity, equality of opportunity and human rights of all lesbian, gay and bisexual people and their families are safeguarded, and enabled."

That was published seven years ago. What is the problem? Can we not all put our hand up in agreement with that statement? Seven years ago, consultees were asked whether they had any comments on the guiding principles. Those guiding principles are: a positive and proactive approach; ensuring that stereotypes do not influence policy development and decision-making adversely; and recognising the multiple identities of LGB people. They are LGB, but they may also be mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, carers and people with disabilities. The final guiding principle is promoting a partnership approach in developing effective and inclusive policies and service delivery. Again, it is seven years, and we cannot sign off on something so practical and demonstrably sensible.

The document also included in its strategic objectives:

"To encourage the increased participation and visibility of LGB people in society"

and

"To promote an environment free from harassment and bullying and to tackle homophobia".

I put the same question to the House: what is there on which we cannot agree that has led to a seven-year delay in introducing the strategy?

I note that, as Ms Lo said, then junior Minister Newton in 2010 suggested to the House that the strategy was imminent. On 18 June last, his successor as junior Minister, Jonathan Bell, made clear that it was the intention to publish a revised sexual orientation strategy by the end of last year.

Interestingly, he went on to say:

"The strategy is not a list of rights; it is an accumulation of best practice ... In the 21 years that I professionally practised as a social worker, [we used] the values of anti-oppressive practice ... We want to tackle real distress that has been caused by discrimination. Everybody, regardless of their sexual orientation, the colour of their skin or their gender, should have the

right to live their life free from intimidation and fear. The proposed public consultation will allow anyone with an interest to make their views known and will, therefore, test opinion on those issues." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 75, p320, col 1].

I put it to the House that —

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

Mr Nesbitt: — we do not need to test opinions on those issues. Those issues are copper-fastened by section 75.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Chair of the Committee for giving way. Given that he set out the context of delayed response to Committee enquiries, how additionally frustrating is it that it appears that the Assembly will not be afforded a response from any of the OFMDFM Ministers today?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an additional minute.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Deputy Chair of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for his intervention. The point is well made. I would simply add that it is far from the first time that an issue falling under the purview of the Department has been debated in the House without any of the four relevant Ministers making themselves available to respond.

I will finish by emphasising the point that there seemed to be a commitment to test opinion on issues about the right to live a life that is free of intimidation and fear. I do not believe, given the protections of section 75 —

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

Mr Nesbitt: — of the Northern Ireland Act, that we need to test those opinions. Let us get on and publish the strategy. I support the motion.

Mr Moutray: A vision based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation was adopted and embraced by the House in the form of the 'Together: Building a United Community' (T:BUC) document at the start of this mandate. The House will be aware that T:BUC provides the framework for government actions in tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance while seeking to address division, hate and separation.

At the outset of my remarks, I will make it clear that I want to see a society that is free from sectarianism, racism or intolerance of any nature. I am utterly opposed to violence, hate crime, intolerance, bigotry or intimidation of any kind. Indeed, I would like to think that everyone in the House would take the same approach. No one is above the law, and, to that end, the T:BUC document contains a commitment to publish a sexual orientation strategy that is aimed at ensuring that the people of the LGBT community are not subjected to such crimes.

The House should be acquainted with the stage that we are at in this process, and I refer everyone to a question that junior Minister Jonathan Bell answered in Question Time on 14 October 2013. He said:

"A consultation document that will inform public consultation on the strategy is under consideration in the Department. That strategy will be published once the consultation process has been completed." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 88, p188, col 1].

It is simple: consultation must take place before the strategy can be brought forward. The House has been given a commitment, and, if the Alliance Party cared to speak with the sector, it would ascertain that that sector is broadly content with the way in which the Assembly is dealing with the matter. Indeed, from discussions with the junior Minister, I believe that not only has a commitment been given but positive and meaningful engagement has taken place between them and the sectors.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Moutray: No.

Therefore, I would go as far as to say that it is concerning that the Alliance Party is bringing this before the House today and, in using it as a political point-scoring exercise is, in fact, doing a disservice to the work that has already been completed.

I, personally, am not in the business of having a strategy for the sake of a strategy. I believe that it must be cognisant of all views in society, whether one sector appreciates the views or not. Although the strategy is not yet in place, I think that it is important to major on the role that statutory authorities are playing to ensure that no one, irrespective of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion or political affiliation, is discriminated against or subjected to hate crimes. Indeed, I believe that our Police Service is key in ensuring that that does not happen, and I commend it for its United Against Hate campaign, which has revealed figures that demonstrate that reported incidences of homophobic crime have, in fact, reduced. That is to be welcomed. So, although the strategy has not been published, significant work has been done to ensure that there is tolerance and a reduction in hate crime against members of the LGBT community.

The motion before us calls for the publication of the sexual orientation strategy to be made a priority. To my mind, OFMDFM faces weighty issues, like those of victims, historical institutional abuse and older people. This issue is no more a priority in ranking than any of those. To that end, I oppose the motion.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am delighted to be able to speak on this motion. We support the motion, and I thank the Alliance Party for bringing it forward. As the motion states, it has been seven years since consultation on the sexual orientation strategy first began. To be here, seven years later, still discussing this and still calling for its publication, is nothing short of ridiculous.

The motion notes that commitments were made regarding the strategy — Anna Lo outlined other commitments in her remarks — that still have not been delivered. Issues around homophobia, hate crime and access to services are still problems in our society that have not effectively been dealt with. I note that Ms Lo asked the following question: is this a failure of two parties to agree? Effectively, it is. I think that it is perfectly obvious where Sinn Féin stands on issues of LGBT equality. I think that it does need to be pointed out, however, that it could ring hollow to some that this is being brought forward by the Alliance Party, which, in my time here, has failed to have a unified vote on issues such as marriage equality. Some Members have even failed to show up to vote.

Sinn Féin has always been highly supportive of the LGBT community, and it is perfectly obvious where the blockage is on this issue within OFMDFM. I know from speaking to our Ministers that there is no hold-up at our end. If you are looking for a blockage, look no further than the DUP, whose record on LGBT rights is nothing short of abysmal. This year alone, we have seen the disgraceful squandering of public money in the pursuit of a personal agenda against unmarried and same-sex couples.

People face discrimination every day of their lives due to their sexual orientation. That is just plain wrong. For example, they face discrimination around family or adoption rights. The right for civil partners to adopt does not exist here. However, if a person in a same-sex relationship chooses to apply to adopt as an individual and completes the process, they have every right to do that and to then enter into a civil partnership post-adoption. It is a farcical situation.

The old narrative that a child needs a man and a woman to be raised properly is totally incorrect. I understand that people hold very sincere religious beliefs. Those beliefs are very important to some people, but they should not be foisted on everyone. In reality, all a child needs is a loving home and environment to grow up in. It is actually insulting to single-parent families everywhere to say that a child needs both a mother and a father to be raised in a wholesome way.

There are lingering and unaddressed inequalities facing those who have undergone gender reassignment. Someone who is married must have a divorce to undergo gender reassignment or have their civil partnership dissolved before they can get a gender reassignment certificate.

We need to think very carefully about the message that we are sending out of this place to young people. The reality is that there are people out there who would rather not be here than openly be who they are, out of fear for the discrimination or intimidation that they would face. Rates of suicide among young gay people have soared. It does not make things any easier when certain public representatives go into schools to say that homosexuality is an abomination. The discrimination that people face comes in enough forms without reinforcing negative societal attitudes —

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Ms Fearon: — whether it is on marriage rights, adoption rights or even the simple life-saving act of giving blood.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Ms Fearon: No thanks.

Ms Lo made some points about schools. I am very proud of the fact that a school in my area, St Joseph's in Crossmaglen, has been awarded the 2013 NITC award for outstanding work in LGBT equality.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Ms Fearon: Yes. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I have to remind people again that making remarks across the Chamber from a sedentary position is not acceptable.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Will the Member shed some light on why she thinks that there has been a delay in a sexual orientation strategy coming forward? Who does she think is at fault?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Fearon: Thank you.

I openly said that there is absolutely no blockage at our end. We approved it with our Ministers; I know that from speaking to them. Sinn Féin's track record on LGBT equality issues is obvious. Look at the DUP; I think that it is plain to see where the hold-up is.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Ms Fearon: No. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Wells: It must be my aftershave.

Ms Fearon: You will have your time to speak.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Speaker has made it perfectly clear that, where a Member demonstrates that they are not prepared to give way, another Member should not persist. I remind Members of what I said two minutes ago: remarks from a sedentary position across the Chamber will not be tolerated.

4.00 pm

Ms Fearon: We can talk about this in here all day, but what it comes down to is real people in real relationships and their personal struggles. To quote a great man who is certainly in my thoughts today, Nelson Mandela:

"There is no such thing as part freedom."

Well, there is no such thing as part equality. It does not work like that. It is an all-or-nothing concept. It is not a concept that we should be striving for; equality is a necessity.

The battle for LGBT rights has been coined as the equivalent to the civil rights movement for my generation. I think that it is time that this Assembly got its act together, caught up and moved into the 21st century.

Mr Eastwood: There are a couple of things about this debate that are quite shocking: first, the fact that it had to be brought. I commend the Alliance Party for bringing the motion. The fact that they had to bring a motion calling for OFMDFM to do what it already said that it was going to do is shocking, to say the least. However, as anybody who has spent any time on the Committee for OFMDFM will know, it is not a rare occurrence to have to badger, berate, plead and beg sometimes for responses from that Department.

It is also very unfortunate that there is no Minister here to answer what I imagine to be an easy question, which is this: why have you not done what you agreed to do? Why have you not published your own proposal or your own policy? For some reason, of the four of them, not one of them is here, and I do not think that that shows this House much respect. I do not think that it bodes well for those of us who would like to see the sexual orientation strategy eventually published.

For some unknown reason, the DUP seems to be opposing the motion. We have heard already, and I will read it into the record in a minute, how many times DUP Ministers have said that they support the notion of a sexual orientation strategy and have said when it is going to

happen and all that, but, of course, it has not happened. We have to be mindful of what this is all about. This is not just about people who believe in equality or people who are slightly, fully or very far on the left wanting some notional strategy just to say that they got it. This is about delivering for those people in our society who have been left behind, because far too often, this House tells them that they are not a full member of our community, that they do not have a right to play their full part in our society, and it is about time that we started sending them a different message.

The Rainbow Project and Stonewall UK gathered some evidence around education and the educational experiences of young people from the LGBT community. I will read some of the findings, because I think that it is important that we remind ourselves what this is all about. Ninety-eight per cent of LGB young people hear derogatory and homophobic language in school, and half of all teachers fail to respond to homophobic language when they hear it. Sixty-five per cent of young people have experienced negative behaviour in school because of their sexual orientation. Let us listen to this figure, as I think that it is important for people to hear it: 85% of LGB young people have considered suicide, and 35% of them have attempted it. If we cannot answer that, we should not be here. I do not understand why the House cannot unite behind this motion. It is a perfectly reasonable motion. All it is doing is calling for OFMDFM to do what it said it would do.

A consultation took place in 2006, and a consultation document on cohesion, sharing and integration was published on Tuesday 27 July 2010, which indicated that Ministers were fully committed to publishing a sexual orientation strategy. On 27 September 2010, Minister Newton, another DUP Minister, reaffirmed to the Assembly OFMDFM's commitment to publishing the report. I could go right through this. On 26 May 2011, Minister Bell outlined to the Assembly that the final consultation process would take place during early 2012 and would be published later that year; again, on 17 September, the same thing. On 4 October 2012, the Department outlined that the draft public consultation document was under consideration; right through to 14 October 2013, when Minister Bell gave an update on the sexual orientation strategy, telling us again that it would be published and that a consultation document would inform public consultation on the strategy. Where is it?

I will give way to Mr Wells, if he wants to stand up and tell me where the sexual orientation strategy is.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: Go ahead.

Mr Wells: The honourable Member for Newry and Armagh clearly does not like my aftershave. She was quite happy to step aside and let Mr McCrea speak, but not me. My power with young women has long since disappeared. The reason why I was trying to intervene is that she alleged that a member of the DUP had gone into a school and said that homosexuality was repugnant. He did not: he said that homosexual marriage was repugnant. It is important to place that on the record. He was not referring to homosexuals per se; he was referring to gay marriage.

Mr Eastwood: I do not know who said what, but I do not think that it is repugnant that people who love each other, whatever their sex and sexuality, should be entitled to

legitimise and legalise their loving relationship. That is a very fair point, and I hope that the Assembly will get to that point some day.

I offered Mr Wells the opportunity to tell us where the sexual orientation strategy was. Unfortunately, he did not take it. I wish there were a Minister here to tell us, but, unfortunately, there is not. We can listen out on the airwaves later. Maybe on 'Evening Extra' or somewhere else, an OFMDFM Minister will come forward and tell us when the gay community will finally receive the news that the sexual orientation strategy, which it has been waiting for since 2006, will be published. However, I think that we will have to wait a wee bit longer.

Mr G Robinson: I am somewhat surprised that the debate is taking place. There is haste to produce a poor document that would be unfit for purpose. If that happened, those who tabled the motion would no doubt be the first to complain that it was inappropriate and a poor outcome. To my mind, we need to produce a workable strategy, not a timescale for producing one. I want to make it clear that I deplore any acts of hate crime and, for that matter, any acts of crime or violence against fellow human beings.

The motion is from a party that is supposed to represent all sections of the community and wants to promote integration, cohesion and sharing. However, that party also voted to remove the flag of our country from Belfast City Hall and, therefore, created great division and hurt. I do not think that the motion is anything other than a cynical attempt at publicity with little or no care for the outcome. Personally, I want a strategy that is fit for purpose. Despite my deep reservations about the lifestyles to which the strategy relates, I am prepared to be patient and wait for the best strategy to be produced for the benefit of those whom it covers rather than for short-term publicity.

There is, I understand, a commitment to a workable strategy. That points to the understanding that there is with those involved with this sector and to the fact that things are progressing, although not at the pace that everyone would like. Patience should prevail. The achievement of a workable sexual orientation strategy does not require haste; it requires patience and agreement. I hope that those who tabled the motion will see the benefit of supporting the current work in progress to achieve the workable solution that I see as critical to a successful outcome. Clarity, not haste, is the essential factor in producing a workable strategy. It is for those reasons that I cannot support the motion.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion. I urge OFMDFM to publish the strategy as soon as possible. OFMDFM is a joint office, and Sinn Féin, for our part, supports the conclusion of the review as soon as possible. Sinn Féin is a party committed to the equality agenda. We believe that all citizens, regardless of race, religion or sexuality, should be treated as equals in the eyes of the law. As a party, Sinn Féin advocates the rights to social, economic, gender and cultural equality. That encompasses equality for all, irrespective of race, age, sexual orientation, physical or mental capacity, ethnicity, social origin, political or religious affiliation or membership of the Travelling community.

The rights of the LGBT community and human rights are not separate; they are one and the same. Barriers are being broken down step by step, but there is more

to be done. You cannot support equality and be a racist. You cannot support equality and perpetuate sexual discrimination. You cannot support equality and be homophobic. Homophobia remains the biggest barrier to the full participation of the gay and lesbian community. MLAs, regardless of their religious belief, represent every section of the community, including LGBT members. The motion is about ensuring equality for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation. The Assembly and all its institutions have to ensure that gender, sexuality, ethnicity and disability are not barriers to full and equal participation. While there are no official statistics on the gay, lesbian and bisexual population in the North, it is estimated that there are between 90,000 and 125,000 lesbians, gays and bisexuals in the North.

The PSNI, for example, has made clear commitments to ensuring equality in the delivery of its service to all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. The Criminal Justice (No. 2) Order 2004 makes provision for sentences to be increased where offences for which a person is convicted were aggravated by hostility based on grounds of race, religion, sexual orientation or disability. The judicial system recognises that sexual orientation discrimination is incompatible with national and international human rights standards. The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2006 and sex discrimination regulations state that it is unlawful for service providers to discriminate against a person because of his or her sexual orientation in the provision of services and public functions. From that evidence and the failure to publish the sexual orientation strategy, could it be suggested that we are not complementing existing law and policy?

Surveys have shown that negative perceptions about lesbian, gay and bisexual people are getting progressively worse in the North. A report on mental health has shown that a quarter of young gay or bisexual men in the North of Ireland have attempted suicide, and many people from the LGBT community have been forced to suppress who they are to protect themselves.

There is no doubt that lesbian, gay and bisexual people are valued in society and seen as participating members of society, but there remains prejudice and barriers to accessing equal opportunities. The Assembly, by supporting the motion, can today give a strong message that prejudice, discrimination and intolerance must be rejected.

Mr Spratt: At the outset, I will say that it is simply not true to say that the strategy is not being progressed. It is still a commitment in the Programme for Government, and I have not heard that that commitment has been removed. I agree with the Chair about the delay in some matters. However, sometimes, it is not Ministers; it is departmental officials, and he has to accept that. I will also say to the Chair that he should not consider that he speaks for every member of the Committee, because I know that this is a regular, weekly soapbox that he gets onto when he makes these complaints. You do not speak for everybody in the Committee. Sometimes I agree, and sometimes I have issues with it, so do not portray that you speak for everybody about some of these issues.

There is already a lot of primary legislation that provides protection on grounds of sexual orientation. As has already been stated, section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities to be aware of the need to promote equality of opportunity on the grounds of

sexual orientation. Secondly, the Human Rights Act 1998 outlines rights and freedoms as contained in the European Convention on Human Rights. Those rights include those pertaining also to sexual orientation.

In a UK context, if individuals feel that their rights have been breached, they can take their case to the courts, and they have a right to do so. The Civil Partnership Act 2004 gave a new legal status to adults in a same-sex relationship. The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 afford protection from discrimination in the provision of goods and services in relation to sexual orientation. There is also secondary legislation that provides protection in respect of adoptive parental leave, flexible working, employment equality, criminal justice — and the list goes on.

In addition to the legislation, the gender equality unit of OFMDFM has been working in partnership with the voluntary and community sector group, which represents lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Following on from that, a forum has been set up that facilitates consultation and, I believe, includes 11 organisations. So, it is clear that much has been done and continues to be done to protect the rights of and give a voice to the LGBT community. In addition to that, I understand that there have been effective discussions with junior Ministers and that the sector is content that the issue is progressing.

4.15 pm

Although the Department has a responsibility to publish the strategy, it is important that it gets the strategy right. Indeed, it is more important to get it right than to simply rush through a paper to meet a calendar date. There are many issues to consider and many people to consult, and it is vital to get it right. I have worked at constituency level with many people from various communities. I turn no one away, whatever community they come from. I am also sure that I speak for everyone in the House when I say that we must take a stand against hate crime, no matter who or what the target is. Violent attacks, intimidation and verbal and physical abuse are always wrong. As a society, we do not need to have a sexual orientation strategy to enshrine that. It is the responsibility of the Police Service of Northern Ireland to deal with such attacks, and I have supported it. Sadly, there have been many such attacks in my constituency. I have condemned them, and I will continue to work for the people in that constituency, which is a very diverse constituency, on whatever issue they come to my door with. I turn no one away, no matter what their class, creed, orientation or anything else is.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I rise, briefly, to underscore the comments by my party colleagues Bronwyn McGahan and Megan Fearon, who rose earlier to support the motion. I add my thanks to the Alliance Party for tabling the motion.

It is clear that the delay in producing the sexual orientation strategy is completely unacceptable. As we have heard and as we are all aware, the strategy was initially consulted on in 2006. A few months ago, we had a public commitment from the First Minister and deputy First Minister that the strategy would be published before the end of 2013. This is the last plenary session of the Assembly in 2013, and, sadly, we still do not have the publication of the sexual orientation strategy.

I think that most Members have referred to various aspects of a strategy and what it might reflect. Certainly, we have section 75, and some good work is being done by such agencies as the PSNI, for example, which is trying to make sure that people from the LGBT community are protected when they come under attack. Clearly, a strategy would be designed to deal with that. It would also be designed to deal with education and public awareness, which would make sure that the bottom line is that people in our society, regardless of who they are, their religious belief or creed or their sexual orientation, would be subject to equal rights and responsibilities. As Megan Fearon pointed out, you cannot be a little bit equal; you have to be equal. That is an important concept that has to be enshrined, and it would be very ably assisted by the publication of a strategy.

On behalf of Sinn Féin, I want to make it clear that Sinn Féin is not in any way responsible for the delay in the publication of such a strategy. We have made our view very clear in the Department. Our Ministers will confirm that. All other Members who have spoken have asked why no Ministers are here. All Members are well aware that it is a joint office and that, unless there is agreement between the First Minister and deputy First Minister's office, no Minister, be they Minister or junior Minister, can speak on behalf of the First Minister or deputy First Minister. All Members are aware of that, but let us make it clear that our party does not stand in the way of the publication of such a strategy. In fact, we have completed our work on it.

It would be worthwhile for all parties to publish their views on the issue, because I suspect that a number of them would be challenged. Today, Members have spoken up, I think, very well, about the rights of this community, but, if you look at the voting pattern in the House in the past number of months on a wide range of issues, you will find that a number of parties would find themselves challenged. They have opted out of taking formal decisions on the basis of a conscience clause, which, in other words, allows Members to unshoulder the burden of legislative responsibility on issues of importance. For one Member to tell me or anybody else that their conscience is more important than that of another MLA is something that I just do not accept. We are the legislators. We have the collective responsibility to legislate. Therefore, when Members say that their conscience will not allow them to do A, B or C, that is a cop-out. People can make their own judgements about that. People will take their own counsel on that.

It is very important that the House send out a clear message as we reach the end of 2013 and the deadline that was provided jointly by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, publicly and personally. As we reach the end of 2013 and that particular time frame, it is essential that such a strategy be produced and agreed very soon so that all of us can have our say on and input into it and work to deliver it. More importantly, it will take us a step further towards a time when all in our society will live as equals. That is all that I have to say.

Mr Cree: I have to say that, since joining the Committee, I have found it very difficult to hold the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to account because of inordinate delays in most of the work that is that Department's responsibility. OFMDFM is unique in that there are long delays in most areas of its work and little evidence of any urgency to resolve the matter.

As the proposer of the motion stated, the sexual orientation strategy has been under consideration for the past seven years. During that time, many deadlines were set for its publication. None of them has been met. Why is there such delay? The Committee has raised the issue on many occasions but has not received acceptable reasons for the continuing delay. It is also worth noting that other areas of work have also failed to be resolved. I will mention just a few: the racial equality strategy; the childcare strategy; the older people strategy; and even the social investment fund. It was therefore amusing to hear from a Department that cannot cope with what is in its existing remit of recent movements towards an additional power grab for planning.

Taking evidence from the Department's officials can be frustrating because of the lack of positive progress, but I have some sympathy for the staff who find themselves in such a culture. The office is dysfunctional and needs to be sorted out as a matter of urgency. It is therefore more in hope than in confidence that I lend my support and that of the Ulster Unionist Party to the motion.

Mr B McCrea: We are blessed with short speeches today. The previous one was one minute and 30 seconds long. I have to say that I am sorry, but I am going to break the mould. There are a few things that I want to say.

I am really surprised by the lack of numbers on the DUP Benches opposite. However, I am pleased to see that Mr Moutray has returned, because he failed to take an intervention when I asked. He said in his contribution that the sector was content. I want to know which sector he is talking about. I would like him to provide some details, and I am prepared to give way. He also referred, if he wants to deal with it, to Unite Against Hate. It is my understanding, although I stand to be corrected, that that organisation stopped functioning a year ago and is not functioning at present. Perhaps the Member knows better. In three minutes and 31 seconds, Mr Moutray, on behalf of the DUP, read a prepared statement that was lacking in grace, lacking in generosity and lacking in humanity. It was simply a snarling, nasty delivery. When you come to Mr George Robinson, who has left the Chamber —

Mr Spratt: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. We heard this nonsense from the Member this morning. He is actually being nasty towards other Members. He talks about people being nasty to him. There is nobody more nasty than the Member for Lagan Valley. It is about time that the Chair told him to wind his neck in.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind the Member that he does not instruct the Chair or question the decisions of the Chair.

Mr Moutray: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sorry; I will deal with this first. I remind all Members, particularly in the run-up to Christmas and the season of goodwill, to be nice to each other.

Mr Moutray: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will you rule on the remark that Mr McCrea made, which was that I snarled? Since I was elected here, I have never snarled at anyone. Maybe he needs to look in the mirror.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think that my link with Christmas resonated across the Chamber. Perhaps we can put any of those nasties that happened in the past behind us. There is a serious subject before the House, and, until now, all Members have behaved reasonably. Perhaps, on this

occasion, a little warning from the Chair will be sufficient, and we can restore peace and goodwill.

Mr B McCrea: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am, of course, sir, mindful of your direction, but I would like to say that this is a serious debate on a matter that I feel passionate about. Just because we are approaching the season of goodwill, it does not mean that I cannot say certain things that, I realise, may not meet with agreement from all Members. I do not wish to cross your instructions in any way, but it is important to say that this is not the right way to deal with this issue. If I have said something wrong, I apologise.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members are constantly reminded to be courteous and to show respect to each other.

Mr B McCrea: Mr Deputy Speaker, sir, I am trying my very best to follow your instructions, but I found the contribution from Members opposite disgraceful. I am sorry if that is not in the spirit of Christmas, but I will say that I find the DUP's attitude on this matter to be xenophobic, homophobic and claustrophobic. As a party, you are not answering the requirements of our entire community. I do not say that on a personal basis —

Mr Spratt: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it right for the Member to make the allegations and assertions that he has just made against Members? I deeply resent what he has said. I have never been homophobic to anyone, and I want you or the Speaker to rule on that, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is totally out of order in my book. I have never been homophobic to anyone.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has his remarks on the record. I also remind Members that other Members are allowed to be critical.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I want to refer to an article about an Assembly outreach programme in Enniskillen at which I was present. The article refers to DUP MLA Tom Buchanan and is headlined "Local politician tells school kids homosexuality is 'an abomination'". The issue is that the party opposite intends to vote against the motion. I cannot understand how it can vote against a motion that is just saying that we should bring forward a strategy that says that we all agree on a way forward and we should consult.

I accept the argument that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has to speak jointly. I suspect that the reason why we have had no response at this stage is that they cannot get agreement. That is outrageous. Today is Human Rights Day throughout the world. I have here a statement about an event that is hosted by the Speaker of the Assembly, which talks about human rights issues and deals with a number of issues that are incumbent on the sexual orientation strategy. There is one party that is stopping it from coming forward, and it is the DUP.

There are other Members present who I know care passionately about the issue. The Alliance Party, which proposed the motion, had it in its manifesto, and I think that this was part of its discussions before it took on the Justice Ministry and what have you. It is outrageous that this has taken six years.

4.30 pm

The Chair of the OFMDFM Committee talked about how we cannot make progress, because people will not

respond. Even the Member for Foyle said that it was not unusual for these matters to be held back. The question that I have to ask you all is this: what you are all doing in the Executive with these people? If you want a voluntary coalition, it should be a voluntary coalition without the DUP, not everybody else but. That is the challenge for this place, because you cannot represent the people —

Mr Moutray: Two Members.

Mr Spratt: You know. We have the numbers, and we have the votes.

Mr B McCrea: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am trying to make a point.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Just when we have resolved one problem, another arises. Members, you know fine well that you cannot make remarks from a sedentary position and you certainly cannot make them directly to a Member who is trying to make his point.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is —

Mr B McCrea: I will indeed.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. I recognise the remarks that he made about the Executive, but will he acknowledge that some Executive Ministers have done good work? For example, Alliance Minister Stephen Farry has done good work on equal rights in the workplace.

Mr B McCrea: I acknowledge the good work done by many people who have tried to bring the strategy to fruition. However, the strategy has been blocked time and time again by people who think that using some sort of words will actually skim over the fact that they are fundamentally opposed to this approach. All the weasel words in the world will not change your attitude. People say, "My door is open to anybody in my constituency", but what homosexual or person from a same-sex marriage in their right mind would actually go to such a door, knowing the treatment that they would get? This is not the right way forward.

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

Mr B McCrea: We need a strategy, and it is a shame that the DUP is stopping it.

Mr Allister: It is disingenuous and, indeed, insulting to our intelligence for anyone to suggest that the self-evident procrastination on this matter is due to some deep-seated desire to study the issues and get the right answers. It is patently obvious that there is fundamental disagreement and blockage on the matter. That does not unduly unsettle me, but I certainly think that it is disingenuous to pretend otherwise.

The problem, as I see it, is that DUP Members, in particular, want to ride two horses on the matter. They want to tick boxes in the Programme for Government by saying, "Oh yes, we are committed to whatever it takes", and then, when it comes to the delivery of a sexual orientation strategy, maybe for very good reasons, they drag their feet to the point where nothing happens and we have repeat promises that are broken just as frequently as they are made. It is clear that there is that fundamental difference. I just wish they would do a full-frontal U-turn, such as they have found possible in other matters, so that we could reach finality on the issue.

I have to ask the House this question again: why do we need a sexual orientation strategy? Those of varying sexual orientations, as it is expressed, are not subject to a lesser standard of law than anyone else. They are subject to the same protections as other interests under section 75, under the Human Rights Act, in employment law, in the provision of services, and so it goes on.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes, giving way is part of my orientation, so certainly. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member. He certainly is orientated in such a way. He outlined legislation as a reason not to have a strategy. We have legislation to protect businesses, but we still have an economic strategy. A strategy is about improving outcomes for people in the LGB community. Surely that is worthwhile. Legislation on its own is not enough.

Mr Allister: So, the Member is really saying that we need to give some special status to the LGBT community and that we need to feed its perpetuating self-pity because it needs some extra special protection. Well, I am sorry; I disagree. It is entitled to the same legal protections as anyone else: the same Human Rights Act; the same section 75; the same employment law; the same services Act; and the same provisions relating to hate crime. In our criminal courts, it is an aggravating factor when it comes to sentence if homophobia is a contributor to the commission of the crime.

I just do not get why one particular section of the community is somehow to be elevated to this special status, this privileged position where it is to be given, for itself, some specific strategy that does not apply to anyone else. That is inequality; that is not the pursuit of equality. I hear many people in the House wed themselves to the notion of equality. Well, let us have equality and do away with the idea that there should be some sort of special status, some sort of special strategy for those of a particular orientation. This thing really has run away with itself in that regard.

We need to keep ourselves focused on one law for all and all equally subject to the law. Once we depart from that fundamental principle, we create these special interest groups with insatiable demands where inequality is the outworking. It seems to me that those who advocate a sexual orientation strategy are on the road to demanding inequality of treatment for everyone else: special status only for those of that particular orientation. I think that that offends the fundamental principle of all being equal to the law and all being equally subject to the law.

Mr Agnew: To respond further to Mr Allister: he said that there should be no special treatment for this particular section of society. Earlier, however, we discussed children with special educational needs. Why do we feel the need to be specific about that group? It is because its outcomes were poor and we wanted to ensure equality of opportunity. The same should be said for those of a particular sexual orientation: the outcomes are poor. Bullying is higher —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Certainly.

Mr Allister: I think that that is a surprising and dangerous comparison to make in taking what he would call the

gay community and saying that, in some way, because we make special provision for kids who have special educational needs, we should make special provision for the gay community. We make special educational needs provision for children who are in that position because of an element of special needs touching on their mental capacity. It is right that society does that, but it is not a mental capacity issue when it comes to the matter of gay adoption, gay marriage or gay anything else.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Agnew: The principle is one of equality of opportunity in whatever section of society, whether it be Protestant working-class males or the gay community. Indeed, if there is evidence to show that the Christian community is somehow being discriminated against or has poorer outcomes, I will defend and work for the rights of those people regardless.

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I have very little time because Mr Allister spoke for quite a long time. I will if I have time.

I will fight for anybody's right for equality of opportunity, and the reasons for poorer outcomes need to be investigated. However, there is no doubt that homophobic bullying has been exacerbated by the comments of some Members of the Assembly and some members of political parties in the Assembly through language that denigrates the LGB community. We have to ensure that we send out a message, because I think that that community finds no solace in what the Assembly has delivered.

It is worth noting that, since devolution in 2007, not a single penny has come from OFMDFM to support groups working with the LGBT community to help them to exercise their rights and to fight and tackle discrimination. That is an indictment of the Assembly and of OFMDFM because there are many groups across society that we fund. For racial groups and new communities coming in, we rightly try to ensure that they have equality of opportunity in education and health services and do not face discrimination. We should do the same for the LGB community.

Let us look at the legislation that has come to the House and that which has been passed in other jurisdictions. If we look at civil partnerships, we see that that was opposed by the DUP, but, thankfully, it came in through direct rule. Equal marriage has been opposed by the DUP and, unfortunately, a majority — albeit a narrow one — in this House. I cannot quite say that gay adoption has been opposed, but it has been restricted by the DUP, because, of course, a gay person can adopt. Unfortunately, someone in a civil partnership cannot adopt. The party that purports to support family and commitment ensures that those who have committed in a civil partnership cannot adopt a child, even though a single gay person can do so. That contrasts with that party's claims about its position on the family.

Blood donation is another issue that we are all well aware of. In each of those cases, justification will be given, and they will say, "Do not call it homophobia, because we do not accept that term". I try not to resort to that term because I would rather win by argument than by insult. However, when you take those things collectively, you have to ask this: what have you done for the LGBT community? What will you do for it? All that is asked is that you produce a sexual orientation strategy, which you committed to

doing in your own Programme for Government and 'Together: Building a United Community' documents. You say that you believe in it, but then you put Members up to vote against a motion that calls for it to be progressed. Why would you do that?

We call on the party to give solace to those who face homophobic bullying that this Assembly will act on their behalf; that it acts on behalf of all the people of Northern Ireland; and that it will look at the issues that affect the LGB community and will address them, where it can, to ensure equality of opportunity for everyone in our society, regardless of race, religion, creed, sexual orientation or, for that matter, disability. I am sure that I have left out other groups. Equality of opportunity should be for all. I will give way to Mr Maskey.

Mr Maskey: I thank Mr Agnew for giving way. I go back to the point about strategies. We all have an obligation to ensure that there is equality for everybody, and everybody should be at the same level of equality across society. The Member mentioned the issue of a strategy for children with special needs, for example. We all agree that there should be strategies for victims, children and senior citizens. We have an Older People's Commissioner and a Children's Commissioner, and we have strategies on disadvantaged communities and gender equality. We need to have a set of strategies to make sure that all those people who, through no fault of their own, suffer a variety of barriers —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. You are using up the Member's time.

Mr Maskey: We have to develop strategies to take those barriers down.

Mr Agnew: The final thing that I will say is that, yesterday, we unanimously supported Mr Allister's amendment to protect the Christian community's right to worship on a Sunday.

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

Mr Agnew: Can we not have a generous majority in the House to support members of the LGBT community to ensure that they have equality of opportunity?

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make a winding-up speech in this debate. It is always a privilege to be called to speak in the House, in a representative and free democracy. Yesterday morning, the House paid tribute to the late Nelson Mandela, and, since his death, numerous quotes of his have been appearing across the media. One of the quotes that struck me, and probably should strike everyone in the House about this debate, is that, as a free person, we need to respect and enhance the freedom of others. We are, by and large, a free society, but some of our fellow citizens still live in fear of violence, bullying and abuse because of their sexual orientation.

4.45 pm

Ms Ruane: Will the Member take an intervention?

Mr Dickson: I will, very quickly.

Ms Ruane: It is in support of your motion. I would just like to thank you for tabling the motion. Does the Member agree with me that the House could send a big, strong message to the LGBT community on international Human

Rights Day by unanimously supporting the motion? Thanks for allowing the intervention.

Mr Dickson: I wholeheartedly agree. Many in the LGBT community face difficulties in employment, housing and health. They look to the House for leadership. They look to all Benches for leadership, but they have been sadly let down today by at least one group in the House.

They look to OFMDFM for a strategy, but the Chair of the Committee told us of his frustration at trying to draw that out from the Department. To some of us, that comes as little surprise. Members rightly raised the issue of the length of time that they have waited for responses from OFMDFM. In some instances, it is almost farcical. When it comes to a delay in addressing serious issues, it is certainly no laughing matter in the House.

The Assembly will be judged on how it defends the rights of all citizens under the law. People have dignity, value and worth. They are deserving of respect and equality of opportunity. We are all members of a stronger society when people are not denied their rights because of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

Mr Eastwood gave us some statistics on the LGBT community, including that some 85% of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people have considered suicide. The failure to have a strategy to point out that the House values that group of people is an indictment of those who wish to vote against the motion. The fact that 35% have attempted suicide is a further indictment of those who wish to vote against it. The House rightly condemns death threats against its Members. I ask the House to think seriously about the 17% of the LGBT community who have received similar death threats.

Things need to change. One place to start is by making sure that LGBT people are made fully aware of their rights. The Alliance Party supports the development of campaigns to raise awareness of legislative changes and how they have affected income, pension and other statutory rights, such as those relating to employment. The Department for Employment and Learning has funded awareness projects of LGBT issues in the workplace, but there is a clear need for other Ministers and Departments to step up to the mark and play their part.

I would like OFMDFM to work in partnership with the LGBT sector to develop guidance for Departments on how to engage effectively with LGBT people on issues that affect them directly. I would like greater efforts made to provide the necessary support to enable individuals and groups to respond to consultations. OFMDFM has a responsibility to develop, update and review research to ensure that shortfalls are identified and addressed. I am quite sure that that would form part of a strategy, yet, after seven years, we do not have one. Raising awareness of issues affecting LGBT people will be an essential part of any strategy. However, we cannot raise awareness if we do not have a strategy. Awareness on its own is insufficient.

LGBT people continue to experience violence and intimidation. It is widely recognised and documented that such incidents have devastating effects on individuals, their families and society. We need to coordinate better support for those affected and broaden the definition of homophobic abuse to include experience of hate incidents, problems in family relationships and sexual violence.

It is important to consider how messages about physical and sexual violence are framed. Many LGBT people do not report violence because of the pervading message about their sexual orientation or because they are unsure of where to turn for support. One Member referred to the support of the PSNI. I place on record my party's support for the work that the PSNI has done and continues to do with the LGBT community.

More could be done to include same-sex physical and sexual health in education programmes. Homophobic bullying in educational facilities is one of the greatest threats faced by LGBT people. Teachers need to step up to the mark and do more.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: Yes, I will.

Mr Agnew: I will be very brief. I just want to echo Ms Lo's comments on the need to put homophobic bullying specifically into schools' anti-bullying policies. Does the Member share my view on that?

Mr Dickson: I do. School pupils need to be fully educated on what constitutes homophobic bullying and what the consequences are of engaging in that behaviour. Our school staff need to be trained to recognise homophobic and, indeed, any other sort of bullying, so that they are confident to tackle it. Such bullying often has health consequences for people, particularly for their mental health. Experiences of homophobia, stigma, isolation and prejudice all contribute to poor mental health outcomes. That support calls for the development of a campaign of mental health programmes, in partnership with the LGBT community. DHSSPS also needs to work with the sector to, among other things, review training standards and identify where gaps exist in awareness, promote training that specifically identifies risks to that community, and increase capacity for mental health support in the LGBT community.

Those are just a few of the specific issues that require greater attention and that need to be addressed in such a strategy — a strategy that the Committee has been calling for but has not seen a draft of. How shameful is it that, in seven years, the Committee has not even seen a draft proposal? We need to work together. That is why it is so important that we have an overarching strategy on sexual orientation. The serious issues that we have raised today cannot be addressed in a silo mentality. No matter the good work of individual Ministers, this is a cross-cutting issue that cannot be addressed if delay continues.

Incredibly, we heard Members in the House say today that this needs time to be developed. How much longer do we need? It has taken seven years. OFMDFM Ministers have come to the House to tell us that we are getting a strategy — "Wait a few months", "Wait to the end of the year", "Wait to the end of the next year, and you will have it". DUP Ministers have also given us their personal experiences and said how much they personally value this particular strategy. Yet, today, that party is set on a road to oppose the motion and to fail to bring forward such a strategy.

In September 2012, we were told that it was a few months away. Yet in October this year, we were told that the consultation document is still under consideration by the Department. How much longer can this go on? I ask, invite and implore all Members of the House, including those in

the DUP, to change their minds, even at this late moment, and join us in calling on OFMDFM to bring forward a strategy in a reasonably practical time, so that the House can honestly finish this year by achieving something — bringing forward the strategy.

Mr Spratt referred to not turning away people who came to his office. How much better would he have been able to deal with those people if all those strategies had been deployed over the past seven years? Perhaps some of them would never have needed to come near an MLA's office if they had not been bullied in school or if they had not been treated in the ways in which they were treated because of the failure to produce and then — this, of course, is the final challenge — implement the strategy. I urge support for the motion.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 48; Noes 30.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lunn and Mr McCarthy.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Moutray and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes that a sexual orientation strategy was subject to consultation in 2006; further notes that public commitments to publish a document by the end of 2013 were made by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in Together: Building a United Community; expresses its deep concern that this document does not appear to have progressed to date; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to publish a cross-departmental sexual orientation strategy as a matter of priority.

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

Motion made:

*That the Assembly do now adjourn. —
[Mr Deputy Speaker.]*

Adjournment

Ballymena Bus and Train Station

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, and all other Members who are called to speak will have approximately six minutes.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Back in 1993, I first visited Ballymena bus station as a pupil of St Louis Grammar School in the town. At that time, I took the daily bus home to Rasharkin. Ballymena bus station, which is separated from the train station, was very dull and cold, and the waiting area was exposed to the elements. There was chewing gum on the pavement of the waiting area, and it was not very attractive at all.

A couple of months ago, I went back to the same station to get a bus to Portglenone. It was dull, cold, exposed to the elements and not very attractive at all. In fact, nothing had changed since 1993 when I was a pupil. Not only that, but I have done some research, and nothing has changed at the station since 1981-82. Therefore, it is long overdue for the Minister, the Department and Translink to look at this issue.

People in Ballymena who commute get a train or bus daily to go to Coleraine and Antrim on each side of the town, where they see a completely different infrastructure. I have used Coleraine station on a number of occasions. You get off the train and immediately step into an indoor area. There is good standard of toilets, a cafe, Wi-Fi, and you can stay indoors in the waiting area until the bus arrives. It is a 21st century station and is very good indeed.

Similarly, a new facility was opened in Antrim in September. That was a £2.9 million project for a low-carbon station with an enclosed modern waiting area, commercial space for businesses, solar panels, triple glazing, curtain walling and a grey water harvesting system. I am not necessarily asking for all that, but we need to move Ballymena station into the 21st century in some shape or form.

Look at other areas. Newry station was upgraded in 2009. I was recently at Portadown station, where the waiting facilities and what it offers to customers are very similar to Coleraine. If you are from Ballymena and use the station, you look at those other stations and wonder why Ballymena is being left behind, especially when you see the car park filled to the brim in the park-and-ride area.

I have looked at the capital expenditure programme for 2013-14 to 2015-16, and there is no mention of any plans for Ballymena station. There is £0.5 million for Banbridge and £0.5 million for Portadown, as I have said. Refurbishments are planned at Lurgan and many other areas. So, yet again, Ballymena does not seem to be within the scope or vision of Translink at this moment.

I think that it is important that we put this in its present context. We have seen a huge rise in passenger numbers, particularly on the trains, as well as in the number of

bus routes. I congratulate the Minister not only on those figures but on his stance on public transport changes in this city and elsewhere. I think that that sort of attitude is moving in the right direction, and it shows some degree of leadership, which I recognise. He is also moving forward on cycling, but until we see what the cycling unit is going to do, I think that the jury is still out.

So, in the context of that rise in figures, Ballymena station truly sticks out like a sore thumb. Recently, I put an Assembly question for written answer to the Minister on this matter. The answer that came back said that:

“A combined bus and rail station at Ballymena is currently on Translink’s long term outline capital plan”.

So, we need to find out what “long term” means and how we can bring it forward to the short to medium term instead. Ballymena is being left behind in 1982, because it has not been touched since then.

The Minister also needs to bring forward proposals on the park-and-ride facility in Ballymena. I recently had some complaints that the park-and-ride facility is now also at capacity. We have heard about similar problems in Ballymoney and Cullybackey. That is a nice problem to have when your aim is to get more people off the roads and onto the trains and buses, but we have to ensure that the infrastructure is there to deal with that demand.

I have several questions that I would like to ask the Minister. What is the projected cost for this project? What year does Translink project that it is for? When does he personally hope to bring it forward? Will he look at improving the cycling infrastructure in Ballymena from the station to the town centre? Quite often, we look at transport from a silo perspective. We look at improving bus services, train services and the pedestrian and cycling infrastructures, but we do not always link them up. Increasingly, we need to have debates in this place about looking at those kinds of issues in a more joined-up way. If there is going to be more capacity for bicycles on trains and buses, as I have already raised with the Minister, the infrastructure from those stations to town centres and other points of interest need to be in place. That is regardless of where the station is, because this is not only about Ballymena.

Finally, I will ask the Minister this: how did Translink allow the situation to develop where Coleraine and Antrim stations were redeveloped but Ballymena was effectively forgotten about? Ballymena is the middle town and one of the main towns in County Antrim. The station is somewhere that, as I said, I have used for many years. Huge crowds of pedestrians and schoolchildren use it as well. I think that it has immense capacity. I have looked at the maps in the context of expanding the park-and-ride facility and of developing a 21st-century, state-of-the-art station for trains and buses. We really need to see something on paper to show Translink’s plan that says that Ballymena will get a new station in the next few years that will be up to at least the minimum standard of stations in the likes of Coleraine and Antrim.

Mr Frew: I congratulate the Member across the Chamber for securing this Adjournment debate. The topic is very important, and I welcome the opportunity to speak on it this evening.

I agree with everything that the Member said about Ballymena bus and train station. You can distinguish between the two parts. It is clear that there has been investment of sorts, albeit, some would argue, that it has been on superficial optics around the entrance to the station and on the organisational facility at the bus station, including the roundabout, gates, flower-beds and that sort of thing. There has been investment to that degree, but nowhere near enough when it comes to what the Member is pushing for. I support him in that.

It is fair to say that, although it was the forgotten part of the station for many years as most people used buses and trains were neglected, I have seen a shift over the past seven to 10 years. More people commute by train than by bus, or at least, it is increasing and levelling out, so I think that more emphasis must be placed on the track and on the train. I think that we see that, because there once would have been no need for park-and-ride facilities, whereas now, it is clear that we need an increased capacity for that scheme.

5.15 pm

I want to park that point for the moment and go back to the attractiveness of the station. It is fair to say that you will be exposed if you spend any length of time on that platform. I grew up beside the train tracks in Kellswater, where there are two platforms. It is only a townland, but there are two platforms, and I suppose that goes back to the historical strength and usage of the rail system in our country. Of course, there was much more. There were tracks in Kells heading out to the coast, but it was something of a dying mode of transport until recently when it changed and transformed. There has to be more emphasis put on and more investment placed in the train station in Ballymena, but not only at the station. I had the opportunity to use the train, and I always have a regret that, while we try our very best to make our towns attractive from the road networks, you only have to travel on a train to sometimes see the ugly side of a town. That is the case in Ballymena at the present time.

There are areas, such as that formally known as the Ballymena constructions area on Queen Street, and places in the inner areas of our town where there is devastation and in which massive investment is needed. One other is the Ladysmith Terrace project; we are trying to get funding into that area. Again, individuals in some parties are not so keen, but it is very important that those areas are brought up to a more attractive standard. I know that the Minister for Regional Development cannot be held responsible for that, but if there is anything that he can do trackside to enhance the attractiveness of these areas coming into the town, I think that it would help sell the town. Once you get to the station and see the ugliness of it, some people may just want to jump back on the train and sail on by. That is something that we want to try to stop. We want people to come to Ballymena, shop in Ballymena, feel its attractiveness and want to spend money there.

The park-and-ride scheme is very important. At the minute, it is maxed out. If you go there after 8.00 am, you will not get a parking space, and there are at least 15 or 20 cars on the Princes Street side of the area that could be parked there all day as someone uses the train. That is not healthy. If you speak to some of the residents of

Princes Street, they will tell you that it is not healthy. It is not helping the situation when pensioners have to park out on Princes Street and walk the long distances to the train station or to the platform heading in either direction. It is very important that that be looked at. If we cannot get investment unless it is a long-term strategy for the future, I think that the Minister should look at increasing the capacity of the park-and-ride scheme in the immediate future. That in itself will enhance the train station and entice people to use the train as opposed to using the bus or their private car, which we are all trying to reduce in any way we can.

Those are the main issues that I see at the present time. We need to improve the service. I have written to the Minister about the frequency of timetabled services and the carriages at peak times. He has responded positively to that, through Translink and Northern Ireland Railways. You can see where the pressure has been applied. The demand was there for increased capacity and frequency and for more carriages at peak times.

I commend today's debate to the Minister. I ask him to look seriously at making a major investment in Ballymena train and bus station, which has been neglected over the years.

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for introducing this debate. It is, of course, the last of this term, which shows the importance of Ballymena bus and train station. The Member for North Antrim who spoke first said that he was using the station in 1993. I was there around the same time, Daithí, and I do not remember you being about our stop.

Mr McKay referred to the numbers. He paid tribute to this Minister's leadership in the move towards public transport. As a wee bit of research for today's debate, I looked into the footfall through Ballymena station. It was 484,000 in 2010-11, 525,000 in 2011-12, and 572,000 in 2012-13. That is an increase of nearly 100,000 in the number of people going through that station in three years. That is a recognition of the Minister's drive for people to use public transport. This debate is important to making sure that the people of Ballymena make full use of the public transport facility. We can work towards hitting the Minister's target of 80 million.

From talking to some Translink employees, I am aware that Ballymena has now moved into its top 10 busiest stations. It is only right and fair that that footfall and usage is complemented with a station upgrade. Mr McKay talked about Antrim station. It took a £3 million or £4 million project to get it to that stage. We do not want sticking plasters. There are easy fixes that Translink could look at. The permanent ticket booth in the station could be replaced rather than having the man walking up and down selling tickets on foot. The heated waiting area was referred to earlier. That heater is more like a barbecue heater than a proper heating system for clients who are waiting to get on the train. There are steps that can be taken. Every Member in the Chamber tonight — we are all from North Antrim — would like to see further expenditure and improvement in the Ballymena station.

One Member mentioned the Minister's response to a request that I made. With the increased use of the public transport coming from Londonderry and Coleraine to Belfast, especially in the festive period, there was no room on the trains when they got the length of Ballymena. Even people getting on in Ballymoney, including elderly

and disabled people, were having difficulties there. When that was raised with the Minister, he got in contact with Translink, which responded very quickly by putting on extra carriages leading up to the festive period. That was welcomed at that time.

Much has been made about how you get people onto trains and whether it is about putting in flower-beds on the way into stations. I think that it is about making the thing easy. I do not think that the aesthetics of a train station will get people onto trains. It is about making people want to get on a train and making it feasible, practical and worth their while economically.

The park-and-ride facilities were mentioned earlier. Ballymena has a major problem with its park-and-ride facility. However, that could be improved with further works on various lines and at different stations such as Cullybackey and Ballymoney. I know that work on the Cullybackey park-and-ride facility is ongoing. A greater project of work could be established to ease the pressures on Ballymena.

I spent eight years using Ballymena station. I have used it a couple of times since to get the train and the bus. It is not a pleasant place to start a journey or to get on and off. Any improvements and a major upgrade to the standard of Antrim station would be very welcome. I do not want to pre-empt the Minister, but, given the Translink statistics, I would be confident in saying that he could commit — I hope that he will — to upgrading Ballymena station and moving it further up the list. He responded well to pressures in north Antrim with the work that he brought forward on the A26.

Any work involving Translink will come down to finances.

I am sure that, if the Member who secured the Adjournment debate and the Member who was second to speak can apply pressure to OFMDFM and DFP to ensure that the Minister for Regional Development receives the appropriate support and funding, this could proceed.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for bringing the issue to the Assembly. I apologise to the Minister if I am not in the House for his reply to the debate, but I have to give a radio interview.

I enjoy using the train in particular because it gives a sense of independence and allows you to do things in the morning rather than being stuck behind a wheel. The Minister knows — I have raised the issue with him — that the difficulty arises when you get into Belfast in particular, and the connection to here or other places is not as it should be. Connectivity is an issue for people who use the Ballymena train. After 6.00 pm, connections with the rest of the services in the area are not what they should be. Investment has been made, and we need to address the issue of how people make their choice of how to travel.

We all need to take a step back and remember the name John Spellar. He held the post that is now held by Minister Kennedy. I remember going to a seminar in Cookstown after being elected in 2001, and John Spellar was there on behalf of the Department. DRD's long-term strategy for the railway line was to close it north of Ballymena. It was called non-core, which is Civil Service-speak for, "We do not need it. It is not valuable". Are we not glad, despite all the deficiencies of this place and all the challenges that it brings, that the return of the devolved institutions to

Northern Ireland has secured the line north of Ballymena to Londonderry and, secondly, got the infrastructure and capital investment in the new trains and in the line that was and is being improved. That is a good place to start.

There is a sense of improvement when we compare the new trains with the old class C trains that ran to Ballymoney or Ballymena. The doors did not close properly, a draught ran up the middle of the train, the windows did not close properly and passengers were cold, but at least there was a food carriage so that people were able to get a cup of coffee. You cannot get that in the new trains, but they are a vast improvement on what we had. Now, the infrastructure needs to be improved. The park-and-ride facility improvements in Ballymena and Ballymoney are to be welcomed, but they need to be commensurate with the increase in the passenger traffic using the train. I recommend that the Minister continue his focus on ensuring that the rail network in Northern Ireland, particularly from Ballymena to Ballymoney, is maintained, enhanced and improved.

The Member for North Antrim Mr Swann referred to taking the pressure off Ballymena. The introduction of a facility at Cullybackey would be an enhancement. For some time, we have been involved in trying to get Translink and the Department to move on a business case because, if the right number of parking places were available at Cullybackey, people would be able to use that facility instead of having to travel to Ballymena.

The ongoing issue of how disabled people access trains is not specific to Ballymena; it also applies to Ballymoney. The Member referred to the running of additional trains. We still had an issue a couple of weeks ago, when a group came from Armoy. We had made arrangements with Translink for facilities to be made available for senior citizens, but that arrangement did not work, and a number of people felt very disappointed about the way in which they had been treated. That is disappointing. We need to look seriously at the way in which disabled people have access to the facilities, because they need to be assured that they have equal access to the provision in our trains.

I am glad that the final debate in the Chamber today is about north Antrim and Ballymena. It is about a success story, but it is a success story that we should build on. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say, what investment plans he has and what capital plans he has. I have no doubt that it will be a good news story that the people of Ballymena and the north Antrim area can appreciate and accept over the festive season.

5.30 pm

Mr D McIlveen: I thank Mr McKay for bringing the matter to the House this evening. I think that it is a very appropriate time, as we approach the end of the year, to have this debate.

One of the key positives about Ballymena, particularly as a shopping town, is twofold. It has almost the perfect mix of independent retailers and the large multiples that everybody would expect to see in any thriving town or city. However, taking it a step further, all the shops, including the two shopping centres, are accessible within a square mile. That makes Ballymena an extremely attractive town for shoppers not only from Ballymena but from outside.

I will do the unthinkable and start by dealing with the positives that exist in the current network. Bearing in mind what I have just said about the attractiveness of Ballymena as a town in which to shop, an elderly person who makes use of their free bus pass or train pass can get on to a train or bus in Belfast and travel up to Ballymena bus station. An exceptionally good town service exists in the town, so they can step off one bus or train and on to another bus and find themselves in the centre of the town, where all of the shops are within a radius of a mile. If a mile is too much, they can stop for a cup of coffee or whatever on the way. All of that is very good. We have to make sure that we exploit that and use it to its absolute maximum. Therefore, I find myself in total agreement with my colleague Mr Frew: first impressions are very important. Mr McKay commented on the cleanliness, lighting and general feel and appearance of the train station and bus station in Ballymena. They definitely leave a lot to be desired. Therefore, it is timely and appropriate that we should look at that.

It is disappointing. Before I came to the House, I used the train station frequently when I had meetings in Belfast and was going down from my business in Ballymena. I used it regularly. A lot of work went on there, I think, two to three years ago. Perhaps then would have been the time to look at having some of these works carried out. Of course, I accept that that was under a different Minister, but an opportunity to get something else done was missed when the contractors were already on site. However, we are where we are, and we need to bring the train station and bus station into the 21st century.

The point has been well made. One word can sum up what has brought us to where we are with this bus and train station: overuse. It is a very well used station. We welcome that and, of course, that will have a knock-on effect on cleanliness and parking, which has already been mentioned. I dare to say that there is not a week goes past that I am not contacted by some of the residents, particularly from the Upper Princes Street area, complaining, quite justifiably, about the almost abandonment of cars in their area. There is no space in the park-and-ride facility now; it has completely outgrown the space for which it was obviously intended. Many people who live in the area, particularly old-age pensioners, have contacted me because they are concerned about the fact that they have found themselves almost blocked in by cars. Therefore, the expansion of the parking facility is a significant part of what will need to be done at the station.

In some ways, Mr Storey has stolen my thunder a little bit because there is a solution three and a half miles north-west of Ballymena station at Cullybackey. The village station there serves a considerable number of the population of that part of north Antrim and is well used. However, the parking arrangements there are horrific. In fact, they are virtually non-existent. To add insult to injury, there is a huge piece of ground owned by Translink, which would serve well into the first hundreds of cars. However, in its wisdom, Translink or whoever it was, at an earlier stage, shut off that piece of ground by effectively selling off a bit in between, which is now in use by a business as a going concern. Translink has assured me that the park-and-ride facility in Cullybackey is high on its priority list. I ask the Minister to continue to work with his officials to bring about a solution to the problem of access to the ground owned by Translink. I encourage him to do that.

All the points have been well made. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to all the points raised today.

Mr Allister: Doubtless there has been a significant upsurge in the use of public transport that passes through the station, particularly the trains. We now have a regular problem of oversubscription. The fundamental problem is that we have not seen an upgrade in facilities to match the upsurge in use and we are left with facilities that are way below par in meeting the need. It is regrettable that that is so, and it should spur us on to rectifying it as speedily as possible.

One of the suggestions made to me is that part of the reason why there has not been the coordinated push to upgrade a combined centre is foot-dragging and resistance by the management side of Ulsterbus locally. If that is so, it is very regrettable. A combined facility is needed. I trust that, if there is an issue there, it will be dealt with.

Part of the manifestation of the success of the train usage is, of course, the fact that the park-and-ride facility is now beyond saturation point. It is generating other unwelcome local parking problems. I respectfully suggest that the answer lies closer than Cullybackey. There is a significant site on Princes Street that is presently in the form of a scrap yard. It is my understanding that, on commercial negotiation, it would be available to Translink. That would be an ideal means of extending the park-and-ride facility at Ballymena. It is sufficiently close to be viable and is reasonably sizeable in its opportunity. I trust that that is something that might be looked at with regard to meeting, in the relatively short term, the park-and-ride needs that exist.

There are other issues in the station. The Minister will recall that, some time back, I vexed him with questions about why Translink was reducing staff there and why there was reduction at a time of growth. The number of station staff that there are, particularly at peak times, is something of a problem, as is the lack of services and facilities for users. That is something that Translink embraced in a very short-sighted way without thinking through that, in a rising market, it needed to look at more, not less, provision. That is not helping the customer experience for those using the trains.

The oversubscription of the trains means that coordinating and getting in place the extra carriages that are often needed is also a problem. I am told by staff at the station that there have been incidents when, although the carriages were produced, even though they have had to be brought in the main from Belfast, there was no conductor and the carriages could not be used. A situation can occur where only three carriages are available for passengers who could all but fill six carriages, if you had them. Therefore, the overcrowding is substantial and gets worse as you get to Antrim.

I was told by a conductor that, even this morning, on the 10.00 am service, which is a non-peak service, over 30 people were standing all the way to Belfast, some of whom were going to outpatient appointments at Belfast City Hospital. That is not the sort of facility that we should offer our public transport users.

There are many things that could be done, but we need a substantial upgrade and a new combined bus and train station. We need a significant increase in the park-and-ride capacity, and we need to get to a point where, when

we need extra carriages, we can provide them and man them and, therefore, continue to grow the service. I trust that the Minister will take some of those points on board.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I thank the Member who secured the Adjournment debate and all the Members who have contributed to it. It has been one of the better Adjournment debates in the sequence in which I have been involved. The contributions from Members have been thoughtful, and there has been a recognition of improvements in usage. Our attention should now focus on how we can improve facilities overall for the many thousands of customers who use the services at Ballymena.

I want to acknowledge Mr McKay's contribution. It is fair to note that, given his usage of Ballymoney station, he very fairly recognises that Ballymena has more need at this time. He did a sort of Michael Palin or Michael Portillo tour, comparing facilities at train and bus stations going back some 20 years, but it was useful nonetheless.

There has been capital spend just short of £1 million on Ballymena station within the past two years. However, that is still short of my ambitions for the station. I intend to meet Translink in the coming weeks specifically to further discuss the significant redevelopment of Ballymena station. Mr Swann has invited me to Ballymena to look at the facilities there, and I hope to take up that opportunity and see things on the ground.

5.45 pm

The debate provides me with the opportunity to report to Members on the excellent progress being made to attract more people to public transport — that has been acknowledged, and I welcome that and thank Members for it — and, in particular, the very significant increases in the number of people using train services. Refurbishment at Portadown, Antrim and Bessbrook/Newry railway stations and the introduction of 20 more new trains are good examples of that investment. I am pleased to say that train journeys on the rail network, including Ballymena, are now more comfortable, more reliable and more accessible. I noted the comment by Mr Frew, I think, who was concerned about the aesthetics. Historically, railways were created to serve industrial areas, carrying freight and all of that, and were mostly found beside soccer grounds. If you travel through England, there is a very interesting and fascinating social and sporting history that can be traced through the advent of the railways. Likewise, that is a feature of railways in Northern Ireland and in Ireland generally.

We also accept that fare levels in Northern Ireland remain low and that passengers recognise the savings that can be made by using public transport. I hope to have further positive news on that front soon. Passenger numbers have already increased on the Coleraine to Belfast line, including at Ballymena. Indeed, right across the railway network there have been significant increases in the number of people using train services. Numbers travelling by train are up by nearly a million for the first seven months of this year compared with the same period last year, which is truly remarkable progress. Over 750,000 of that increase is in fare-paying passengers. If that increase continues, I expect the annual number of journeys to exceed 14 million.

What message can be taken from that? It is clear that, if we can provide low-cost, quality public transport services and facilities, people will use them. It also shows that the Executive can make a really positive difference to people's lives. It is important that the Executive further endorse my approach to public transport by making capital available for further station improvements, focusing on stations such as Ballymena. The public expect to see train services and facilities enhanced, and they are entitled to expect the best station facilities in order to access improved train services. Indeed, the Great Victoria Street facility must also be improved, and the major new hub plan is already in development. I actively continue to pursue EU funding options to supplement that, with the Enterprise project a priority.

The rail capital budget needs to provide for safety on the lines — user-worked crossings are a key example — general maintenance, improved signalling and trains to carry the number of passengers. Indeed, following representations from Mr Swann and others recently, with the seasonal surge in Christmas shopping and people wanting to use trains, we have been able to increase the number of carriages being used. We must also look at how we can improve railway stations and parking facilities.

Translink currently estimates that between £50 million and £60 million is needed annually to meet its needs before we even consider expanding the network to other parts of Northern Ireland, so there needs to be ongoing and significant further investment over and above the current planned investment. I hope that Members will support me in securing that funding in the next comprehensive spending review and in any other capital budget exercises that are carried out in the near future. I can advise Mr McKay that a combined bus and rail station at Ballymena is currently in Translink's outline capital plan.

Mr Storey: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Kennedy: I am not able to provide him with the timescales that he seeks, but this debate has provided me with the opportunity to advise the Assembly of my aspiration to improve the train and bus facilities in Ballymena. I will look, in turn, to Members as we work with the Executive to make that happen.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for giving way. If this is, as I think he just alluded to, a two-way process — like a train track — and if there is collective agreement in the House on what needs to be done, will he supply to Members for the constituency the bid that DRD will make to the centre in the next monitoring round to address the issues that he has outlined? If he does not make the bid, he cannot really come to us and say, "I need your help and support". Maybe he could clarify what bids he has in line to address this.

Mr Kennedy: The Member will accept that a January monitoring bid is not going to crack this. It is dependent on Translink's proposals and plans and what stage they have been worked up to. More important is the early engagement that I intend to have with Translink to move things forward and to look at the earliest possible timings for making serious improvements, not superficial ones. You can tart things up. You can paint a bit here and plant a shrub there, but people are interested in serious infrastructural improvement to Ballymena station, so I am not going to be tempted to go for a cheap headline and

a cheap way out by saying that a coat of paint and a few flowers will crack it. Clearly, it will not.

In consultation and cooperation with Translink, I will, hopefully, bring forward a scheme, which may also have to include additional park-and-ride facilities. Mr Allister indicated that he sees potential opportunities at other sites. Let us do this properly and strategically, and let us hope that we can make progress.

I am not sure, Mr Deputy Speaker, how much time I am being afforded.

Mr Deputy Speaker: You are almost out of time.

Mr Kennedy: It was very polite of you to say so.

I have taken careful note of the points raised. If there are any specific follow-up questions, we will write to Members. However, with regard to the main thrust of the debate, everybody is on the same side. We want to see improved public transport services, we want to welcome and encourage greater use of trains and buses, particularly as it impacts on Ballymena, and, therefore, we want to see improved facilities at Ballymena station.

Adjourned at 5.53 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 13 January 2014

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matters of the Day

Paul Goggins MP

Mr Speaker: Dr Alasdair McDonnell has been given leave to make a statement, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24, on the death of Paul Goggins MP. If other Members wish to be called to speak, they should rise in their places continually. All Members will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject matter. I remind Members again that no points of order or any other items of business will be taken until we finish this item. If that is clear, I will call Dr Alasdair McDonnell.

Dr McDonnell: It is with sadness that I rise this afternoon before the House. It is extremely appropriate that I offer my sympathy and deepest condolences, and those of my party, to the family of our friend Paul Goggins.

Paul came here some years ago as a junior Minister. Many of us met him as a stranger, but he very quickly became a trusted Minister and, in time, a valued friend to all of us.

Paul was humble. He never sought benefit, glory or publicity for himself. He constantly sought progress on issues that would bring the greatest benefit to those in greatest need; those around him on the margins of society. Perhaps that was driven by the fact that he represented Wythenshawe, one of the biggest housing developments in Britain. He was very aware of poverty and how people struggled on the margins of society.

Paul was a very valued and good Minister here. Beyond that, I was very lucky that, following my election to the House of Commons in May 2005, I got to know Paul even better. Unlike many of those who served here as Ministers, Paul never forgot us as individuals or parties, and he never forgot the interests of the people of Northern Ireland. As I got to know him better, I came to depend on him as a trusted confidant, adviser and reliable friend. We did not agree on everything — that would be exceptional — but differences were always honourably dealt with and respected.

For me, Paul's standing was recognised last week in the House of Commons when political opponents from all parties, from all corners and of all hues, as well as his colleagues in the Labour Party, queued to sing his praises and pay tribute to him and his many outstanding human qualities, of which there were too many for me to go into in detail.

Paul had a deep Christian faith. I say that because he was Christianity in action as he pursued his political career. At the time of his death, he was attempting to arrange a memorial service for my good friend and colleague Eddie McGrady. We will remember Paul in his standing for a long

time. I think of not just his wife and sons and daughter but his elderly father, and of the deep sadness that they are experiencing. I hope that that sadness will be eased somewhat by the recognition and tributes in the House of Commons and our tribute today.

It is my earnest wish that almighty God, in His mercy, will show ultimate mercy to Paul and reward him for his selflessness and tremendous generosity in life. May God bless him.

Mr Campbell: It is with a deep sense of sadness that I stand on behalf of my party to join the honourable Member for South Belfast Mr McDonnell in passing our condolences and sympathy to the family and wife of Paul Goggins MP.

I, as did many others in the House, got to know Paul when he came to Northern Ireland. Many former Northern Ireland Office Ministers will just periodically refer to their time in Northern Ireland. It was not the same with Paul. He had a deep sense of companionship and humanitarianism, and he loved the people of Northern Ireland.

I remember when I met him over the Magilligan prison issue that he made it clear to me that the civil servants with whom he was dealing would prefer to move the prison away from Magilligan, but he said to me, "If you can make a case to retain the prison at Magilligan, you will have me on your side". As I said in the House of Commons last week, he was a man of his word, because we made the case and he took that decision.

He was a humanitarian and a man who always had time to speak to you. I always found the distinction between politics in Northern Ireland and in London to be that many in London do not pass you the time of day, whereas in Northern Ireland we do. However, Paul Goggins was a Northern Ireland man even though he represented Wythenshawe in Manchester, because he would always speak to you. He always had the time of day to stand and talk and ask about Northern Ireland.

We pass on our condolences to his wife and family. He will be deeply and sadly missed.

Mr McGimpsey: On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I join Members in expressing our sincere sympathy and condolences to Paul's wife and family.

I first got to know Paul in 2007 when I took over the health brief from him. I found him to be very supportive. In a world used to cynicism, I also found him to be a sincere, genuine and committed politician. There is no doubt that his strong Christian faith and values informed his politics. In that respect, his will be a sad loss for not just the Labour Party

in Manchester but the House of Commons and politics in general.

I took over a number of the health policies that he laid down. There was the Protect Life policy, which was the anti-suicide policy; the smoking ban in public places, which again was Paul's initiative; and the negotiations with him to ensure that the Fire and Rescue Service formed part of the new police training college at Cookstown, allowing him to proceed to that announcement as well. So, in those respects, Paul touched the lives of everybody in Northern Ireland, and his loss is a sad one. On a personal level, I extend our sincere sympathies to his wife and his family.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I rise on behalf of Sinn Féin to express our deepest sympathies to Paul Goggins's family and very close friends.

Like all those who contributed, I met Paul Goggins when he was appointed as a Minister here. I had occasion to work with him at meetings and engagements over a number of years, and I always found him to be very affable and amenable. Obviously, he was a good and skilled political representative, and testimony to that are the universal declarations of support and sympathy that have been expressed across the wider political spectrum. They are testimony to the impartial way in which he did his work and to the way that he treated people with fairness and respect.

My party colleague Martin McGuinness has placed on record our party's sympathy to Paul's family and expressed the fact that it was a great pleasure to work with him. Like others said, we may not have agreed on everything, but we had great respect for him when working with him when he was a Minister. Very often, we were looking at challenging issues, and, as he did with everyone, he gave us the respect that we believed our mandate entitled us to.

My colleague Francie Molloy, on behalf of our group of MPs, made it clear that, as recently as December, he and other colleagues met Paul Goggins and discussed with him issues of common concern, including justice matters, which would have been close to his portfolio when he was here.

Again, a Cheann Comhairle, I place on record our deepest sympathy for Paul's family, friends and colleagues. He will be missed deeply from the wider political arena.

Mr Ford: On behalf of my colleagues, I add our sympathy to the wife, family and colleagues of Paul Goggins MP.

He was described almost universally in tributes in the House of Commons last week as "a gentleman". However, that does not convey everything that there was about Paul, because he cared deeply about his constituents and about those who were suffering in difficult economic circumstances. Indeed, his previous work as a social worker and as director of Church Action on Poverty showed where his heart was and where his faith led him to.

He carried that through when he came to be a Minister in Northern Ireland and showed the care that others talked about for the people of this Province, just as he showed it for his own constituents and colleagues. The universal tributes that have been paid to him — in the Commons, by politicians here, in the media, by the two Governments or all those he came across — show that he was a very special person and a very special Minister.

I got to know him particularly well, because he was my ministerial predecessor as Minister of Justice, just as he

was to Michael McGimpsey. In the difficult days leading up to that very significant devolution of powers almost four years ago, he went out of his way to ensure that the Department of Justice and its agencies were ready for devolution. He showed very significant personal kindness to me by informing me of issues that were coming up in the time immediately preceding the devolution of the powers being passed. I am extraordinarily grateful at a personal level for what he did.

Last week, those who are my civil servants and who were also his were deeply shocked. Other Ministers have come and gone, but Paul Goggins is one of the few who will be remembered warmly for what he did not just by those he worked immediately with but by staff across the Department and all the agencies of the justice system. He demonstrated his care for the people of Northern Ireland, even in the period after he left office. I had regular phone calls and text messages from him in which he encouraged me. He spoke regularly to Naomi Long and passed on good messages via her of warmth for the work that was being done in the DOJ, and he gave his encouragement for keeping that work going. So, I am extraordinarily grateful for that level of encouragement from a deeply caring person, and I extend my sympathies to his wife, his children and his family circle.

12.15 pm

Mr Agnew: The Green Party NI extends its deepest sympathies to the family, friends and colleagues of Paul Goggins after his sudden death at the age of just 60. It is clear from today's tributes that he was well respected by politicians across all parties. He was renowned for his work with children, and I know from my work with people in the children's sector in Northern Ireland that they highly regarded him and his commitment to children. Poverty was another key issue for him, which I share. As has been mentioned, he saw poverty in his constituency, and that informed his work in the House of Commons.

Paul Goggins had a very personal style and a genuine approach to politics, which probably contrasted in a lot of ways with what was expected of new Labour politicians. He seemed to offer a warmth that was genuine, honest and in no way orchestrated. As has been mentioned, he was very much a man of faith, and his strong values came through in the work that he did not just as a politician but before that as a social worker, when he experienced at first hand the significant disadvantage faced by many in society.

Paul Goggins was Minister of State for Northern Ireland, and it is often the case that the NIO and its Ministers are accused by one side or the other of being partisan. It is a testament to him that, to the best of my knowledge, that criticism was never levelled at him. Indeed, the warm tributes from all sides of the House show that he worked in Northern Ireland as a fair and honest broker for the common good of the people. Clearly, he was not divisive among politicians or the people, and we should welcome that in Northern Ireland because it is something that we need to focus on.

On behalf of the Green Party NI, I would like to pay a warm tribute to Mr Goggins. I wish his family and friends all the best at this difficult time. Today, I congratulate him on and celebrate his efforts.

Mr McNarry: UKIP wishes to be associated with the kind remarks and tributes that have been genuinely made in the House about the late Paul Goggins. On a personal note, it does not seem all that long ago since I talked to him, and it reminds you of how time passes by. It only remains to say that our thoughts and prayers, as always, are with those who are left behind, and I express genuine thanks for the contribution that Paul Goggins made to the country of Northern Ireland.

Mr Wilson: Gregory Campbell spoke on behalf of our party about Paul Goggins and the role that he played here. Nevertheless, personally, I would like to add to the tributes that have been made and to pass on my condolences to his family.

As has been said, for lots of politicians who come here, it is either a climb up or down the ladder, but the degree of interest that is shown does not sometimes even last during the period when they are here, let alone afterwards. In Paul Goggins, we saw someone who came here, got a genuine love for Northern Ireland and showed it even when he was out of office. I can hardly think of a month that went past in the House of Commons when he did not ask what was happening back home here, and he showed a knowledge of what was happening through the questions that he asked, indicating that he kept up that interest.

It has also been said that a lot of Paul's politics were driven by his faith. He never hid that, although he did not preach it. He took the view that his faith was best shown by his works and by the things that he drove in his political life. Indeed, only last week, I had the opportunity to speak on a Bill in the House of Commons dealing with people who had been affected by exposure to asbestos. Many in his constituency had been affected by that, and, after many long years, a Bill was finally going through the House of Commons. Many of those who spoke were on the Committee and indicated the amount of work that Paul had put into it because it was obviously a big issue for many disadvantaged people in his constituency — those from low-income backgrounds who had been impacted as a result of exposure to asbestos. So, I pay tribute to someone who showed his deep commitment, driven by a personal faith. It was not shallow, as was seen and evidenced by his genuine interest in Northern Ireland.

Sometimes people such as that can, of course, be driven and divisive, as has been said. The Speaker in the House of Commons summed it up when he said that Paul Goggins was Labour to the core but never tribal. That indicates the kind of man he was.

Mrs Cameron: I will add to what both of my colleagues said. The loss of Paul Goggins at such a relatively young age is shocking and terrible for his family and friends. It also leaves politics a poorer place without him.

Paul was a great friend to Northern Ireland. As the tributes to him have shown, he was someone who gained the respect and trust of local representatives of all shades and from all traditions. My husband had the privilege of serving as Paul's private secretary, and, while we miss Paul as a friend, we are proud to have known him, and I know that his family has been touched by all the tributes from Northern Ireland since his death.

First and foremost, Paul was a good man who loved his family and worked tirelessly for people everywhere, whether in Manchester or Northern Ireland. His family specifically asked me to convey Paul's eternal wish that all politicians here continue to build the trust and deliver the future that Paul hoped everyone in Northern Ireland would enjoy. We indeed lost a great man and a dedicated politician, and he will be missed.

Flooding: Impact on Coastal Areas

Mr Speaker: Miss Michelle McIlveen has been given leave to make a statement that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. Other Members who wish to be called should indicate that that is so by rising in their places continually. Members will have up to three minutes in which to speak on the subject. I again warn that no points of order or any other item of business will be brought before the House until this item is dealt with.

Miss M McIlveen: Some coastal parts of Northern Ireland are in recovery mode following last weekend's tidal surge, which was caused by a combination of high tides, low pressure and strong winds. To provide some context, those weather conditions are incredibly rare and were last seen in 1903.

East Belfast was in a particularly precarious position, with many homes there situated below river level. At pre-planning on Thursday, potentially 6,000 homes might have had to be evacuated. In Newtownards, an evacuation of homes around the canal began on Friday, but that was ultimately abandoned as the tide receded. At that stage, it was possible that several hundred homes would have to be abandoned.

Although the impact in Northern Ireland was thankfully not as bad as had first been feared, we did not escape being affected. While we should be thankful that there were no serious injuries or loss of life, we should remember the families in the rest of the United Kingdom who were not so fortunate.

Several homes and businesses at Portaferry in the Strangford constituency were flooded, as was the Saltwater Brig, just outside the village. I am told that one house was flooded twice — on both Friday and Monday. It was devastating for residents and businesses to be faced with such unstoppable forces of nature. The Whitechurch Road, which is the main coastal route between Millisle and Ballywalter, collapsed and I am informed that it could take up to three months to reopen that route. Parts of Portavogie promenade were destroyed. The promenade was reopened last year following significant investment by DARD and Ards Borough Council. Along the Ards peninsula, caravan parks that bring a huge proportion of tourists into the area suffered significant damage as a result of the tidal surge.

I am sure that other Members will give accounts of what happened in their constituencies. While media outlets focused on what might have happened in Belfast, other areas of Northern Ireland were bearing the brunt of a weekend of tidal damage. Some may say that there was an overreaction, but we can never be complacent in these sorts of circumstances. In many places, the difference between catastrophe and not was measured in millimetres and centimetres. I express my party's gratitude for the huge efforts made across Northern Ireland by local councils, Roads Service, the Rivers Agency, the PSNI and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. A number of months ago, the relevant Departments came together to discuss plans for events such as this. The coordination of resource information and delivery last weekend showed the benefit of that planning. Whether it was the delivery of sandbags, the release of information to media outlets or even the phone service, I can only commend all the agencies involved.

In addition, I recognise the selfless efforts of voluntary, community and church organisations that helped in the

provision of facilities and other assistance. It showed just how well the people of Northern Ireland can work together in the face of adversity. That said, it also shows the need for a coordinated civil response programme throughout Northern Ireland like the Belfast model, Belfast Resilience.

In conclusion, I ask for Northern Ireland's coastal defences to be looked at in light of what did happen, and could have happened, to assess whether investment is needed for Northern Ireland to remain as safe as it can be.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members of the three-minute rule in matters of the day. Members will know that I am very reluctant to intervene, especially in matters of the day, which are sometimes very sensitive. They need to understand that, while there may be some latitude, it certainly does not extend to four minutes.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I would like to remind Members of the damage that was done in my area: Cushendun, Cushendall and Waterfoot in the glens area and Carnlough in the east Antrim area. Devastation is not the word for it. It is only because of the quick and prompt action of the emergency services that we were not left with a bigger catastrophe than what we had. I want to congratulate the Roads Service — and the Minister for Regional Development is here today — the Fire and Rescue Service, the PSNI, the councils of Moyle and Larne, and the volunteers who were there to distribute sandbags etc.

The one thing that came out of all of this is that there is a lack of information coming from the coordinated meetings. The information is not getting out to MLAs. We are usually the last ones to find out. I would have been lost, only for the people on the ground telling me what was going on.

We now need to look at our coastal defences, which are hundreds of years old. The sea defence wall in Carnlough, for example, gave way completely. Waves battered down the wall on the coast road. Only for the quick action to shore up that wall again, the coast road would have been closed. At one stage, the village of Carnlough was completely closed because of surging water. In Cushendall, the sea wall has been breached in six places at the beach, and there are cracks in several other places. It is going to cost quite a lot of money to repair that.

An interdepartmental approach is needed. Councils need help to correct the damage that was done. Everyone needs to take a look at our coastal defences because, as I said, they are hundreds of years old. They have stood the test of time up to now, but they are now starting to wilt and crack. We are looking at more disasters in Carnlough especially, as it is right on the sea. The sea wall there was breached and is still lying open today. It has still not been built up again. We need help and guidance on how that wall should be put back up. I ask the Minister, as one of the relevant Ministers, to look at this.

Again, I say a big thanks to all the emergency services and statutory bodies for the help that they gave. Their quick and prompt action averted a disaster. Now that it is all over, we need help, and MLAs must be included.

12.30 pm

Mr Rogers: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to speak about the flooding in the South Down constituency. At the outset, I must commend the work of Down District

Council and Newry and Mourne District Council and the good coordination of the agencies, under the guidance of the PSNI, that were out there working for the benefit of everyone.

Flooding happened right around the coast from Strangford to Newry and in places such as Minerstown Road, the Annalong coastal path and the Greencastle Pier Road. Indeed, the Rostrevor Road in Warrenpoint was closed at one stage. It is no consolation for the people who were flooded, but the saving grace for us in south Down was that there had not been two or three days' torrential rain and the rivers were not in flood. That must be remembered.

I agree with the Members who spoke earlier, and, to move on, two or three things need to happen. Repairs need to be carried out as a matter of urgency. A study needs to be carried out on how we can improve our coastal defences. The various agencies, particularly with many of our rivers being environmentally sensitive areas (ESAs), need to review how we can improve our flood defences to ensure that, when this happens again, we are as well, if not better, prepared.

Mr Nesbitt: I begin by thanking those who rolled up their sleeves in the face of the storm and did what they could to mitigate the anticipated damage two weekends ago. I also give our thanks to those who are currently working to repair the damage that was done, not least in my constituency of Strangford. I am reliably informed that Portavogie witnessed some of the worst weather in a generation. My colleague Councillor Angus Carson, a resident of Portavogie and a former captain in the fishing fleet, said that he had not seen anything like it at the Harbour Road corner of Portavogie in 50 years. Boats rose to the height of the Harbour Road, and that is how close we came to an extremely serious situation there.

Coastal defences are an issue. Civil contingencies and emergency plans have been mentioned. I want to reassure the House that the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has been looking at the issue and has spoken to some who are involved in that area, and, as we stand here this afternoon, we await news on when the Department will come to the Committee for a briefing and a discussion on how we take these matters forward in the coordinated manner that some Members have called for.

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

It is clear from inspecting the damage on the coast in the lower Ards that rock armour is an essential defence, but even at that, it was obvious to me, when visiting the promenade at Portavogie, which one Member has mentioned, that, in those very unusual weather conditions, huge slabs of rock had been lifted right across the promenade and through the wooden fencing. So, they were exceptional circumstances. Where the rock armour was not present, such as at the Portavogie side of Ballyhalbert, the debris on the road was shocking. Indeed, where new defences have been put in — I lobbied the Minister for new defences on the north side of Ballyhalbert — they withstood the high tide and the weather conditions rather well.

As has been mentioned, we have a major problem with the Whitechurch Road to the north of Ballywalter. I congratulate DRD and Roads Service on being on the

ground early the next morning clearing the debris. I understand that it will take many weeks to repair that road. It was not just the damage on the Friday; more damage was done on the Monday. There was also the issue of BT cables, including a fibre-optic cable, which is a very expensive bit of kit. So, care has to be taken to coordinate the repair effort on those 40-odd yards of road.

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

Mr Nesbitt: I pay tribute once again to all who helped to mitigate and repair the damage, and I am sure that the House will not be found wanting in putting things right.

Mr McCarthy: The Alliance Party fully supports the comments made by my Strangford constituency colleague Michelle McLlveen on the very vexing problems that we have experienced recently with flooding and, indeed, the fear of flooding in many areas throughout Northern Ireland. I pay tribute to the Police Service of Northern Ireland for leading all the services at the onset of the gales, storms and excessive rainfall to get help to homeowners in all the districts to prevent distress and disaster. We are very grateful to the Met Office for forecasting the storms, even though they were not as bad as was forecast. Nevertheless, all the agencies, including the councils, pulled out all the stops to serve the community in many ways, particularly in delivering sandbags to those who were in danger at the time.

I am so privileged to live in the Ards peninsula, with water all around us. It is a fantastic area in which to live, but at times, when there are storms and excessive rain, we have real problems. Coastal erosion and land drains being unable to cater for the excessive rainfall is and has been a problem that must be tackled with more investment made before the next storm.

Both sides of the peninsula suffered. The main roads were undermined, and homes and businesses suffered as sea defences were breached. One area along the lough wall was breached by water that entered homes and an old church. The Saltwater Brig — one of the main watering holes in the area — was nearly washed away, which was a disaster. I hope that, in the near future, we can debate my motion, which is down on the list for debate, on coastal erosion and more investment in flood prevention.

Mr McCallister: As colleagues said, we probably witnessed some very difficult weather conditions in many parts of Northern Ireland over the entire Christmas period, including very strong winds and stormy weather that caused a tidal surge along our coast and resulted in huge problems. As my colleague Mr Rogers rightly pointed out, it could have been worse, had there been a combination of very heavy rain and the tidal surge. We were maybe spared the worst of that.

There were difficult issues in places such as Greencastle, which sustained significant damage, as well as the coastal path at Annalong. We have to look at how we can restore and improve those areas. Over the past number of years of severe weather events, we have started a process of learning some of the lessons. This time, the response from the district councils, Roads Service and other government agencies and Departments seemed to be more coordinated, which made a difference to response times, and that is to be commended.

I agree with the comments that this is always going to be a learning experience. We should always evaluate how we respond and see whether we can improve, because these things, sadly, will be a regular occurrence at various times of the year when we get heavy rainfall, winds and tidal surges. When those things combine, they can cause serious problems, serious damage to our infrastructure and serious danger to the citizens whom we serve.

I encourage the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Committee to look at the response and study the evidence on how the response was carried out. Where it has been carried out swiftly and well, we need to build on that and congratulate those involved. Where systems need to be changed, we should not be afraid to question them, look at that and see how we can improve for future events.

Mr Agnew: On behalf of Green Party NI, I thank Michelle McIlveen for bringing this forward today. It is important that we should mark these events to acknowledge to our constituents not just that we are aware of what is going on and the difficulties they face when flooding events happen but that we realise that these freak weather events, as we sometimes call them, or extreme weather events are not freak any more. This is becoming a pattern, and it is clear to anyone who experiences these events — people are aware that they are happening more often — that climate change is happening. Although some in the Chamber would like to bury their head in the sandbags and, indeed, continue to bury their constituents in sandbags, we have to be proactive.

I add to the tributes paid to the emergency services and council workers, who have stepped up their game and are learning from flooding experiences, but we need to help them in the Chamber and at Executive level by taking proactive measures to prevent such weather events causing flooding in people's homes. We must introduce climate adaptation strategies. Every piece of evidence suggests that we will face more extreme weather, so we need to improve our coastal defences and reinforce our river banks. We need a climate Bill to ensure that we do that strategically and coherently.

I pay tribute to all those who braved the storms to serve our constituents, but they sometimes do so in spite of the work that we do in the Assembly rather than with the help of it. It is now time for us to work together to produce a climate mitigation and adaptation strategy.

Mr Douglas: I thank my colleague Michelle McIlveen for raising this important issue. In east Belfast, we had the potential for major flooding. In fact, some people said that it was a potential disaster, a view with which I concur. Some have said that maybe there was a bit of an over-reaction. I was there with the First Minister, Councillor Gavin Robinson and my colleague Robin Newton at the height of the surge, when it was millimetres from spilling over into possibly thousands of homes in east Belfast.

I concur with what has been said already about the statutory agencies and the emergency services and the excellent job that they did, spearheaded by the PSNI, which was excellent and was on the ground literally 24 hours a day over the period. I also pay tribute to Belfast City Council for the work that its officials did. However, it was much more than just the agencies involved. I was very proud of the community response in east Belfast. People came together. I remember seeing my colleague Robin

Newton hawking sandbags up and down the street. I think that his back has not been too good since then. Seriously, however, the community response was so encouraging. We have had our difficulties in east Belfast over the years, but it was good to see so many community organisations, local residents, churches and other organisations come together to avert the crisis, and it definitely was a crisis.

I am also encouraged by the fact that schemes are now under way in east Belfast to alleviate flooding. We have the Connswater Community Greenway scheme — a £40 million scheme — working in tandem with the Rivers Agency on a flood alleviation scheme in Sydenham, the area that had the potential for major flooding. Hopefully, that will be implemented within the next year. The other day, I was at Orangefield Park, where we have had major problems with flooding causing major difficulties for local residents. There is a major scheme there that is diverting the river away from the homes of local residents. Some of them have had to move out, never to move back in again. I pay tribute to the various agencies and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their co-ordination.

Mr Newton: I echo in many ways the words of my party colleagues Michelle McIlveen and, from my constituency, Sammy Douglas. I pay tribute to Belfast City Council for its role in the work leading up to what might have been the largest disaster that east Belfast had ever witnessed — at one stage, there was talk of 6,000 homes potentially being flooded — for the work that it did in bringing together all the emergency response teams and, indeed, for the further step that it has taken to form an emergency and severe weather working group that will be in place permanently and hopefully do constructive work over the coming years.

12.45 pm

I agree with Sammy about the response from the community and the statutory bodies. In particular, I pay tribute to the Lagan rescue team, which, in the most atrocious conditions, particularly on the Saturday, was out in the cold and wet. They were there all day in Inverary Community Centre, where they unloaded sandbags from the vehicles arriving and, indeed, loaded sandbags into the cars of individual members. Indeed, I pay tribute to the other statutory agencies that toured the area depositing sandbags for people who felt under threat and putting them at their door. There was a tremendous feeling of a community coming together with the statutory bodies to address a potentially major crisis in the area.

To finish, I pay tribute to the Connswater greenway project and to the fact that a flood alleviation scheme is built into it. However, it is critical that nothing happens that in any way impedes that scheme going forward. People who are sitting on the riverbank facing potential flooding will demand that this be at least one measure —

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

Mr Newton: — that is put in place. I call on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to ensure that the work is completed satisfactorily and to a high standard.

Mr Wilson: I also pay tribute to those who worked in very hazardous conditions during the weather conditions that we experienced over the period of the recess. I thought that we might have got through this discussion without any

mention of global warming, especially given that America, which we were told about five years ago would see no snow ever again, is now gripped in arctic conditions. Those who went to see the polar cap melting in Antarctica got trapped in the encroaching ice, so I thought that we might have escaped any reference to global warming, but I think that the Green Party maybe cannot leave this alone.

The one thing that we do know is that, because of the patterns that we have, people now live in areas that are more vulnerable to extreme weather conditions. They live in floodplains, and we have more industry etc close to the coast. That means that, whenever there is freak weather, more people are affected, so it becomes a bigger issue. We have seen some of the very vulnerable areas during the conditions that we have experienced over the past couple of weeks. Those areas have been vulnerable now for some years, and the likes of Cushendall and Carnlough have experienced flooding over the past number of years. I hope that, having identified the vulnerable areas, the Minister for Regional Development will make bids to get short-term measures in place, as capital moneys may well be available in the monitoring round coming up soon. I hope that a longer-term capital strategy will look at where those vulnerable areas are to ensure that more permanent work is carried out so that the fears that people have had to live with and, indeed, the experiences that they had to live with in the past number of years will be alleviated.

Assembly Business

Extension of Sitting

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

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 13 January 2014 be extended to no later than 9.00 pm. — [Mr P Ramsey.]

Ministerial Statements

Apprenticeships: Interim Report

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

Today, I am announcing my proposals for the future of apprenticeships in Northern Ireland. I believe that they have the potential to radically reform and improve our skills and training landscape. Last year, I launched major reviews of apprenticeships and youth training. Today marks the publication of the interim report on the review of apprenticeships and the launch of a public consultation on its proposals. Shortly, we will announce the interim outcome of the review of youth training, and I will make a similar statement to the Assembly in that regard.

There is very clear necessity for the reviews. Rebalancing and rebuilding the economy is the Executive's top priority. In achieving those goals, we must recognise that our main asset is our people. It is on the basis of their talents and skills that we will transform the economy, increase employment and social mobility, raise productivity and compete globally. It is my job to ensure that we have a pipeline of appropriately skilled people so that our economy can operate at maximum efficiency. That involves making sure that current and potential employers have access to the skilled employees that they require and providing people, particularly young people, with the opportunity to secure and sustain meaningful employment. Arising from that is an ongoing imperative to closely match supply and demand for skills, bring people closer to the labour market and increase economic participation.

Our skills strategy, 'Success through Skills – Transforming Futures', demonstrates clearly that the economy will require a significant increase in higher skills. For example, by 2020, around half of our workforce will need to be trained to level 4 or above. Although we have an overarching requirement to deliver a greater volume of higher-level skills, including in STEM areas, it is clear that there is a range of pathways to secure that outcome, including the traditional university route and, increasingly, through apprenticeships at higher levels. It is clear to me that some of the most successful economies in the world, judged by both productivity and employment, have well-developed professional and technical training systems with highly respected apprenticeship programmes. In order to compete, it is vital that Northern Ireland also has in place a strong and efficient route for the delivery of high-level professional and technical skills.

The concept of an apprenticeship remains reasonably familiar in Northern Ireland. However, it is overly associated either with a long-lost age or, in today's terms, with a narrow range of occupations. Shortly, I will set out how we propose to transform the concept of apprenticeships locally to capture the opportunities of the modern, knowledge-based economy. First, it is important to understand in greater detail the rationale for change.

Although the current model for apprenticeships in Northern Ireland — ApprenticeshipsNI — has served us well, it needs to be transformed to meet the needs of the economy now and in the future. The current model is limited in a number of ways. Firstly, current provision is almost entirely focused on levels 2 and 3, with two thirds of apprenticeships at level 2, which is around GCSE level. In the past couple of years, we have begun

to pilot some apprenticeships at higher levels. The present offering is, therefore, increasingly out of step with the needs of the modern economy. In addition, there is almost no provision in the public sector, and many of the growth and professional sectors do not engage in or offer apprenticeship opportunities. Furthermore, there are few progression routes available to apprentices. As a consequence, the training offer is not able to compete with higher education alternatives.

Secondly, in many cases, the main relationship is between the apprentice and the provider of off-the-job training. Therefore, the employer becomes a passive partner who takes on an apprentice but is not engaged sufficiently in training or in the outcome of the programme. That results in the off-the-job training being less valuable to the employer and the apprentice losing out because there is insufficient integration of what he or she learns off the job and the skills that they use in work. In addition, the qualifications landscape is complicated, and changes are slow to take effect.

Thirdly, access to information regarding the benefits and opportunities of apprenticeships from the perspective of the employer and the potential apprentice is, at best, imperfect. That leads to low participation rates by businesses and individuals.

Over the past year, much work has taken place, leading to the findings set out in the interim report. My team has engaged in significant analysis of our economy and the practices, experiences and outcomes in other jurisdictions. It is an evidence-based report.

At the outset of the review, I established an expert panel, and the work has benefited from its views. I am very grateful for the advice provided by its members, which is reflected in the report's proposals. I am grateful also for the advice provided by a wide range of other key stakeholders, which has helped to inform the findings of the review. It was obtained through a series of stakeholder forums and a call for submissions.

I also thank the Committee for Employment and Learning and other Members of the Assembly for their comments and views over the past number of months; those have further shaped our thinking. The Committee will have further opportunities to provide comment on the formal proposals.

In our vision for the future of Northern Ireland's apprenticeship system, it will deliver highly skilled apprentices in areas of economic importance for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Apprenticeships will be highly sought after by young people and recognised as a key route into many professional and technical occupations. They will be held in the same high esteem as the traditional format of higher education. In essence, quality, breadth, progression and portability will form the blueprint of Northern Ireland's apprenticeships of the future, delivering skills excellence and recognised nationally and internationally as the gold standard.

In total, the review is making 32 proposals for the future of apprenticeships. They can be grouped into four categories: the components of an apprenticeship; increasing participation; the roles of the key players; and ensuring quality. First of all, an apprenticeship will be defined as a system of learning, irrespective of branding. It is accepted that different sectors may wish to use different terminology to describe their on-the-job-training. Instead,

an apprenticeship will be recognised by government if it contains a number of key components.

An apprenticeship will be for a new employee or, in the case of an existing employee, a new job role. Perhaps most significantly, an apprenticeship will commence at professional and technical level 3 or higher. This represents a major shift in the balance of focus towards intermediate and higher-level skills. The rationale for the change is strong and reflects the evolving skills needs in our economy and the need to make an apprenticeship something that people can aspire to. The proposal also needs to be read in conjunction with the review of youth training, which will provide revamped provision at level 2. I want to emphasise that we envisage that there will be an increasing number of apprenticeships offered beyond the current cap at level 3. Indeed, under our new plans, apprenticeships will be possible at any level up to and including level 8, which is PhD level. An apprenticeship will be for a minimum duration of two years. That will ensure a degree of rigour to training and will distinguish it from other forms of in-work training. An apprenticeship will involve a breadth of training beyond the specific needs of a job. When compared to other work-based learning systems, it is the combination of on-the-job and off-the-job training through a programme of learning, formal assessment and recognised certification that differentiates apprenticeships. An apprenticeship will be designed to enable individuals to progress into higher professional or technical training or on to a more traditional academic pathway. It is important that apprenticeships are framed with those progression routes in mind. I will return to that aspect shortly. Collectively, these commitments will constitute the core components of an apprenticeship in Northern Ireland.

A number of underpinning elements will support the core components. Apprenticeships will have a single award or qualification for each occupation at each level. The need for simplification of the qualifications was a consistent message that we received, in particular from employers. Apprenticeships will be open to everyone irrespective of age but with a primary focus on young people aged between 16 and 24. This is something that my team and I have reflected on.

Given levels of youth unemployment, there is a particularly strong rationale to focus exclusively on young people, but, after consideration, we believe that we should provide flexibility in the system to reflect the realities of career changes and the growth in lifelong learning.

1.00 pm

Apprenticeships will support progression beyond the initial apprenticeship through a variety of pathways, including to higher-level apprenticeships and to further and higher education. It should be understood that apprenticeships do not exist in isolation from the wider training and education system, and, indeed, that they should facilitate access to higher-level technical or professional training and to more traditional academic pathways.

Apprenticeship awards and qualifications will facilitate portability within a sector and mobility within the wider economy. Apprenticeships are not about training for a specific job. The training should involve a breadth of skills that should service an entire sector and assist with an appropriately trained individual having transferable skills relevant across the economy.

Measures will be put in place to support individuals to make the transition into apprenticeships at level 3. While apprenticeships will be readily accessible for those with GCSEs, A levels and, potentially, degrees, we will work to ensure that additional support is provided for others to achieve the required level 2 entry requirements so that they can access apprenticeships. Furthermore, in recognition of the shift of apprenticeships to level 3, the review of youth training will examine current provision at level 2, including simplifying the offer and providing clear progression pathways to an apprenticeship, employment or further and higher education.

International opportunities for placements and exchanges will also be important for our future apprentices. That will give apprenticeships enhanced status. We are working with the European Commission on the European alliance for apprenticeships and the new ERASMUS+ programme to facilitate that.

Although we can design a gold standard system of apprenticeships, it will be effective only if employers create opportunities and, in turn, people — particularly our young people — take up those opportunities. For the first time in Northern Ireland, a central service will be introduced to market, promote and support apprenticeship provision by engaging with employers and potential participants. The central service will provide advice and guidance for employers and potential apprentices on the range of support and training available.

An online service will be introduced to advertise apprenticeship vacancies across all sectors. This will make information matching much more efficient.

Applications for apprenticeship places will be supported via a UCAS-style portal to inform young people of the range of opportunities available. This offers the potential to create a better parity of esteem between alternative pathways.

Apprenticeships will be offered in a wide range of professional and technical areas, reflecting the needs of the Northern Ireland economy. In particular, it is worth stressing the potential to expand the apprenticeship system into the professions, noting my earlier point around flexibility on branding. That could see apprenticeships being applied to positions that have recently been filled almost exclusively by graduates. Higher-level apprenticeships may, therefore, exist alongside graduate entry, providing an alternative pathway and perhaps, at times, a more efficient and effective pathway to the same destination.

Furthermore, apprenticeships will be expanded to include professional and technical occupations in the public sector. With our public sector likely to constitute a major source of employment for the foreseeable future, it is only right that it offers such opportunities. In turn, I am confident that the on-the-job training offered in apprenticeships will be very appropriate for aspects of the public sector, and I am pleased that there have been preliminary expressions of interest in that regard.

A range of incentives will be considered to support employers, particularly SMEs and microbusinesses, to participate in apprenticeships. There are a number of models to be explored, including an upfront payment on apprentice start-up and achievement; collective group arrangements; larger employers overtraining for their sectors; and public-private partnerships.

The Careers Service will provide impartial pre-entry advice to all young people considering the apprenticeship pathway. It will intervene at key transition points for young people to provide impartial advice and guidance. The forthcoming joint review of careers between my Department and the Department of Education will be instrumental.

We also need to encourage our young people, their parents and other key influencers and schools to see apprenticeships as a really valuable way of securing an excellent career, getting qualifications while gaining experience and progressing through a route that has equal value and prestige to the university pathway. To secure that, we must be bold, innovative and creative to break new ground.

Apprenticeships will include a range of measures to support participation by both genders across occupations. Although the participation levels in the current ApprenticeshipsNI programme are reasonably even at present, there is significant gender segmentation. Female participation in some of the key growth sectors is particularly low. That was the subject of a general statement that I made on gender issues in June 2013. We will put in place a range of measures to encourage balanced gender participation.

The most successful apprenticeship systems are based on a partnership between the key stakeholders. Partnership and an economy-driven approach will become a key feature of the apprenticeship model. An advisory group based around a partnership comprising employers, trade unions and the providers of off-the-job training will be established to advise government at a strategic level on apprenticeship provision, including oversight, consideration of supply and demand issues, devising new support mechanisms and balancing the specific training needed for a role against the broader, more transferable skills required for an apprenticeship. That partnership approach will better ensure an economy-led approach. It is important that employer participation is facilitated in every respect of the design and delivery of apprenticeships.

At a sectoral level, partnership groupings, including representatives from employers, sector skills councils or equivalent bodies and providers of off-the-job training and government, will be established to design and agree apprenticeship provision, including the content of qualifications that will be taken, and to advise on any exceptions to the standard model. That sectoral-focused partnership is essential to create a model that is flexible and responsive to the needs of the economy. Recognising that the economy and demand can often be unpredictable, resulting in skills and job mismatches, I will also put in place a system to estimate demand and inform supply. That annual skills barometer approach will facilitate the development of any interventions to increase participation levels.

Quality, achievement and progression will be key measures of success for apprenticeship provision. Employers and industry specialists, in partnership with other key stakeholders, will inform the content, duration and assessment of each apprenticeship, including tests at the end of the training period. That will provide for employers and apprentices a guarantee of the quality of the training and education they have received. Apprenticeship training will be subject to rigorous

assurance by inspectors who have up-to-date experience in the professional and technical areas, supported by industry experts to ensure that each apprenticeship meets the needs of employers and apprentices.

To support the quality of teaching and learning, criteria will be set for all teaching staff that will establish minimum qualification requirements in the subject area and related pedagogy, as well as significant and up-to-date experience in industry. Stringent conditions will be established for continuous professional development to ensure that those delivering training remain experts in their field. Only the providers that meet the minimum quality standards, as determined by the Department, will be funded to deliver apprenticeship training.

From today, the proposals will be subject to a 12-week consultation period. Feedback received through the process will be used to inform our final policy for apprenticeships, which will be published in the early summer of 2014. In parallel with that consultation, some further exploratory work will be taken forward by my Department. First, we will seek to develop a financial model to determine how best to resource the new model of apprenticeships and support employers. There is an existing budget for ApprenticeshipsNI, which can be reallocated. In the past, the European social fund has been used to support apprenticeships locally. It is my intention that the fund will provide greater support over the 2014-2020 period. Furthermore, we will examine how best to engage with the HMRC model announced by the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer on 5 December 2013.

Secondly, we will seek to pilot a central service to market, promote and support apprenticeships for employers and individuals. I have already outlined the purpose of such a service. It will bring a degree of cohesion to apprenticeships locally that hitherto has been lacking. Thirdly, we will develop a demand estimation model. That will assist us to better plan for future provision. Fourthly, we will seek to support SMEs, with the aim of encouraging them to participate in apprenticeships. I have already set out some of the options in that regard, and we will now proceed to explore them with employers and to develop and test their effectiveness. Finally, we will proceed to open up the public sector to apprenticeships and to work further on opening up higher-level apprenticeships.

The review articulates a blueprint for the future of apprenticeships in Northern Ireland. I believe that it will transform the supply of skills, particularly at higher levels for employers and, at the same time, inspire all who participate in an apprenticeship programme. This will be a system that works in the interests of the individual, the employer and the economy. It will be driven by strategic partnership, put employers at its very heart, better match supply with demand, afford opportunities in a much wider range of occupations and offer flexible progression pathways across vocational and professional education and training. These proposals will help to develop a modern, knowledge-based economy and will play a huge role in transforming our economic fortunes.

I commend the proposals to the Assembly.

Mr Swann (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I thank the Minister for his timely statement on tackling apprenticeships. It is timely when it is taken into consideration that the number

of young people entering apprenticeships through ApprenticeshipsNI has fallen from 8,948 in 2010-11 to 6,345 in 2011-12; a drop of 30%. Will the Minister explain how he will set about changing parents' mindsets about apprenticeships? That is where we need to change the perception.

I am glad that he has taken on a number of recommendations from the Employment and Learning Committee's inquiry into careers; they are smattered throughout the statement, and I welcome that. Will the Minister expand on the detail of the incentives and what funding or support will be available to SMEs? They are the backbone of our economy. How will he encourage them to take on an apprentice? Could the model being put forward by HMRC threaten the work that he intends to do?

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair of the Committee for his comments. I will address his points in the order in which he made them. First, he is right to identify that we are seeing a dip in the number of apprentices in recent years. That tells me that the current model is not working. It is not being pitched at the right level of skills pressures that employers are seeing. There may well be other issues that we need to consider. However, as we look to the future, it is important that we do not simply focus on numbers progressing through the apprenticeship frameworks. Ultimately, this has to be judged on the impact on the economy and whether employers are satisfied that they are getting the skilled young people, in particular, that they require to fill their job vacancies and to drive their businesses forward. It will also be judged on whether, as a result, productivity is increasing in our economy and whether individuals are finding and sustaining secure employment. Obviously, numbers are a secondary issue in that regard, and it is important that we maximise the number of people who are availing themselves of that training. We do look to other countries around Europe that have a much bigger footprint in apprenticeships than we have in Northern Ireland.

The Chair is right to stress the fact that parents are a key influencer in decision-making in this regard as in others. That leads neatly into the review of careers. I recognise and thank the Committee for its efforts on the report that it published just before Christmas. Efforts are being made between my Department and the Department of Education to finalise the terms of reference for the formal review of careers, and I want to discuss those with the Committee before they are formally launched. That will be an incredibly important piece of work that will inform the future needs of our economy. It is a much broader issue than simply apprentices, although there is considerable overlap in that area.

Finally, the Chair is also right to make reference to the need for incentives, particularly for SMEs. It is important to recognise that our economy is disproportionately made up of SMEs and microbusinesses in Northern Ireland. Around the world, SMEs are, generally speaking, less willing to engage in apprenticeships than larger businesses. That is a reality for all of us. That said, we must do as much as we can to encourage them to participate in apprenticeships. We are looking at a number of different schemes. We will explore and study those in greater detail and, indeed, pilot some of them. Those would involve some sort of group training systems. We can also look to see whether there are some financial incentives that we could give directly

to those employers and how we phase the payments and also whether larger employers could be encouraged to over-train for sectors, particularly those in their own supply chains.

1.15 pm

It is important that we go out and sell apprenticeships to SMEs in particular. There is the notion that taking on an apprentice is a burden; that it is something that you may wish to do for the common good but is of little benefit to businesses. However, it is important to stress that taking on an apprentice is good for the productivity of a business directly. There will be a cost to business for perhaps the first year, but, over the lifespan of an apprenticeship — bear in mind that we are stressing a minimum duration of two years — an apprenticeship will pay for itself through the benefits accrued by the business. There are international studies that prove that.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his statement. It is quite lengthy and very appropriate for today. In it, he said:

“Apprenticeship training will be subject to rigorous assurance by inspectors who have up-to-date experience in the professional and technical areas”.

Will he elaborate a little on how those inspectors will maintain that up-to-date technical experience, given that that was a problem in past training programmes?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his comments. It is important that we stress the importance of quality throughout all of this, for the employers, who will know that they are getting a product that will work for them, and for the individuals who go through the training, who will know that they have the skills that are relevant not just to their employer but the wider sector.

We will attain the outcome that the Member referred to through a smooth transition of people into and out of industry. It is important that those who engage in the assessments and the quality assurance of apprenticeships have direct, current experience of the industries in which they operate. It is also important that we take on board the views of employers, use employers where we can for the benefit of the wider sectors and create opportunities for placements for those who are involved in that work so that they can spend time in industry. That is something that we have begun to do over the past 12 months in the Careers Service, where careers advisers now spend some time, perhaps a week at a time, in different industries to get a feel for how they operate. I wish to see that type of approach expanded as we take forward our new beginning for apprenticeships.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the very detailed statement to the House. I wish the Department well in bringing forward the proposals and look forward to engagement in Committee.

Minister, as we move towards a more intermediate and higher-level form of apprenticeships, are you not concerned that we will leave behind marginalised and vulnerable groups, particularly disabled young people? You recently spoke to an all-party group on disability. It is of concern to the parents of disabled young people that their children could be left further behind by the new strategy.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his comments and appreciate fully the point that he makes. Let me make a number of comments in response. First, it is important that my Department, the Executive and the Assembly realise that we have a full spectrum of interventions to deal with people and their different aptitudes and skill levels across the board.

As far as the review is concerned, we need to develop apprenticeships with skills at intermediate and higher levels. It is about trying to ensure that we address the real pressure points in industry. It is also about ensuring that the apprenticeship brand is something that people can aspire to and that is viewed as being of real value and something that people want to do, for which they see a real sense of achievement in getting there. I should make the point that higher-level and intermediate-level apprenticeships can be offered to those with disabilities. People with disabilities can operate at every skill level across our economy and particular support will be made available to those with disabilities who wish to engage in an apprenticeship, as it is to those who are in work.

There are other interventions at different skill levels that we need to be conscious of. We are conducting a parallel review of youth training, which, in particular, will look at the level 2 provision for those who have the potential to move on to an apprenticeship, into work or into further and higher education. I will come back to the Assembly to report further on that in the coming months. Beyond that, we have the Pathways to Success strategy, which deals with those who are not in education, employment or training and, in particular, those who face barriers. That strategy is working well. I appreciate that that is a major problem in this society, as it is in other societies, and that there is always more that we can do. Looking to the future, I can say that the United Youth programme will offer opportunities for us to reassess and better corral many of the existing interventions, bring new interventions to the table and provide a more cohesive approach to how we deal with our young people.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Bronwyn McGahan. Thank you for your understanding.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I welcome the Minister's statement. As he is aware, I have raised through correspondence the fact that, due to differences in funding, young people above the age of 18 face greater difficulties in finding employment as apprentices compared with 16- and 17-year-olds. How does the Minister propose to change that anomaly through the review?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her comments. As I indicated, we will be doing some more detailed work on a funding model. The key point is that we want to eradicate the anomalies in the present system that sometimes work against the interests of employers and young people entering into apprenticeships. We want to ensure that it is a properly demand-led system where employers are in the driving seat.

We stress that, hopefully, this is primarily for young people, because there is a strong rationale for addressing youth unemployment. If you look around Europe, you will see that it is often those societies that invest most in vocational training and apprenticeships that have the lowest levels of youth unemployment. That is no coincidence. Equally, we are making the point that we are not going to wrap it

up in bureaucracy or make it so inflexible that it makes it more difficult for older apprentices. As we move to level 3 and above, we should bear in mind that it is likely that we are going to get entry at higher levels from people who are looking to change careers or who are engaging in lifelong learning. People will enter into apprenticeships at different stages. It will no longer be simply something that is entered into by people who are 16 or 18. So, it is important that, as we design the very particular funding rules for this, we respect that flexibility.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the action that the Minister has taken to radically reform and improve apprenticeships for trainees and employees across Northern Ireland. Will he give some examples of how he will judge the success of the new system of apprenticeships?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. He is right to stress that this is a radical change to apprenticeships in Northern Ireland. It is perhaps the most radical change for several decades. It has been very clear to me over the past number of years that there is a need to refresh apprenticeships and to have radical innovation. We have seen frustration expressed both by employers and young people who have not had the progression routes in vocational training as was the case in the past.

The ultimate judge of this is whether we can improve our economy and whether a revised system of apprenticeships will make a major contribution to that transformation. It is about increasing productivity and about increasing employment levels. Through a better and more efficient matching of the supply of and demand for skills, we will achieve that type of outcome. It is not as simple a process as a headcount of those going through apprenticeships. Nonetheless, that is important, and we want to radically upscale the number of people who are going through apprenticeships. However, ultimately you have to judge it on the impact that it has on turning our economy around. We want to be noted around the world as an exemplar of how people are trained to engage in the modern knowledge-based economy.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister and welcome his statement. I look forward to further opportunities through the Committee to discuss the detail.

Minister, you stated that there is currently almost no provision in the public sector and that many of the growth and professional sectors do not engage with or offer apprenticeship opportunities. I think that you indicated later that there may be some provisional interest. Do you have any more detail on how that is going to change?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. He is right to identify some of the new areas where this can be of relevance. In addition to branching into the public sector, we are keen to see the model advance into the traditional professions. This model of apprenticeships will be highly relevant, particularly to the new innovative areas in our economy — for example, the creative industries and information technology — as well as to developing the areas that are perhaps more associated with apprenticeships, such as engineering and construction.

The Member will be aware that, when it comes to the public sector, my Department, alongside the Department of Finance and Personnel, will pilot a level 3 ICT apprenticeship. It is probably premature to give precise examples of where that can go in other areas, as those

discussions are still at a very early stage. However, there have been some indications, particularly in some of the more technical areas in the public sector, that the model of on-the-job training would be highly relevant and appropriate.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. We will be making a detailed submission to the consultation, and we encourage any other interested groups to do so. It is good to see that the Minister is colour-coordinated; I have never seen brighter yellow paper in my life. It must be election paper or something.

Will the Minister outline the potential economic benefits to society of making higher-level apprenticeships more accessible and available to people across community?

Dr Farry: I am glad to respond to that. I hope that my yellow tie is not too bright for Mr Flanagan. He is right to identify that the new form of apprenticeship, particularly higher-level apprenticeships, will be an enabler of growth and transformation of our economy.

Apprenticeships will be good for raising productivity. There will be a real productivity gain for individual businesses and organisations, and the economy as a whole. It should also lead to better outcomes in employment and sustaining employment because we will see better matching of supply and demand, and better addressing of required skills in our economy. It is a source of huge frustration when we have ongoing problems with unemployment but, at the same time, hear stories of employers saying that they have vacancies that they cannot fill and for which they cannot find the people. That tells us that something is not quite right in our education and training system. Often, we may well be educating people to a very high standard but not in the right areas. Sometimes, we educate people to a very good level of competence in their areas but they lack the necessary skills for employability. By having a form of apprenticeship in place, particularly at higher levels, we will address those problems with a combination of the on- and off-the-job training.

It is also worth stressing that apprenticeships will provide very good outcomes in social mobility and breaking down traditional structures. They are a way for people who perhaps come from more difficult backgrounds to get a foot on the ladder and progress through an organisation or a particular sector. In the past, there have been many examples of people who had their first opportunity as apprentices progressing and becoming leaders in society. We have tended to lose that over the past number of decades but I hope that, through this revised approach, we can begin to recapture that.

Mr Ross: The Minister talked about the establishment of a new central service. I wonder whether he can give the House a little more information on the role of such a service. How much will it cost the public purse? Will it be created within his Department or sit outside it? Will that body be responsible for offering financial incentives to employers who are willing to take on apprentices?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. This is a consultation and we are open to responses, particularly on how best the proposals can be taken forward. At this stage, we envisage a service provided within the scope of my Department. It would provide a range of functions, including managing the financial incentives that are

available. The rationale is that, at the moment, we have a very fragmented system for the matching of opportunities with those who are interested in taking them up. It is somewhat haphazard. We need to overcome that and have a much more efficient form of information exchange. That is why the central service is such an important aspect.

Where exactly the service would fit within the Department and what other synergies we can make with employer interfaces is a wider debate that we also wish to take forward. The Member may wish to look at the National Apprenticeship Service in England as an example of how that type of brokerage service can make a difference. However, it is not a case of us seeking to replicate that. We want to do something bespoke in Northern Ireland that opens up new opportunities. It is worth highlighting one area in particular: the development of a portal for young people. We describe that in the document as a “UCAS style portal”. It does not necessarily need to be a part of UCAS itself; it may well be free-standing. However, we think it important that young people have almost a parity of pathway when they are at the stage of choosing options for future careers, rather than a situation where university entry is the primary goal to which they aspire in school and then, if they are not successful, they look around for other options, perhaps including apprenticeships.

The opportunities for apprentices sit alongside opportunities to go to university at the age of 18. Young people can make a balanced choice and there is genuine parity of esteem between those pathways, both leading potentially to lucrative, well-paid careers and sustainable jobs.

1.30 pm

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement and answers. I broadly welcome the potential of the initiative to enhance the status of apprenticeships and increase opportunities for social mobility. Will the Minister agree that additional support to enable the most marginalised and disadvantaged young people to achieve the required entry level is fundamental to its success?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question and concur with his points. We are building what will be, hopefully, a very new and effective model from level 3 and beyond, but we need to ensure that we can facilitate a pathway for young people who are accessing apprenticeships. For some, this will become a natural choice as they progress successfully through school, after GCSEs or A levels.

There will also be young people who maybe have come across barriers in their development and have not succeeded in their academic abilities so far regarding the basic entry requirements for apprenticeships. We need to put support in place for them. The review of youth training will put a new system of traineeship at level 2 in place. We are developing that model as we speak, and I hope to make announcements on that in the near future.

There will be stakeholder events later this month when we will engage with the community and voluntary sector and young people, to get a feel for how we can best shape that future provision. We also have to bear in mind the more fundamental interventions that we have to make to deal with people who fall into the NEET category to get them on to the first rung of the ladder. That is why the Pathways

to Success strategy and whatever successors come along through United Youth are so important.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his statement. Today's apprenticeships and, indeed, tomorrow's apprenticeships will need a high level of skills and knowledge. Minister, can you assure me that young people entering an apprenticeship will have a sufficient level of STEM knowledge? If there is a shortfall, what has been put in place to ensure that they get the STEM qualification as well?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. It will be for the individual sectors, as part of the sectoral partnership, to set the precise entry qualifications for particular apprenticeship frameworks that may be offered. He is right to stress that this will be about higher standards across the board and that apprenticeships will be highly relevant to sectors that require a strong knowledge of STEM.

Knowledge of STEM subjects can be gained in a number of ways. There is the more academic route, in which people will achieve qualifications through school, further education college or university. Indeed, graduates can go on to become apprentices under the new scheme that we are setting out today. The on-the-job and off-the-job training that accompanies that will also be about giving people real knowledge in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The off-the-job training will be rigorous. It is not there simply for the particular job but to provide people with the portability and breadth of training that will allow them to function across an entire sector and have skills that are transferable to other parts of the economy.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's statement. He briefly mentioned the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. Will he go into more detail on that and the discussions he has had with EU counterparts on that, particularly about learning from countries that are much more advanced in the level and uptake of apprenticeships?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question and comments. Learning from Europe was a core component of the work that we conducted over the past year. We have made a number of visits — to Switzerland and Germany, to name but two — and much closer to home in other parts of these islands. The Germanic countries in particular have very successful forms of apprenticeships, and, while we have sought to learn as much as we can from them, we have to be realistic about our ability to replicate what are often deep cultural attitudes towards vocational training that have built up in those societies over decades. Nonetheless, they have very heavily influenced our thinking, and, as he goes through the formal report, the Member will see that being referenced on a consistent basis.

The European Union can directly assist us with two components. The first is the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, which has come in over the past 12 months. That is something that local employers or sectors — for example, the sector skills councils — can sign up to, and we will encourage them to do so. That will provide opportunities for exchanges of information and best practice. There are also potential opportunities under ERASMUS+. Members may well be familiar with ERASMUS, which facilitates exchanges for university students in the context of Europe. ERASMUS+ will be much more flexible and will allow for potential apprentices to go on placements and learn from best practice in other jurisdictions, which they can bring back to Northern Ireland

and enrich the companies and organisations in which they get their main training. I have had discussions with the European Commission and expressed our keen interest in using ERASMUS in that manner, and hopefully that will develop.

It is also worth stressing that the OECD, which is not strictly part of the European Union but is another international organisation, has commented favourably on the need for the review to take place in Northern Ireland. The OECD can also offer a wealth of information on best practice, and we will take further soundings from them on the details that we have announced today.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his statement, which I welcome. In light of the high levels of unemployment across Europe, particularly among the young people whom we describe as “hard to reach”, has he come across any models through which countries have been successful in targeting those young people, who very often leave school without any qualifications?

Dr Farry: I am grateful for the Member’s comments. He is right to make the general comment that we have issues with youth unemployment across Europe. As we drill down beneath that, we will see a correlation between the countries with the lowest youth unemployment, particularly the Germanic and Nordic countries, and the areas where vocational training is most developed. Those societies engage with young people across a range of skill levels and aptitudes, so there are lessons to be learned. As we take forward the review of youth training over the coming months, we will go back to Europe. We are taking advice on the best exemplars for engaging with marginalised young people and bringing them into training opportunities. I will be glad to report back in more detail on our findings in that regard over the coming months.

Mr Allister: If someone was looking for a straightforward and streamlined apprenticeship scheme, the verbosity and complexity of the Minister’s statement might not give much encouragement. The point that struck me most about his statement was the distinct absence of any thread of coordination with our education system. Is it not the case that, where apprenticeships in other countries are a huge success, there is a very distinct sync between education preparing the kids and streaming them into apprenticeships? The statement seems to have very little to say about how we should shape our education system.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has asked his question.

Dr Farry: It is easy to engage in cheap shots around what is a fairly detailed statement in which we set out and explain in considerable detail a substantial change in practice on apprenticeships. Like a number of other Members, Mr Allister has been in touch with me to complain about the complexities of the current system, so I would have thought that, like others, he would be keen to welcome a change that would lead to a simpler approach both for individuals who want to be apprentices and employers who want to avail themselves of opportunities.

This statement relates to my responsibilities as Minister for Employment and Learning as regards the apprenticeship offer. As the statement makes clear, this is very much a level 3-and-above commitment that we are making today, and it will be subject to consultation.

Of course, we have issues with regard to our education system. Those are well known to Members and have been the subject of numerous debates in the past and, no doubt, will be in the future. I hope that what we have announced today and what will be confirmed in due course after the public consultation will help to inform and influence wider discussions on the future of our education system. It is important that we consider alternative pathways for our young people and recognise that there is a range of academic and vocational pathways available. We can move away from labelling people as successes or failures as a result of things that have happened to them in the early days of their education. It is important that all young people understand that there is a range of opportunities out there for them, and it is important that the education system, in turn, orientates itself, as, I believe, it is beginning to do, to ensure that that takes place.

Minister O’Dowd and I have a joint responsibility for a strategy for 14- to 19-year-olds, and, no doubt, what I am doing in respect of apprenticeships and what he is doing in respect of his reforms of the education system will come together, and we will look to see how we can best coordinate and ensure that we have a seamless transition pathway for young people.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his statement. He announced that an online service would be introduced to advertise apprenticeship vacancies. I cannot understand why that was not being done. Nevertheless, recently, I met a business, and its major concern was that it had to go to places such as Poland to find welders. So, there seems to be an incredible mismatch between vacancies and apprenticeships. That does not surprise me. Will the Minister indicate what practical measures will be taken to match up vacancies in businesses with apprenticeships to make sure that locals who are unemployed get those opportunities?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. It raises a number of issues. First of all, we want to see the most efficient system of matching vacancies to those who wish to avail themselves of opportunities. We also need to ensure that more employers offer apprenticeship opportunities and that young people are encouraged to think about becoming an apprentice. At times, however, businesses will need other forms of support for their training. They will need training for people who are in their companies already who need to refresh some of their skills. Also, at times, they will need support to recruit individuals, perhaps sometimes for more short-term-type contracts.

There is a particular issue with welding, which came to the fore around a very recent contract that Harland and Wolff secured. That was a victim of the very short-term nature of the work and the timescales involved with that, which, sometimes, does not lend itself readily to the longer- or medium-term planning that is involved with apprenticeships. So, it is important that we invest in a range of interventions. Not everything will go into our apprenticeship system in the future. We will continue with other forms of support for employers and training, and, hopefully, through that, we will capture all the diverse needs of employers to ensure that they capture as many of those skill opportunities and pressures that they have.

Common Agricultural Policy 2014-2020: EU Budget Allocation

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has indicated that she wishes to make a statement. Members will be aware that Question Time commences at 2.00 pm. Should time permit, we will commence questions to the Minister on her statement prior to Question Time, but we must break for Question Time at 2.00 pm. Questions to the Minister on her statement will continue after questions for urgent oral answer.

1.45 pm

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am grateful for the opportunity to make a statement regarding the EU CAP funds available to the North of Ireland for pillar 1 to fund direct payments to farmers and for pillar 2 to fund rural development.

The recent CAP agreement allows each European member state to transfer up to 15% of its direct payment allocation to rural development or, alternatively, up to 25% of its rural development allocation to direct payments. Under EU rules, member states were required to notify the European Commission of their decision by 31 December 2013. The next and only opportunity for review of this decision will be by 1 August 2017 for the 2018 and 2019 years.

Members will be aware that, on 20 December 2013, I made a written ministerial statement to advise of my decision to transfer 7% of the direct payment allocation to the rural development allocation. I intended that this transfer rate of 7% for the years 2014 to 2019 would provide an additional €137.5 million approximately to the overall rural development programme (RDP) budget to help support investment in our agrifood industry, protection of the environment and the economic and social development of our rural areas.

The reform of the CAP and the development and delivery of the RDP are absolute core elements of my remit as Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. These are key policy and operational roles for my Department. The question of whether there should be a transfer between the pillars of the CAP was part of my Department's consultation about proposals for the 2014-2020 rural development programme. There was considerable interest in the consultation, with 175 responses received and over 400 people attending my Department's public events.

The responses to the public consultation reflected a number of differing views on the issue, which was not unexpected and, in many ways, no different from the conflicting stakeholder views that Ministers deal with daily. Almost 50% of the respondents to the consultation question supported a transfer of funds to rural development. Half of those in favour supported a transfer of the maximum of 15%. Approximately one third of the respondents were opposed to any transfer. Subsequently, on 18 December, the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) stated that it expected that there should be a transfer to fund certain farming-related measures and that it should be less than 9%, which was the rate that had been applied in 2011 and 2012.

In making my decision about a transfer, I considered very carefully the range of opinions received from stakeholders during the public consultation. As an important element of the consultation, I also sought views from my Executive colleagues and their respective Departments on the specific issue of the pillar 1 to pillar 2 transfer. I looked closely at how any transfer would affect the budget available to both direct payments and rural development and the sources of funding — EU and Executive — that could be available to fund a future rural development programme. I considered the impact that any funding decision would have on our agrifood sector, our environment and our wider rural communities. I believe that the rate of 7% represents a good balance between the many different priorities that I, as Minister, have to consider.

The EU allocation available to the North of Ireland from the 2014-2020 EU budget for direct payments is €2.3 billion. The EU allocation available for rural development over the same period is €227.4 million, which is approximately 10% of the direct payments budget. At member state level, that is the lowest EU rural development allocation per hectare of all 28 states and represents a reduction of 14% in current terms when compared with the 2013 level extrapolated over the seven years of the new programme. So, it is disappointing that, once again, we have the lowest EU allocation for rural development in Europe. Furthermore, as I have just highlighted, our EU rural development allocation has been reduced significantly as a result of the cuts to the CAP budget arising from the EU budget negotiations. This means that it was even more important for us to identify additional sources of funding to provide strategic support to our farming, environmental and rural sectors.

I believe that I am best placed to balance the numerous and often very complex issues that play into decisions on funding. Taking account of legal advice, I believe that I had the authority to take the decision to transfer 7% of the direct payment funds. I had taken previous similar decisions — in particular, the decision in 2012 not to apply an additional year of voluntary modulation — without any of those decisions being challenged. Indeed, my predecessor's decisions on the transfer of funds from direct payments to rural development were not challenged. All such transferred funds were used to benefit only farmers and farm families.

As Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, I have dealt with all aspects of CAP reform over two and a half years, as did my predecessor during her tenure as Minister. Evidently, a view has emerged over the past few weeks from some Ministers that my decision to set a transfer rate of 7% should be challenged. It is disappointing that this view was not communicated through the interdepartmental consultation, which specifically sought views from Ministers on whether funds should be transferred. The Finance Minister made no comments on any aspect of my proposals for the future rural development programme, including on the funding issues that were clearly set out in the consultation document.

Following my decision, which I advised of on 20 December, the Finance Minister instigated legal action on the basis that the issue should have been referred to the Executive. The court held that the issue met the criterion of being significant or controversial and outside

the Programme for Government. In fact, the judgement was that the issue was significant and controversial. Following the court judgement, I immediately proposed a transfer of 7% of the direct payments funds to the Executive by urgent procedure. That required the approval of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. I clearly explained the pressing timescale for a decision and that the decision was required no later than 30 December. I did not receive approval for my decision by that deadline, and, consequently, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) was advised that Executive agreement had not been reached. The result was the notification of a zero rate of transfer for the North of Ireland to the EU Commission by DEFRA. In comparison, Wales has notified a transfer rate of 15%, which is worth €288 million; England a rate of 12%, which is worth €1.68 billion; and Scotland a rate of 9.5%, which is worth €332 million. That represents a total additional investment of approximately €2.3 billion in strategically important farming, environmental and rural schemes.

It is extremely disappointing that, as a result of the intervention by the Finance Minister, the North of Ireland will be the only part of the member state where additional investment may not now be available. That risks depriving our farmers, our rural communities and the protection of our environment of much-needed investment.

I have followed with interest the various press statements and interviews from political representatives and stakeholders on this issue and the implementation of the current rural development programme. I would like to take this opportunity to provide Members with factual information on the likely impact of the decision. The current programme is worth in the region of £530 million. Approximately 80% of the programme funds schemes that are aimed directly at farms and farm families, with some 20% directed at broader rural investment.

To supplement the rural development budget allocation in the 2007-2013 period, my predecessor set an average rate of 6%, which provided additional funding for rural development of €118 million. Those funds, known as voluntary modulation, have been used to help fund the less-favoured areas (LFAs) and the agrienvironment schemes. In addition, the transferred funds have fully funded the farm modernisation programme and the farm family options measures, including training, mentoring and Focus Farms. The funds have also been used to assist farm diversification projects.

I will provide Members with some examples of the important beneficial impacts that the modulated funds have had in the current rural development programme. To date, all modulated funds have been directed only to projects that benefit farms and farm families. That includes supporting 58 Focus Farms across the North of Ireland, with, to date, 1,000 visits attended by over 15,000 farmers; training 7,500 farmers in environment management; and training over 4,500 farm family members in information and communication technology (ICT), bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) awareness and farm safety. Some 1,900 farmers have attended BVD training, and that has contributed to 1,734 herd owners joining the eradication scheme and ordering 108,000 tissue tags.

Under the farm modernisation programme, modulated funds totalling over £12.5 million have supported 4,600 farm businesses. When the additional 60% contribution

from farmers is taken into account, that funding has resulted in a total investment of over £30 million in the local economy.

Specifically on the farm diversification measures of axis 3, we have committed funding to some 619 projects, worth £15.8 million. To date, 429 projects have drawn down funding of £10 million. They, in turn, have levered in additional match funding investment of £12 million. That means that, to date, a total of £22 million has been invested in farm diversification, helping to sustain over 400 farm families and provide them with additional income. So far, that investment has seen the creation of new farm diversification businesses such as Harrison's farm shop and restaurant in Greyabbey, which has created more than 10 jobs, and Todd's Leap in Ballygawley, which has created up to 30 jobs. All of that has been achieved through the transfer of modulated funds from pillar 1.

EU policy for rural development is not just about supporting the agriculture and food industry and protecting and enhancing the environment but about promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas. That benefits all rural dwellers, including farmers and their families. That vital support is provided through axis 3 in the current rural development programme.

We continue to make good progress in providing much-needed investment in our rural areas. Axis 3 has committed all its funds across all its measures. Almost 1,800 projects have been completed across all parts of the North, with funding of some £47 million already paid out. When match funding is included, it represents an overall investment of £79 million. That investment has helped to sustain many hard-pressed rural businesses, and, indeed, it has helped to create some new businesses and to expand others, creating over 450 rural jobs, despite the difficult economic climate. For example, Sinton's restaurant in Scarva has, with a small grant, created 18 jobs, and Antrim Hills water has created five jobs with a similar grant.

Axis 3 has also helped 370 community and social economy projects to improve the quality of life for rural dwellers, providing rural communities with shared spaces in which to meet, childcare facilities, employment opportunities and the means to improve their health and fitness. The funding has opened up the rural North to greater numbers of tourists, with axis 3 projects accounting for 121,000 additional tourist visits to our rural areas. The availability of accommodation in rural areas for tourists has increased with the provision of funding for self-catering, camping barns and coaching inns. One hundred projects have been funded. It has allowed rural heritage projects, such as the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland and the Caledon beam engine, to be developed using our rural heritage to provide interesting additions to the rural tourism offering and, at the same time, preserve the local heritage. The Caledon beam engine is the only such engine left in Ireland. Other unique projects, such as the bird sanctuary in Broughshane, have contributed to the increase in tourist visits to rural areas.

Over 198 rural villages across the seven local action group areas in the North have now developed integrated and comprehensive village plans. Indeed, many have initiated some of the capital works associated with the plans. Additionally, through my Department's investment in the next generation broadband project, almost 14,500

rural dwellers and businesses now have a connection to broadband as a result of the axis 3 funding.

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

Those impacts are all very significant, with direct benefits for the farming industry and secondary benefits for the wider rural economy. In comparison, the benefit to farmers of the funds remaining in pillar 1 in the CAP 2014-2020 will depend on individual circumstances and will be affected by the changes brought about by the pillar 1 reforms. On the basis of the current distribution of support, about half of all claimants will each get less than €260 additional a year by not making the transfer.

It is important to develop a rural development programme that balances the needs of all rural sectors and allocates funds accordingly. The EU Commission will base its approval for the next RDP on a robust assessment that sets out clear needs for each sector, what we intend to do to address those needs and the likely impact of funding. The clear outcome of a zero transfer rate is that fewer funds will be available to address those needs.

I am very disappointed with the funding outcome for the North of Ireland. With no transfer of funds being made in the North from pillar 1 to pillar 2, funding in the rural development programme here will potentially be reduced for agrifood competitiveness, the environment and rural development. It is bad news for rural communities, the environment and the agrifood industry in the North of Ireland. It is critical that we review the zero transfer rate at the first opportunity, which will be in August 2017, with a view to increasing the rate and bringing additional investment into the programme for 2018 and 2019. In the absence of any transfer of funds from pillar 1 to pillar 2, I believe that the Executive funding will now have a greater role to play.

As 2017 will be the first chance to make any change to the transfer rate, I will press the Executive to make available funds to bridge the deficit and to support the farming sector, enhance the environment and meet the needs of rural communities. I am also looking at the scope to seek further funding from the Executive to help my Department to deliver on the objectives that have been set out in the Going for Growth strategy for the agrifood industry. A positive response on that from the Executive is now more vital than ever.

My main objective in putting together a balanced package of funding for the next rural development programme is to ensure that we have enough money to further improve the competitiveness of our farm and agrifood businesses, to protect and enhance our environment and countryside and to improve the quality of life in our rural communities. It will be important to look at the funds available and all the priorities for funding. I will consider all that carefully as we finalise the new programme, because I want to ensure a targeted and balanced RDP for the farming sector and rural dwellers.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Members, we must proceed to Question Time at 2.00 pm. We will commence questions on the statement after the questions for urgent oral answer are complete. I ask Members to please take their ease until 2.00 pm.

The business stood suspended.

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Flooding: Coastal

1. **Mr Copeland** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the collaboration between Executive Departments and their agencies during the recent flood warnings. (AQO 5249/11-15)

3. **Mr McCarthy** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the emergency planning in place for flooding. (AQO 5251/11-15)

9. **Mr Douglas** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the Executive's response to the recent flooding crisis. (AQO 5257/11-15)

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 1, 3 and 9 together. The coastal flooding of recent days and the risks associated with it presented an extremely challenging situation for us all, the public and emergency responders alike. It was a great relief that the flooding was not as severe as initial assessments indicated in some areas.

The Executive met on Friday 3 January to assess the risk from coastal flooding and agreed that our Departments and agencies would cooperate fully in the emergency response, which was led by the PSNI. We urged the public not to risk their own safety and to continue to cooperate fully with responders. The PSNI led the multi-agency response, involving 40 organisations, which responded quickly to minimise the risk and impact of the flooding. In all, some 45,000 sandbags were used to protect homes and key infrastructure. That highly effective response reflects the level of preparedness that was in place to deal with a whole range of emergencies, including flooding. Indeed, an exercise to test the multi-agency response to widespread coastal flooding took place as recently as last November.

We will not be complacent but will continue to improve our emergency preparedness through the work of the Civil Contingencies Group (Northern Ireland), led by OFMDFM and that of other groups of key responders. In line with good practice, the PSNI, as the coordinators of the response to the emergency, will conduct a multi-agency debrief to identify learning points, which will be applied to further strengthen our ability to respond to future emergencies.

Mr Copeland: I thank the First Minister for his fulsome answer. I join him in paying tribute to those who were involved in preparing for what could have become a very dangerous and nasty situation. What role was considered for the Civil Contingencies Group? What factors were considered, and what information coloured the eventual outcome and the way in which the response was structured?

Mr P Robinson: First, I join the Member and extend the thanks because, obviously, although a number of Departments and agencies were involved, there was

a very considerable effort at a community level to give assistance. Those involved should be praised for the way in which they rallied round in severe circumstances.

We discussed the triggering of the Civil Contingencies Group (Northern Ireland) when I met the head of the Civil Service, who chairs that group, along with the PSNI. I think that was on the Saturday evening; maybe it was on the Friday evening. We considered at that stage that we would leave it to the call of the police as to whether they felt the risk was sufficiently broadly based around the Province to require that to be done. At that stage, it was determined that most of the requirement would be in the Belfast area, particularly east Belfast, but that there could be patches outside Belfast. As it transpired, some places outside Belfast were hit much more strongly than had been anticipated, but the group was ready to be called. The head of the Civil Service was ready to bring people together and had put them on notice that, should the PSNI require it, the Civil Contingencies Group would be brought together.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the First Minister for his response. I am glad that he recognised that there are places outside east Belfast because, when I was looking for sandbags, I was originally told to go to Inverary Community Centre. Eventually, however, sandbags were sent down to the Ards peninsula, which deserved to have them.

Last week, the Prime Minister informed us that he is spending over £1 billion on coastal erosion, sea defences and flooding. Will the First Minister now commit the Executive to spending whatever it takes to ensure that coastal erosion and flooding will things of the past and will not happen again?

Mr P Robinson: The Executive, of course, are the only body that can commit themselves. I can say that the deputy First Minister and I had a conversation with the head of the Civil Service about how we can make an assessment, because the assessment carried out by the PSNI is on the basis of how the responders acted in the emergency. We need a response regarding what the level of danger of coastal erosion was at various points. That is something that several of our Departments probably need to liaise on, particularly Roads Service, to give us an indicator of what steps are necessary.

We were told that we were dealing with the sort of event that happens once every 200 years; but over the past number of years I seem to have come to the Dispatch Box all too often about events that were supposed to happen only once in every 100 or 200 years. It is very clear, although there might be some people who deny climate change, that there are factors at play that indicate that these will be much more regular events. That being the case, I think we need to look at some more permanent answers to those questions. To me, sandbags are very much of the last century. They did the job and they did it well, but, for people's homes, there are potential ways of looking at whether you can get domestic mechanisms that can seal the doors and stop water coming in, which are much better and quicker to put in place. There is also the issue of whether walls need to be fortified. I hope that that is the kind of response that the deputy First Minister and I will get from the two Departments concerned.

Mr Douglas: I thank the First Minister for his answers so far. I know that he saw the level of flood preparedness in

east Belfast at first hand, but will he outline his view on the local resilience shown throughout the Province?

Mr P Robinson: I think that the responders acted well across the Province. I enter a caveat, because, although I think that very few people will complain about the way the civil contingencies organisations responded in this case, it was a case that we had notice of. We had several weeks of knowledge of it coming about and there was therefore an opportunity for us to be at a better stage of preparedness, unlike when a heavy deluge of rain strikes you overnight and you have to respond immediately and without the immediate preparation.

We need to look at how we can step up the preparation for other kinds of emergency. Belfast, of course, is very well placed, because it has a civil contingency organisation in place that has been running well and has its own structure already set in place. That is not the case in all parts of Northern Ireland. We have an official's report indicating that legislation should be passed in the Assembly to require and place a duty on councils to have that kind of civil contingency planning done. I support that and think that we are going to have to look at it. That should be a lot easier to do with 11 larger councils than with the 26 councils, some of which are very small.

Investment: Asia

2. **Mr G Robinson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on any inward investment from Asia resulting from their recent visit to the area. (AQO 5250/11-15)

14. **Mr McAleer** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their recent visit to Japan. (AQO 5262/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 2 and 14 together.

Our international engagement during the past year has created a number of potential investment opportunities. I make no apology for our continuing commitment to meet all influencers and business representatives in an effort to promote trade, tourism and inward investment in Northern Ireland and to establish university and government links. Visits to Asia last year included China and, more recently, Japan.

We continue to engage with officials from the Chinese Government on a number of projects, including the opening of an office in Beijing later this year. That will be a big step in strengthening the relations between Northern Ireland and China. Once that is established there will be an opportunity to further explore relationships in other parts of China.

When we visited Japan in December, the deputy First Minister and I met Prime Minister Abe and a Senior Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs. Our programme also included meetings with the British and Irish ambassadors to Japan and their trade and investment representatives and a number of Japanese companies that are already established in Northern Ireland. It was particularly rewarding for us to meet again prospective Japanese investors who attended the hugely successful investment conference last October in Belfast. We also hosted a Northern Irish Connections event, where we met a number

of diaspora and Japanese people with an interest in helping the Executive promote their objectives in Japan.

We are confident that this series of meetings will help to strengthen links with the Japanese Government and business sector and increase the potential for new and sustainable sources of foreign direct investment in Northern Ireland. Tangible and very welcome evidence of this was the announcement on 10 December of a new 192-job project at Fujitsu in Londonderry. Northern Ireland has a longstanding and active business relationship with Japan. Major Japanese investors include Fujitsu, Terumo BCT, Japan Tobacco, Ryobi and Canon. Collectively, they employ some 3,000 people across Northern Ireland. The growth and longevity of Japanese investment is testament to the culture and commitment of its companies to sustainable overseas collaboration.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the First Minister for his very detailed answer. What plans do you have to encourage investment and trade over the next year that could benefit areas such as the north-west? I know that you mentioned new jobs that are coming to the north-west, but there are other areas, such as my own, Limavady, that could benefit greatly from new jobs.

Mr P Robinson: I know that Fujitsu is already employing people, so I hope that some people from Limavady can stretch themselves to go to Londonderry to take up some of the jobs that are available as a result of that initiative. The deputy First Minister and I very much operate at the behest of Invest Northern Ireland and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster. We are there to give them support where they think that our presence can give them access to companies and where we can persuade them to look at Northern Ireland more seriously. We have done that consistently over the past number of years, with very positive impact.

I indicated in the immediate answer to the question that we were intending to open an office in Beijing. I hope that not only the deputy First Minister and I but other Ministers will attempt to create links with China, using the base of that office to do so. We of course remain active in the United States and Canada and in the Middle East. We are pushing hard in India and Brazil. The deputy First Minister and I will take any steps that we can to give support.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister more or less answered my question in his final comments. In the short term, what further trips are planned in search of jobs and investment?

Mr P Robinson: As I indicated, we have nothing scheduled beyond going to the United States in March, although I suspect that we will be required to go to Beijing to open the new office. In March, we are being asked by Invest Northern Ireland to extend the St Patrick's Day visit. I think that, this time, we actually get back in time for St Patrick's Day because of the way that the White House has arranged its events. Invest wants us to go to the west coast of the United States and to speak to a number of potential clients there, so that will be the first investment trip that we are likely to have this year.

Mr McKinney: In discussing the October investment conference, the First Minister talked about many of the building blocks in place to take our economy to a higher level. Will the First Minister encourage his party to ensure

that it signs up to one of those major building blocks, the Haass paper?

Mr P Robinson: We will have a very full debate on this issue later on, and I look forward to that. We all recognise that there is a responsibility on the political parties, especially those that are in the Northern Ireland Executive, to fulfil the requirements that are set down in the terms of reference to the panel of parties as they did their work. They were asked to come forward with a report indicating the level of agreement that there was, and I hope that his party will join others in doing that.

2.15 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Givan is not in his place to ask question no 4.

Freedom of Information: OFMDFM

5. Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many freedom of information requests to their Department were not answered within the initial 20 working day time limit, in each of the past three years. (AQO 5253/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: I am pleased to say that things are moving in the right direction. Some might say that they are moving too slowly. Three years ago, 58% of freedom of information requests were answered outside the 20-day time limit. That improved to 56% in 2012 and 35% in 2013. Although that is not satisfactory, it is clear that progress has been made.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the First Minister for his answer. Many of us see that progress as being so slow that it is actually a disgrace. It needs to move as quickly as possible. Freedom of information is a vital part of our democratic system. How many of those freedom of information (FOI) requests were over a year old?

Mr P Robinson: My understanding is that, of those that we have at present, six have not yet been answered. The oldest request goes back to July. It is less than one year old. I do not think that anybody suggests that we should be satisfied with the process. I have to say that it is much more difficult in a Department that has two Ministers because both are required to be satisfied with the response. Indeed, I think that we have probably responded to requests to which we could, quite easily, have refused to respond because of the excessive cost of providing an answer. However, we have sought, where possible, to respond. We have, indeed, put in place improvements to the procedures for and the processing and tracking of FOI requests, which should see that steady progress continuing.

Mr Dallat: Does the First Minister agree that, in addition to answering FOI requests, there is a need to respond to motions that are agreed in the House? I am thinking in particular of two motions which encouraged the recall of the Civic Forum.

Mr P Robinson: I recognise that that is a bit of a stretch of the question on freedom of information. However, I congratulate the Member on being able to stretch it that far and get off with it. The reality is, of course, that the deputy First Minister and I deal with many important issues. We are often out and about in the community, hearing people's real concerns. I have to say that, in all of these years, I

have yet to meet anybody who has pressed me to sort out the Civic Forum.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next Member, I want to point out that the Minister always has the option of not answering a question if he feels that it is completely outside the original question.

Mr P Robinson: I would not do that to the Member.

Sexual Orientation Strategy

6. **Ms Lo** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the commitment in Together: Building a United Community, when they will publish a sexual orientation strategy. (AQO 5254/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer the question.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): As outlined in Together: Building a United Community, we are committed to publishing a sexual orientation strategy. A draft consultation document to inform public consultation on the strategy is currently under consideration in the Department. It will be published when the consultation process has been completed.

Ms Lo: I thank the junior Minister for his brief response. I want to put my question to the First Minister, who is the head of the Department. Is he away? He is not here. Oh, he is here. Sorry. *[Laughter.]* Mr Bell is obstructing my view of the First Minister.

Given the DUP's opposition to the recent motion that called for the strategy to be published as a priority, I ask the Minister directly whether he supports the publication of that strategy. If so, what has he done to speed up the process?

Mr Bell: I thank the honourable lady for her question. I did not realise that I was so big that I would shield other Members. Perhaps, the new year diet will have to kick in.

The sexual orientation strategy was the commitment of the Executive, not just of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Although we led on it, it is the Executive's commitment, under Together: Building a United Community, to publish it. I have met a range of groups in connection with that, as have my officials, and we have listened to the concerns. We have led on other areas: against violence, verbal abuse and attacks on property and homes. We have led on a number of issues that were raised with us during the process. We have also spoken with the groups concerned about what are the best methods for them in the consultation process, what will enable them to give the most fulsome answers and what means of communication, including the use of information technology, will allow for the fullest and most comprehensive level of responses to be brought back with us.

The feedback that I received just a couple of days ago last week from officials directly engaged with a number of groups is that they are very pleased with the way that the communication is going and with where the strategy is at. Under Together: Building a United Community, we are committed to publishing a sexual orientation strategy.

Ms P Bradley: Junior Minister, how will the intended sexual orientation strategy fit within the overall equality context?

Mr Bell: I thank the honourable lady for her question; it is an important one within the overall equality context. OFMDFM has a track record of engaging with and proactively seeking to protect vulnerable groups in our society. We have, through numerous strategies, sought to ensure protection for the whole ambit of section 75 groups, including the age sector, the gender sector, race, disability etc. The sexual orientation strategy will form part of the overall equality suite of services.

Mr Rogers: Minister, what discussions have you had with the Department of Education about addressing the issue of homophobic bullying in schools?

Mr Bell: The initiative in Together: Building a United Community addresses all those matters. We are aware of the situation. We are very clear, in all the discussions that the Executive have had about Together: Building a United Community, that nobody should experience verbal abuse or bullying. There are a range of resources that Mr O'Dowd as Minister of Education can more comprehensively outline in respect of what has happened under his remit and with the anti-bullying strategy, which has been endorsed.

I do not think that any young person should have to experience verbal or physical abuse or damage to their property or possessions. As you know being a distinguished former headmaster, schools have very robust policies in place. We have very clear reporting mechanisms in place, and a number of charities, including Barnardo's and NSPCC, have measures in place. I know that schools in my constituency such as Regent House — I am a governor — have dedicated school counsellors in place, in situ, where young people can report any incident of bullying.

The encouragement that goes out to young people is not to suffer in silence. There are mechanisms in place so that young people will be listened to. There are very robust child protection procedures in place in schools, with dedicated pastoral care teachers, and in social services, should it get to that level, in conjunction with the police to address serious incidents of bullying. The message that goes out to young people is this: talk to somebody in your family, your friends or somebody in authority whom you trust and your concerns will be addressed. There are measures in place to redress any acts of bullying, which should not have occurred in the first place.

Energy Efficiency: Retrofitting

7. **Mr Flanagan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their commitment in the economy and jobs initiative document to bring forward proposals to boost economic activity through the retrofitting of energy efficiency measures into homes. (AQO 5255/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: The Executive's economy and jobs initiative has identified a commitment that OFMDFM should bring forward proposals to boost economic activity through the retrofitting of energy efficient measures in homes. A project team is working with stakeholders and recognised industry experts to identify options that will enable householders to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and help to address the prevalence of

fuel poverty. A market survey is due to begin at the end of January. That will help to determine demand for a range of energy retrofit options and to refine programme design ahead of any proposed programme delivery. Following the market survey, proposals will be prepared for our consideration. It is important that any proposals complement and supplement existing fuel poverty and energy-efficiency initiatives.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer, but I am concerned about the range of experts that has been appointed, given the previous bad advice that was provided to the Social Development Minister on the issue. However, we will wait and see.

How will the retrofit programme tackle the ongoing issue of fuel poverty, which is getting worse instead of improving, as was supposed to be the case?

Mr P Robinson: It is very clear that if measures can be brought forward that will reduce the cost of keeping a home warm, they will help to reduce fuel poverty. I should say that I recognise some scepticism from the earlier part of the Member's supplementary question. In speaking to officials about the issue, I was pleased to hear that real progress is being made on this occasion under the tutelage of the deputy First Minister and me. We are fairly confident that proposals will come out in a very short time.

Mr Spratt: This type of initiative has the potential to be a significant boost to the Northern Ireland economy. Can the First Minister ensure that small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) across Northern Ireland will be able to draw down work from the initiative when it is eventually rolled out?

Mr P Robinson: The Member is absolutely right. Not only will the initiative have an impact on homes that will ensure that there is greater efficiency in energy usage but it will provide much-needed work and therefore expand the number of jobs in the construction industry. Of course, we have to wait until the proposals are brought before us, but I would be very surprised if, as we are dealing with the whole of Northern Ireland, the initiative did not involve a range of companies right across Northern Ireland.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mrs Dolores Kelly for a quick supplementary question.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. How many jobs have been created in socially disadvantaged and excluded communities as a result of the initiative from the First Minister's Department?

Mr P Robinson: We are waiting for the initiative to work its way through. At times, there is a tendency on the part of Members to look at these things through the negative end of the telescope. There is massive potential in the set of proposals to save energy in the Province, thereby reducing the household costs of many people and bringing people out of fuel poverty, and, at the same time, to provide much-needed jobs in the construction sector, where they are most required at present. I ask Members to be supportive of what we are doing. We will, I hope, be able to bring encouraging news before the Assembly within a few months, and I also hope that we will, at that stage, be able to see the outworking of the proposals in a way that will cheer even the Member for Upper Bann.

Haass Talks

8. **Mr McGlone** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the conclusion of the Haass talks. (AQO 5256/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: The panel of parties in the Northern Ireland Executive concluded its discussions on parades, select commemorations and related protests, flags and emblems, and contending with the past on 31 December 2013 without an overall agreement. A draft document was forwarded to the deputy First Minister and me by the chair of the panel, Dr Richard Haass, and the deputy chair, Meghan O'Sullivan. On the same day, we placed it on the Executive's website for wider consideration.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Members, that is the end of the period for listed questions. We will now move to 15 minutes of topical questions. Mr Easton is not in his place, so I call Mr David — oh there he is. Excuse me, Alex.

Mr Easton: Thank you.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: He is not in his usual place.

2.30 pm

Haass Talks

1. **Mr Easton** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the process will move forward following the recent Haass talks. (AQT 521/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: What is required, if we are to move forward in Northern Ireland, is reaching agreement on outstanding issues. The unfortunate element of the Haass process has been that, although we now know what Dr Haass and Professor O'Sullivan believed would gain widespread support from the parties, we do not have itemised the level of agreement that there might be in any of the hundreds of elements of that overall proposal. So, I think that it is necessary for a working group to sit down and to work out where there had been agreement and to identify areas where further work is required. I hope that all the parties are up for that. I know that the Ulster Unionists and the Alliance Party have indicated that they are willing to be part of such a process. I was pleased to see in the House of Commons Dr Alasdair McDonnell indicating that he was willing to be part of that; indeed, he was urging the Secretary of State to be involved in a process that would do precisely that. My party is certainly up for it. So, I hope that, when the party leaders meet tomorrow, they can reach that kind of agreement.

Mr Easton: I thank the First Minister for his answer. Who should chair the next step of the process? Does he envisage Mr Haass returning?

Mr P Robinson: I do not know; there are laws against inhumane treatment, so I am not sure that we would want to push Dr Haass to return. I would certainly be very happy if he were to return, but I suspect that, when he indicated that he was leaving on 31 December, he was not going to go beyond that and that that is his fixed position. I note that the Secretary of State has offered herself as chair for the next phase of the process. Again, I would be quite content with that, but the choice of who chairs it has been left with the five parties collectively. That was how Dr Haass was

appointed. So, I suspect that, if the parties are agreeable to a further phase, they will determine an appropriate chair.

Common Agricultural Policy: Court Action

2. **Mr Hilditch** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they are aware of and would like to comment on the statement made by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to criticise the Minister of Finance and Personnel for taking court action over her failure to bring her decision on the reform of the common agricultural policy to the Executive. (AQT 522/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: I was not in for that part of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development's statement. I came in at the tail end of it, so, clearly, she made the remarks before I entered. I am not sure that it is altogether appropriate for the Minister to make comments if they were made in the fashion suggested. I would have thought that the person who breached the ministerial code and who was found to have acted unlawfully is not in a strong position to censure the person who drew attention to such a breach.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the First Minister for his answer. What implications do you believe the decision could have for the operation of the Executive?

Mr P Robinson: This is not the first time that we have been faced with these kinds of judgements. A series of rulings from the High Court — remember that this one was from the Lord Chief Justice — have indicated the necessity to bring any matter that is significant, controversial or cross-cutting to the Executive. That remains the position. I think that it requires each Minister to reflect more closely on the decisions that they are taking and on whether they fall within those categories.

Of course, we have not yet seen the Lord Chief Justice's written judgement on the matter. That might be helpful to us. However, I really think that the Executive need to sit down and decide how they operate when taking decisions. We do not want to grind an Executive to a standstill, but if there are decisions to be taken that other Ministers point up as controversial, significant or cross-cutting, a Minister should not try to avoid the requirement that is laid down in the ministerial code to bring them to the Executive.

Victims' Commissioner

3. **Mr Dickson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they agree that one positive from the Haass talks was a proposal agreed by all parties that the Victims' Commissioner should assess better ways to meet the financial needs of those seriously injured as a result of the past and whether they are prepared to add direction to the Victims' Commissioner's terms of reference to deal with this matter now. (AQT 523/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: I am sometimes overcome by the enthusiasm of some parties in the Chamber to get the deputy First Minister and I to do various things, although those same parties talk about a DUP/Sinn Féin carve-up or tag team. If the five parties sat down as part of a panel and reached agreements, they should bring those agreements, as required by the terms of reference, to the deputy First Minister and me. They have yet to do that.

We have heard Dr Haass's view of the matter but we have not had any paper from the panel, as required under

the terms of reference, indicating areas where there is agreement. We are prepared to look at all the areas on which there is agreement, if they can be moved forward on their own. That can be brought to the Executive. However, the first job of that panel, I believe, is to sit down and go through the 340 elements of agreement in the Haass proposals so that each party can determine whether it agrees those. We will then be able to see where agreement on how many of those elements is shared by all five parties and can, therefore, be acted on.

Mr Dickson: I thank the First Minister for his comments. A proposal has been made with regard to provision of a pension for those with serious conflict-related injuries. What actions do you propose or what comment do you have to make on that proposal?

Mr P Robinson: The comment I make is the same as the one I made earlier. For us to look at any set of proposals, it is necessary for the panel to bring them forward. The panel has not yet done that, and I really do suggest that the requirement that we set down in our terms of reference for the panel — not for Dr Haass, but the panel — to bring forward the areas of agreement, means that it should meet to carry out the obligation that has been placed on it so that we can look at each of the individual proposals that are agreed by all.

Apologising for the Past

4. **Mr Dallat** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they are aware that today one of the most courageous clergymen to emerge from the Troubles, the Rev David Armstrong, called on the former First Minister to apologise for deeds or words of the past and whether the First Minister agrees that the ability to say sorry for the past is an essential element of permanent peace and reconciliation here. (AQT 524/11-15)

I am sure that the First Minister is pleased that my question moves us away from the Haass talks and onto another topical issue.

Mr P Robinson: I am not sure that the Member has moved away from the Haass proposals, which, of course, contain an issue relating to acknowledgement of the past. I do not want to equate those who operated within the democratic process with those who went out and quite deliberately killed and maimed individuals in our society. I think that, when we make mistakes — there is not one of us in this Chamber who has not done so — we should all be prepared to indicate that we have made those mistakes. That is a lesson not just for party leaders but for party members, and not just for DUP party leaders but for members of the SDLP.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the First Minister's response. If I have said something in the past that was wrong, I apologise publicly for it. Will he now encourage his former party leader to do likewise?

Mr P Robinson: I imagine that that is a public apology from the Member for the SDLP's support of a play park in County Down being named after a terrorist, and we will all note that. He is shaking his head, so he clearly does not apologise for the past.

Let me say this about the programme that seems to have stirred up interest: Ian Paisley has been a major figure in public life in Northern Ireland for many generations. He

was active while most of us in this Chamber were either not born or were in short trousers or plaid skirts. The fact remains that he made an enormous contribution to the life of Northern Ireland. He has a fantastic legacy. It saddens me that the programme appears to have portrayed it in that way. However, it does not take away from the very significant role that he played. I honestly believe that, if we are to have interviews about the past, it is far better to have them when the events are fresher in people's memories.

Social Investment Fund

5. **Lord Morrow** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the position of the social investment fund. (AQT 525/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Here, again, real progress is being made. As I understand it, officials have been working on approving projects that have gone through the economic appraisal process. I believe that, literally within the next two or three weeks, we will be in a position to move forward with the first tranche of projects, which amounts to over £30 million.

Lord Morrow: I thank the First Minister for his response. Will he tell us how many projects are in a position to have letters of offer issued?

Mr P Robinson: As I understand it, 22 schemes have been approved and have gone through the system. I also understand that 14 schemes are virtually ready. Of course, those are schemes that will be on the ground across the Province and will benefit local communities.

Dickson Plan

6. **Mr Anderson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what implications the decision in the DFP/DARD court case, which took place over the Christmas period, will have for the Dickson plan for education in the Craigavon/Tandragee area. (AQT 526/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: All politics is local. I have always held the view that decisions on the Dickson plan in Craigavon and the surrounding area are such that the matter would have to come to the Executive. The matter would certainly be regarded as significant and controversial and, if finances are involved, it would also be cross-cutting. The recent decision is just a confirmation of what we already knew: such matters have to be brought to the Executive.

Mr Anderson: I thank the First Minister for that response. Will he indicate what steps would be taken if the Education Minister decided not to bring the decision to the Executive?

Mr P Robinson: It is a hypothetical question and I have no reason to believe that the Education Minister would not bring it to the Executive. Indeed, on reflection, he might take a different position to that adopted heretofore and it would not be necessary to bring it to the Executive.

Clearly, there are mechanisms in place in the Assembly. If 30 or more Members sign a petition of concern, the matter can be referred to the Executive; three Executive Ministers can require that the matter is brought to the Executive, or the deputy First Minister and I acting jointly can bring it to the Executive. There are a number of ways that it can be brought to the Executive. However, I repeat that I do not have any reason to believe that the Education Minister

will not bring the matter to the Executive if it requires a decision.

Haass Proposals: Implementation Plan

7. **Mr Rogers** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their short-term goals for an implementation plan for the Haass proposals, given that, when Richard Haass and Meghan O'Sullivan were leaving, they said that the proposals were not self-implementing. (AQT 527/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: I think that the Member is confused. He needs to look at the terms of reference again. We do not simply throw a number of people into a room and tell them to get on with it. We give them terms of reference and they act on those terms of reference. The terms of reference place a responsibility on the panel of the parties to bring forward proposals for the areas on which they have reached agreement. The panel has not yet done that.

I now know very clearly what Dr Haass and Professor O'Sullivan's view was of what might have gained widespread acceptance. It clearly did not do so. Therefore, it is up to the parties to identify the elements in the proposals that they can all agree on, or where there is sufficient consensus for agreement, and bring those forward so that the deputy First Minister and I can decide what the appropriate next steps should be.

2.45 pm

Agriculture and Rural Development

East Belfast: Flooding/Rivers Agency

1. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of Rivers Agency's performance during recent flood warnings in East Belfast. (AQO 5263/11-15)

Ms O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Rivers Agency's preparation for and response to the recent flood warnings in east Belfast was excellent. In November 2013, the agency organised and ran a real-time simulated emergency planning exercise focusing on coastal flooding. The exercise involved 70 organisations, including all the flood response agencies, the PSNI, Belfast City Council and other key stakeholders. As a result, when the events of last week began to unfold, there was clarity on roles and responsibilities from the outset and, I should say, excellent cooperation between all the organisations involved. During the emergency response, Rivers Agency had a critical role in providing professional advice on the technical aspects of coastal flood risk. That included close liaison throughout the holiday period with the coastal monitoring and forecasting service and the Met Office throughout the holiday period to use the data available to forecast the level of flood risk; decide when to instigate an emergency response; identify those areas at greatest risk, which included east Belfast; and inform an appropriate level of response. The input from the Rivers Agency in the coordinated multi-agency response led by the PSNI was critical in informing key decisions about vulnerable areas and infrastructure. The

agency's timely engagement with the PSNI and other organisations, and the technical support that it provided, facilitated the pre-deployment of resources and the strengthening of existing flood defences at Sydenham and elsewhere to successfully avert the threat of serious flooding. The agency was also directly involved in the provision and placing of sandbags in and around the areas under threat.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for her answer. Through her, I pass on my sincere thanks to those in Rivers Agency for the actions they carried out over that time. It is true to say that we were "lucky" as much as anything else.

My understanding is that, when it is in Belfast lough, water is the responsibility of DCAL; when it enters the Connswater river, it is the responsibility of Rivers Agency; if it overflows onto the ground, it is the responsibility of the DOE; and if it goes onto the roads, it is the responsibility of DRD. Can the Minister explain why she continues to believe that Rivers Agency, for example, with all the responsibilities that it has, particularly at times of flooding, should continue to be in her Department? Can she see the logic of it being included in another Department, perhaps the Department for Regional Development?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his complimentary comments about Rivers Agency staff. I concur with that. Staff actually came in off their leave to make sure that they were there to do all that they could, so thanks for that.

There was a multi-agency response to the incident because of the significant nature of what potentially could have happened. As I said, Rivers Agency was very much to the fore in providing technical advice for the entire group on weather developments and what could potentially have occurred. It was a multi-agency approach because of the various responsibilities. It comes back to the point raised on the back of the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) report some time ago, which looked at whether there should be a strategic role for one responsible Department for overarching flooding issues. That is all in the mix, but it is something that needs to be considered further down the line under the wider review of what responsibilities are within each Department.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for the response from the Rivers Agency, particularly in east Belfast, where it was a river problem. Its role was crucial. There are a number of stakeholders, and you have mentioned some of them. Primarily, the stakeholders in this situation are the residents of Sydenham, Orangefield and Clarawood. A flood alleviation scheme is in place, and I know that you are aware of it, along the Connswater greenway. It is absolutely crucial that the investment that is there for that is implemented and that it is done as quickly as possible, with urgency, to produce safety aspects for the residents along the route of that river, whom I have already mentioned, so that they enjoy at least some respite from any potential future flooding.

Mrs O'Neill: In the wider project, I am pleased that there has been progress to date, particularly in the Orangefield and Victoria Park area. The work is ongoing and is now almost complete in those two areas. Obviously, we look forward to construction on the final phase of the greenway project starting in the summer, and we are all very committed to making sure that that happens within the time frame that we have set out. We are looking at

early 2016 for the completion of the whole project. The Member is aware that there have been delays because of the failure of the tender between Belfast City Council and the company. So, there have been delays, but I am pleased with the progress to date and that we are on target to deliver the full flood alleviation project in the whole area by early 2016.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next Member to speak, I would like to give Members two indications. Questions should be short and to the point. This question relates specifically to east Belfast and anyone who wants to ask a supplementary question must address the question, otherwise they should indicate whether they want to withdraw. **[Interruption.]** I am going to move on unless I get an indication. **[Laughter.]** OK, I call Mr Fearghal McKinney to do his best. **[Laughter.]**

Mr McKinney: Is the Minister giving serious consideration to the allocation of more money for capital schemes to deal with the increasing difficulty of flooding in a number of locations across the North, as well as in the east of the city?

Mrs O'Neill: I would be very foolish to stand here as a Minister and say that I do not want more money. We always want more money, and, after recent events, Rivers Agency will do a follow-up exercise to look at the resources that we have in place. There will be inspections of areas that were impacted upon. Based on that, Rivers Agency will be able to bring forward recommendations as to whether we need additional resources or need to bring forward additional work. That work is ongoing, and options will come from Rivers Agency if it feels it needs additional resource to bring forward additional projects.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Why did the PSNI lead on the preparations in response to the flooding? They are neither engineers nor experts in flooding.

Mrs O'Neill: Flood risk in coastal areas has a significant risk to life associated with it, so it is classed as a category 1 emergency. In such situations, the lead role in coordinating and directing preparations and response sits with the PSNI. The fact that we held a simulation exercise back in November was very helpful. It meant that when we were faced with this situation, which was potentially very dangerous, agencies were clear as to their roles, and it was clear from the start that, given the risk to life, the PSNI needed to take the lead.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Sammy Wilson is not in his place to ask question 2.

Single Farm Payment: 2013

3. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers have yet to receive their 2013 single farm payment. (AQO 5265/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: To date, approximately 3,000 single farm payment claims remain to be finalised. My officials are working to finalise them as quickly as possible. In November 2013, I announced that 95% of claims, including the majority of businesses subject to inspection, will be finalised by the end of February 2014. Some 92% of single farm payment claims have been finalised since 1 December 2013. More farmers received their single farm payment in December 2013 than ever before.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for her answer. I welcome the fact that 92% of farmers are in receipt of their payment, Minister, but I am sure that you, coming, like me, from a rural constituency, are disappointed that your Department has not got that number much higher. Given the economic climate, what will your Department do to address the plight of the 3,000 farmers who are still waiting for receipt of their payment? Can she assure those farmers that they will get that payment speedily?

Mrs O'Neill: I can assure the Member that it is my intention to have as many people paid as possible. As I said, we have made a great improvement in that we paid more farmers in December than in previous years, so there has been progress. However, we obviously have more to do to get to a position where we can pay everybody as early as possible.

Claims remain outstanding for a variety of reasons, including probate or people not providing their bank details. It is hard to believe but, in this day and age, some people still do not provide their bank details. As I say, there is a variety of reasons why those people have not been paid, but we are working our way through it, and I intend to meet the target that I have set out for February 2014.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Is it possible to review and speed up the process whereby decisions are reviewed?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. The single farm payment review and decisions procedure is a two-stage process. Stage 1 involves a review of the decision by an officer in the Department not previously involved in the case. Stage 2 involves a review by an external panel. The panel considers the Department's decision against the EU regulations and agreed policy and makes a recommendation. The panel's recommendation is not binding on the Department. The final decision rests with the head of the paying agency of the Department and the Department's statutory responsibility cannot be delegated to the panel.

We are working to reduce the backlog of cases at stages 1 and 2 and to reduce the time taken to process some cases. We met our target in over 400 stage 1 cases, and 80 stage 2 cases were finalised by the end of 2013. The current stage 1 backlog has reduced to 132 cases. However, the clearing of stage 1 cases has had a knock-on effect at stage 2, and 101 cases are now sitting at various stages in the process. Of those, work on 62 cases is not started.

In June 2013, two additional case officers were seconded to the stage 1 team to assist with clearing the backlog of reviews. Since then, we have been able to halve the number of outstanding cases and are continuing to bear down on this. Additional resources have been made available to the stage 2 process. However, because of the level of knowledge required to deal with the complex issues, and the time necessary to become competent in this work, the benefits of increased resources is being fully realised only now.

The workload and resourcing levels of the team are continually monitored to make sure that we can speed everything up and get as many cases dealt with as quickly as possible.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that update. A remote inspections system appears to have been introduced this

year where two areas were inspected. I think that the Bann valley and Clogher valley were the areas. There appears to be no payments made to any of the people involved in those. Could the Minister explain why?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. The Member will be aware that we are in the process of trying to speed up payments. Part of that is being able to ramp up the number of inspections that we do by remote sensing. The two geographical regions selected for the 2013 scheme encompass the towns of Portglengone, Maghera, Magherafelt and Garvagh in the east and Fivemiletown, Augher, Clogher, Tempo and Fintona in the west. The majority of those inspected cases will be paid by the end of February 2014. I can give the Member that assurance. That is earlier than would have been the situation last year.

We are working our way through all those cases. Being able to speed up the number of people inspected by remote sensing is key to us being able to move forward and improving the payment rate as early as possible in December.

Mr A Maginness: I do not come from a farming background, but I do come from a self-employed background, and one of the worst aspects that any self-employed person has to suffer is delays in payments from public authorities, and this is one such delay. I ask the Minister to radically look at the system of review so that this endless delay in payments is eradicated or kept to a basic minimum. Eight per cent is still high and should not be repeated.

Mrs O'Neill: I am very aware of how important the single farm payment is to individual farmers. Those who have not received their payment are obviously anxious, which is natural and totally acceptable. With the targets that we set, we have improved. We are in a better position, and there is a better picture. However, my aim is to make sure that we deal with those remaining cases as quickly as possible.

As I said, by February 2014, we have a target of 95% and are in line to achieve that. We have done better than the targets that we set, but I want to be in a position where we pay all farmers their maximum amount of money in as short a time frame as possible. We have made massive improvements to be able to do that and will continue to drive forward that agenda for change. In my answer to Declan McAleer I mentioned the review process that we want to sort out as quickly as possible.

Common Agricultural Policy: Habitats and Birds Directives

4. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the recent decision not to transfer any money from pillar 1 to pillar 2 of the new common agricultural policy, how many meetings she has had with the Minister of the Environment concerning meeting the obligations under the habitats and birds directives to manage designated sites under targeted agrienvironment schemes. (AQO 5266/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am scheduled to meet the Minister of the Environment tomorrow to discuss the next rural development programme, including agrienvironment schemes. My officials have been working closely with officials in the Department of the Environment on the

design of the agrienvironment scheme for the next rural development programme.

It is proposed that land designated under the EU habitats and birds directive will be a priority for entry into the new scheme. This will support specific management plans for designated sites to help meet obligations under the habitats and birds directive.

The existing agrienvironment scheme under the current rural development programme has been prioritised towards designated sites. At 30 November 2013, over 25,000 hectares of designated land was being managed under agrienvironment scheme agreements. The budget available for the new agrienvironment scheme has yet to be finalised. However, the protection of designated land will be one of the priorities of the next scheme, and funding will be targeted to achieve the best effect.

3.00 pm

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for her reply. Given the zero-rate transfer from pillar 1 to pillar 2 and the much reduced funding for pillar 2 and therefore for the agrienvironment schemes, are we at risk, now or in the near future, of infraction fines from the EU for missing targets?

Mrs O'Neill: I am keen to assure the Member that I am as committed to environmental schemes going forward in the new programme. Because of the court ruling and the decision by DEFRA to go to Europe with a 0% transfer, we have a reduced budget. That will have an impact on the environmental side of things, the rural dwellers and farmers, because the money that I would have transferred was to help get a balanced approach to supporting all the different elements of rural communities. You have to take a holistic view of the rural community.

I assure the Member that I am as committed as I was to taking forward the schemes. There are farmers who will be anxious about the schemes, looking to the future, and I want to give an assurance that I will bring forward schemes. I can give that commitment to farmers.

As I said, my officials are talking to DOE officials and are already very focused on ensuring that the new scheme is designed to best meet the needs of the environment and our requirements under the birds and habitats directive.

Mr Byrne: What level of formal or informal discussions did the Minister have with ministerial colleagues, particularly the Minister of Finance and Personnel, before her announcement on 20 December?

Mrs O'Neill: I am happy to inform the House. I started to deliver a statement before Question Time, and we will come back to that.

As part of the normal process of Executive business, I wrote to all Ministers, seeking their views on the very issue of my pillar transfer and the potential for transfer. The Minister of Finance and Personnel made no response on both occasions, yet further down the line he thought it appropriate to take a court case without going through the Executive and the normal procedure. That is the correspondence that I had with Ministers prior to taking the decision.

Mr Campbell: The Minister has been alluding to the processes regarding her discussions with the Finance Minister. In the wider context, does she realise and accept

the substantial difference between before 2007 and since 2007, which is that such issues now need to be brought before the Executive for approval rather than have a Minister proceed on a stand-alone basis?

Mrs O'Neill: Over the past number of years, I have been very much committed to taking forward the CAP discussions. I have been in Europe regularly to debate the issues and fight the corner for our local farmers.

I took this decision on the basis that it is the core business of my Department. I did not see any reason to bring the decision to the Executive. My Department's core remit is very much to improve the social and economic infrastructure of rural communities. The decision was taken on the basis of a very balanced approach, on the back of a consultation and engagement with stakeholders, and looked towards the needs of farmers, the environment, rural dwellers and rural businesses. For me, the 7% transfer rate was a very logical, fair and balanced approach to take forward. The Finance Minister, as I said, had no issue with the transfer rate when he was written to and made no response to it, yet he failed to have an Executive discussion and wanted to go to court. Perhaps we need to question the motivation behind that decision and ask whether it was politically motivated.

Common Agricultural Policy: Pillar 1/Pillar 2

5. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the proposed transfer of common agricultural policy monies from pillar 1 to pillar 2 is going ahead. (AQO 5267/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As I advised in the statement that I made today, the 0% rate of transfer for the North of Ireland from pillar 1 to pillar 2 has been notified to the European Commission by DEFRA for the scheme years 2014 to 2019. That means that there will be no transfer of moneys to rural development at this time. It is critical that we review that decision at the first opportunity. It will need to be done by 1 August 2017, as permitted by the European regulations. The regulations allow for the transfer rates for scheme years 2018 and 2019 to be increased, which will bring additional investment into the programme in those years.

Mrs D Kelly: In view of the Minister's earlier comments and the very public, political slapping about that the DUP Finance Minister seemed to employ against her and her Department, does she have any comment to make on the failure of political leadership, which were words that, I believe, were used in the judgement as a result of the case taken by her ministerial colleague?

Mrs O'Neill: I think that it is unfortunate, to say the least, that the Minister of Finance and Personnel saw fit to go to the courts, as opposed to coming to the Executive to have a very reasoned and logical discussion. Again, I question the motives for that. I am not going to be sidetracked. However, the decision has now been taken, and we are sitting with no transfer rate. We have an opportunity to review that in 2017, and, obviously, we look towards that.

We have to be serious about supporting rural communities in the whole. I think that some people are attempting to portray this as being the farmers versus the environment. Farmers are the natural custodians of the countryside, and they are very mindful of and dependent on the

environment around them. It is very much not about that; it is about a balanced approach. As I said, I am not going to be distracted. I will get on. There are big decisions to be taken, and I will take those in the time ahead on the basis of corresponding with stakeholders. We have had over 400 responses to the consultation, and we have an ongoing consultation that runs up to 17 January. So, any decisions that I take will be in the best interests of a fair and balanced rural economy and will look after the needs of farmers, the environment, rural dwellers and rural businesses. That is the only thing that you can be guided by when you make a decision. This is of major importance to rural dwellers and farmers. It will be in place and will run up to 2020, so we need to get it right. I will carry on with my business, and I believe that this is my core business.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister think that the Executive need to provide funding for Going for Growth?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. Obviously, the eventual shape and size of the programme will depend on the resources that are available to it. We have been forced into a position where we are unable to transfer funds to support the agrifood industry, which is very much what this was about. The 7% transfer would have allowed support for capital grant schemes for sheds and fencing. Those are the things that farmers are asking for whenever I am out and about.

The Executive will now have to step up to the mark to support rural communities and the agrifood industry. You have to remember that, throughout the past number of years of recession and economic decline, agrifood has continued to do well. We have worked very hard to bring it to the forefront and to put it at centre stage in any economic recovery. What we have now is a vision in the Going for Growth document, and the Executive need to support that in going forward. When I go to the Executive in the next number of weeks with the Going for Growth strategy, I expect to get that support.

Mrs Dobson: Does the Minister agree that the Executive, not the High Court, is surely the best forum to debate and make decisions such as this? Does she feel that this puts future funding for farm safety at risk? That is such a vital issue, and our Agriculture Committee will focus on it yet again tomorrow.

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, it certainly makes things more challenging. If you look at the current programme and the things that the modulated money has been paying for, you will see that they have all been farm-related or farm family-related, particularly in BVD training, Focus Farms and family mentoring and support. So, there is obviously a danger in moving forward on what we can afford to do with the range of measures that are in the current programme and are funded through modulated money.

I agree with you totally that this is a discussion that should have been held in the Executive, not through the courts. That said, we are where we are, and we have to deal with it. As I said, I will not be sidetracked. I will have to take key decisions in the time ahead that are based on the needs of stakeholders and the entire rural communities. As the consultation comes to a close on 17 January, we will have to take decisions on the way forward that best meet the needs of rural communities.

Mr Frew: Does the Minister agree with me that the best and most direct way to get financial assistance to the

farming community is through single farm payments, and does she agree that it was left to the DUP to fight for that payment and restore it to the farming community?

Mrs O'Neill: No is the simple answer. The DUP may want to look after just one section of our rural community; I very much want to look after everybody in the rural community. You have to take a balanced approach, so you should not play one off against the other. You need to support the farming community, rural dwellers and businesses, and the rural development programme is a fantastic vehicle for doing that. The DUP may want to look after just one section of the rural community; I will look after it in its entirety.

Rural Development Programme: Axis 3

6. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much money has been committed to strategic projects within the rural development programme under axis 3. (AQO 5268/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has now issued 32 letters of offer worth over £17.5 million to strategic projects across all seven cluster areas. These projects are already contributing to spend, with £4.7 million in claims paid to date and a further £3 million to be claimed this financial year. Indeed, several of the projects are now complete and are bringing in much-needed income to rural areas.

When I originally announced the refocus of axis 3, it was to increase investment in rural areas at a time when the economy was in decline and to ensure that no funds were returned to Europe. I am pleased to say that my actions have been effective. In December, we saw our highest value of quarterly claims processed so far, at £3.5 million, bringing our total spend to date to just over £58 million. We now have over 1,800 projects on the ground, and, despite the difficult economic climate, the programme has created over 450 rural jobs to date, with more to come. Rural tourism projects funded by axis 3 have accounted for 121,000 visitors, and this will rise as more projects come on stream. An additional 14,500 rural businesses and dwellers now have broadband thanks to the DARD investment in the next generation broadband project. Over 300 community and social economy projects have benefited from axis 3 funding. So, I am happy to report that axis 3 is making a real difference to rural dwellers and communities and is helping to sustain and grow rural businesses, which form an important part of our rural economy.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for that detailed response. However, in the wider context of the reform of the common agricultural policy, will she outline what steps she intends to take to support young entrants into farming?

Mrs O'Neill: I think that that is vital in moving forward. It is one of the decisions that we will have to take as a result of the consultation on CAP reform. A look at the age profile of farmers shows that it is important that we help young people to stay in the industry. It will be vital to look at a scheme that will support our young farmers and new entrants. That is one of the things that we are consulting on at the minute, and we will take decisions on that in the very near future.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister explain to the House why the priorities were not agreed beforehand, which would have avoided the High Court farce over Christmas?

Mrs O'Neill: I was in the High Court over Christmas because the Finance Minister disagreed with my decision. When the court made its ruling, I brought a paper to the Executive and it was not agreed. I took decisions because, as I said, I believe that it is my core business to take such decisions. In the past, I was able to take decisions not to move money under modulation without any challenge. It is strange that the Finance Minister decided to make that challenge this time, but only he can answer why.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. My question to the Minister is whether she thinks that the strategic projects had the impact that she hoped for, but I think that you answered it to some degree in your first answer.

Mrs O'Neill: I think that I did. I outlined some of what I think are fantastic elements of the projects that are going forward. They have brought fantastic benefits to rural communities. Increased spend at a time of recession is to be very much welcomed. I think that they have been very successful over the past year or year and a half.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Dominic Bradley is not in his place, so I call Mr Seán Lynch. Mr Seán Lynch is not in his place *[Interruption.]* Oh, there he is. I call Mr Seán Lynch for a topical question. I am busy looking for Members. That is the end of the listed questions, and we are now moving to topical questions. You are the next Member who is available.

3.15 pm

Tourism: Forest Service Estate

3. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the potential for tourism on the Forest Service estate. (AQT 533/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Forest Service already delivers significant recreational and tourism benefits. The potential exists for further development, particularly through working with other recreational and tourism providers. The Forest Service is continuing its work in developing partnership arrangements with local authorities and other recreational providers to ensure that opportunities for progress are fully realised. This approach has led to the development of improved facilities in many areas, including the major mountain bike projects completed in Castlewellan Forest Park, Rostrevor park and Davagh forest in partnership with the local councils. We have seen a multipurpose trails network completed in Castle Ward, a regional play park opened in Slieve Gullion and biodiversity trails launched in Learmount forest in partnership with Derry City Council. There has been a whole suite of partnership working to the benefit of tourism in our forests. Forest Service is also using funding from the Executive's economy and jobs initiative to improve recreation and tourist facilities on Forest Service property under the theme of supporting infrastructural investment.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. As the Minister is aware, there is a tree disease. Does she believe that it will impact on potential tourism?

Mrs O'Neill: We want to limit any impact that tree disease will have on the potential of our forests. My Department continues to put significant resources into tackling the

disease. I think that the Member is referring to P ramorum. We have had follow-up inspections on sites identified through aerial surveillance in June and September and have confirmed an increased area of infected larch compared with 2012 and outbreaks in new areas, notably westwards as far as County Fermanagh.

Felling is under way at 12 forests, including an area of 164 hectares. Further action will be taken forward on a prioritised basis. We continue to engage with the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) on research to help our understanding of the disease. We are also working closely with plant health colleagues in the South and across in Britain. Since the disease was first diagnosed in larch in 2010, over 900 hectares of larch plantation have been felled to control it.

These things have an impact on access to our forests. We very much seek the cooperation of landowners and the general public who visit our forests in observing the biodiversity features and taking precautions by, for example, washing the wheels of bikes and prams when using our forests. We want to be able to limit the damage that disease can do to our forests' tourism potential.

Winter Weather: DARD

4. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what lessons her departmental officials learnt from last year's winter weather and what provisions they have in place, given that she will remember that, last year, my constituency of East Antrim was affected by some of the worst of the winter conditions, particularly the snow, with rural and very isolated farms in the glens of Antrim suffering the most. (AQT 534/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The scenes that we witnessed last year were shocking. The extreme weather was something that had not been seen for quite a number of years. On the back of that, we set up the fodder task force to look at preparedness for winter. We continue to do that. A number of farmers have taken part in our College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) feed management courses. That is in preparation for the potential for this to occur again.

We worked with all the stakeholders — the farming unions, the banks and the feed providers — to make sure that we put everything in place that could be put in place in the event of something like this happening again. The task force met on numerous occasions and has agreed to meet again as and when required if we were to find ourselves in that position again. I believe that we are in a better state of preparedness. I believe that lessons were learned by all agencies, because it was a multi-agency response to that snow. Hopefully, we will not find ourselves in that position again, but I believe that, if we do, we will be in a better state of preparedness.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for her assessment thus far. The recent experience of flooding, particularly in places such as Carnlough, Carrickfergus and further up the coast, should have demonstrated to us the value of one lead agency, which is clearly the PSNI. Does she agree with me that, should we have further severe winter conditions, it would be appropriate that the PSNI should be the lead agency coordinating district councils and others?

Mrs O'Neill: It will be dependent on the circumstances of the incident at the time. Because of the flooding and the risk to life, it was decided that the PSNI was the natural lead. If that is needed in the future, I will be open to doing whatever is best for the situation at that time.

Rural Crime

5. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she is aware of last week's news when my constituency colleague highlighted rural crime and whether she will tell us what she is doing in conjunction with the PSNI to try to tackle this problem, which has been going on for some time now. (AQT 535/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I agree with you: it is a serious problem. I have ongoing engagement with DOJ and the Chief Constable. We meet on a regular basis to discuss the issues, emerging trends and themes that everybody is picking up on. We have a very efficient enforcement team in place and now have a representative on the rural steering group. So, all the agencies are working together on the best approach. I will continue to carry out my role in addressing the very real concerns of rural dwellers about crime. You will be aware that, in some areas, we have issues with cattle theft and, in other areas, it could be around equipment. So, we need to look at everything and make sure that all agencies play their role, and I will not be shy in taking my issues to the PSNI and DOJ.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Trevor Clarke for a supplementary.

Mr Clarke: Sorry about that; I was daydreaming.

Can the Minister outline exactly what her Department has been doing to date? I am sure that you will accept that the figures show an increase, and, whilst I accept, as the Minister said, that there have been various agency meetings and agencies are working together, will she accept that not enough has been done and give us an insight into what she will do and what has been happening?

Mrs O'Neill: It is a positive that we now have a rural crime steering group. It is good that all the agencies are sitting around the table and working together on how we can combat rural crime. The Member is aware that responsibility for combating rural crime falls primarily to the Department of Justice and the PSNI, but DARD continues to play its role, particularly through our CAFRE advisers giving advice on keeping equipment safe and keeping all your individual things safe. The colleges have had workshops on rural crime awareness. So, quite a number of things are being taken forward in conjunction with the other agencies. In looking to the future and towards support for, for example, the farm modernisation programme, we may want to consider including criteria such as having identification tags on your things. There are initiatives that we can take forward that will hopefully be of benefit to rural people.

Young Farmers: Qualifications

6. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to join me in recommending to our

young farmers that they follow the example of the future king, Prince William, by enhancing their agricultural qualifications. (AQT 536/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It is encouraging in itself that our agriculture colleges are oversubscribed. So, young people already see a future in either farming or food. We have an opportunity now with CAP reform to tailor financial supports for young farmers. That will hopefully create a bit of an incentive to support those young people to stay in the industry. As I said earlier, the age profile of the farming community is a concern. We need to sustain that for the future, and the only way we can do that is if new people and young people come into the industry. So, I will do whatever I can to support those young people to come into the industry and to encourage them, and we are doing that through our colleges and hopefully through CAP reform with some financial incentive.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given that she identified the potential difficulties with the new CAP schemes for young farmers in particular, is she able to give some kind of direction to those young farmers about what level of qualifications they should pursue to help them with their future?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, it is part of the consultation process, and we can look at all of that. I have not taken final decisions on it. However, in looking towards new ways of farming and being innovative, it will be significant for young people to have the qualifications, and that will assist them in how they run their business. So, we very much encourage people to get on board and attend the courses. We have formal and less formal learning environments for people. It tries to appeal to everybody.

Fishing: Stakeholder Forum

7. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to convene a meeting with relevant stakeholders to explore options around the restructuring of the fishing fleet, particularly on decommissioning. (AQT 537/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I met representatives of the fishing industry back in November, when I suggested that it would be important to get a stakeholder forum back together again. It is something that happened in the past, and there would be benefits all round if that were to happen. I have agreed that officials should meet representatives of the industry again this month, and we will take it forward straight after that.

Miss M McIlveen: Further to that question, will the Minister confirm whether moneys that had been ring-fenced under the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) for decommissioning are still available?

Mrs O'Neill: I will write to the Member on that issue. Moving forward, however, we have the new EFF and the European Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF), so there are opportunities there for funding for the industry. Were we to get that stakeholder group together again, we could get a collective voice to express the needs of the industry and use the European funding to meet the needs that are identified.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mrs Judith Cochrane is not in her place. I call Mr Ian McCrea.

Farming: Remote Sensing

9. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how many farms were subject to the remote sensor inspection in 2013. (AQT 539/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have the figures on me, but it was somewhere around 1,200. I will confirm the number in writing to the Member. Two geographical areas were chosen, one towards the east and one towards the west. It was around 1,200, but I will be happy to confirm that in writing.

Mr I McCrea: Why were the farmers involved not notified that the inspections were taking place? Many of them were expecting money at the end of the year and found that that did not happen. The Minister will certainly be aware that farmers depend on that money. Will she detail why they were not informed that the inspections were taking place?

Mrs O'Neill: We did write to the people who were being inspected. Obviously, the aim is to get as many inspections done by remote sensor as possible so that we are in a position to get payments out more quickly. I suppose that that is challenging at the start, and it is different, but we intend to have payments sent out by the end of February to the people who were inspected in that way. We are working actively towards that at the moment. People were written to individually to inform them that they were going to be inspected in that way.

Common Agricultural Policy: Pillar 1/Pillar 2

10. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that there may well be environmental implications from the DFP-inspired court case to quash the transfer of funds from pillar 1 of the rural development programme, to tell us the response from the Minister of the Environment when she alerted him to her proposal to transfer 7% from pillar 1 to pillar 2. (AQT 540/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As I said earlier, when I wrote to all Ministers, the Minister of the Environment was the only one to respond to the potential transfer from pillar 1 to pillar 2. Obviously, he is very concerned about the environmental schemes and wants to see them go forward. He is also very alert to the fact that our officials have been working together to design a new scheme and have it in place and ready to go as soon as we implement the new CAP. Those were his concerns, and he just wanted to make sure that we were protecting the environment. I want to assure the Member that, as I said, I am just as wedded to ensuring that we bring forward environmental schemes, albeit that it will be more difficult now because we have a smaller pot of money.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr McAleer for a supplementary question.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister has already answered my supplementary question.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes the topical questions. The House will take its ease while the Minister takes his place.

Questions for Urgent Oral Answer

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Emergency Departments: Crisis Conditions

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Fearghal McKinney has given notice of an urgent question for oral answer to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I remind Members that if they wish to ask a supplementary question, they should rise continually in their places. The Member who tabled the question will be called automatically to ask a supplementary question.

Mr McKinney: asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to address crisis conditions experienced by patients recently at the accident and emergency departments in Craigavon Area Hospital and the Royal Victoria Hospital.

3.30 pm

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Last week's circumstances were exceptional, and it is important not to confuse an exceptional circumstance with overall performance in the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) and Craigavon Area Hospital emergency departments (ED). The escalation plan at the RVH, which included some ambulances being diverted to the Ulster Hospital, worked effectively and normal arrangements resumed within a matter of hours. Ambulances were also diverted to other hospitals for a time last week in response to the situation at Craigavon hospital, which was significantly busier than usual. That is a routine part of the operational management of pressures across the system.

The Health and Social Care Board and Belfast Trust are reviewing the major incident declared by the trust to see whether refinement of the Health and Social Care business continuity planning is required to respond more appropriately to future incidents of that kind. It is important to note that there will continue to be periods of pressure in all our emergency departments throughout the winter. That is to be expected in emergency departments.

Mr McKinney: At the outset, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I thank you and the House for acknowledging the major importance of the issue. The SDLP warned, not just before Christmas but many months ago, that the savage budget cuts that the DUP and others backed would provoke just such an outcome for vulnerable people. The SDLP also warned that the recent closures announced in Downe and Lagan Valley were wrong and would have a negative impact. They should be reversed.

We, like patients, staff and unions, were shocked to see what happened in the Royal Victoria Hospital on Wednesday and in Craigavon on the previous Monday. For us, it is about accountability and how a decision in one area can potentially affect another. In this case, it has affected a number of other areas negatively and to a significant degree.

Is the tail wagging the dog? Who is ultimately responsible? What happened on Wednesday at the Royal Victoria Hospital was a symptom, not a cause. We need to know the extent to which those earlier decisions impacted on Wednesday night's crisis. Can the Minister tell us what steps are being taken to assess that?

Mr Poots: A course of work has been done to assess the impact on the other trusts of the closures of Downe and Lagan Valley at the weekends. The assessment carried out indicates that the situation at the Royal Victoria Hospital on the Wednesday night was in no way related to the reduction of hours at the emergency departments at Lagan Valley and Downe hospitals, which, of course, is on Saturday and Sunday. The Royal is a hospital that admits around 70 to 80 people each day. Over the course of the days associated with the backlog in the emergency department, it was admitting over 100 — 110 in one case. Consequently, there was a degree of backing up, not enough people were being discharged and, as a result of that, they introduced an emergency plan.

I just wish that our politicians and, indeed, our media would be more mature in how they assess things. Three hours after an emergency plan was initiated, things were back to normal in the Royal Victoria Hospital. We can look at things even as they stand today. As at 3.15 pm today, there were 67 people waiting in the emergency department in the Royal Victoria Hospital. Nobody has been waiting in excess of eight hours. I say "waiting", but people are normally triaged within 15 to 20 minutes; although, in some cases, it can be a bit longer. When we say waiting for four hours or 12 hours, we are actually referring to people having been treated and either sent home or else having a bed in the hospital. Those are the 12-hour waits that we are talking about. We are not talking about people waiting for 12 hours to see a doctor or nurse. That is not the case. In the Ulster Hospital at 3.15 pm today, there were 58 people waiting for treatment; in Antrim, there were 46; and in Craigavon, there were 73. Over the weekend, nobody had to wait for longer than 12 hours.

So we do not have a crisis in emergency departments across Northern Ireland. What we have witnessed, on one particular night in the Royal, is a backlog that had come from the previous two days. It was difficult from the Monday right through to the Wednesday. We witnessed that, but it has been dealt with and responded to. We have seen Craigavon Hospital have its struggles on a Monday night, and it has used the divert mechanism to go to Daisy Hill Hospital and the South West Hospital. It is very appropriate for people from the southern part of the Southern Trust area to go the South West Hospital, and that has helped to alleviate the problems. However, we should have a greater degree of maturity and identify when people respond well to dealing with a difficult situation, as opposed to homing in on the fact that there were lots of people waiting in an emergency department. That will happen from time to time, and we cannot predict whether 300 people will come into the Ulster Hospital or, indeed, the Royal Victoria Hospital emergency department today or whether it will be 200 people. What is important is how we respond, and the response dealt with the issue and ensured that normality returned to the hospital.

Mr Givan: What steps are being taken to ensure that our acute emergency departments, which are the specialist units with all the support necessary to deal with major

trauma, such as those at the Royal, Craigavon and the Ulster, are being freed up so that they deal with emergency and serious incidences and, where local people need it, attention can be provided in people's local hospital, such as at Lagan Valley with the reopening of its emergency department and through greater access to GPs?

Mr Poots: Let me be absolutely clear. First, we have our major acute hospitals, which should be dealing with major acute incidences, as well as providing support for people who have other requirements in their catchment area. We also have a range of smaller hospitals that should be able to provide key services, and I am deeply unhappy — I have recorded this — that Lagan Valley and Downe are being closed at weekends. However, let us be quite clear about it. People can talk about savage cuts. The money has always been available to employ doctors to man those facilities, but the doctors are not available to provide cover. Therefore, the South Eastern Trust found itself in a situation in which it had 70 shifts not covered. As a result, the trust took the decision to close both facilities on the basis that it could not provide a safe service. As a Minister, I cannot argue with that. If a trust comes to me and says that it cannot provide a safe service, I cannot say that it must provide an unsafe service. It would be irresponsible of me to do that.

It is fundamentally important, however, that the South Eastern Trust works to ensure that there is 24/7 front-door access to Lagan Valley Hospital and Downe Hospital and that it continues to seek to recruit people for the front door of the hospital. I ask the whole House to remember this: if trusts throughout the rest of the United Kingdom have difficulty recruiting doctors for emergency departments, why would we not have difficulty recruiting them for places such as Lagan Valley and Downe? It is natural that those places will have real difficulty in seeking to recruit people of the standing and standards that we expect to provide the care for our people here.

I also put down a very clear marker, because the GPs have been very supportive in the Downe Hospital area. We need greater support from GPs for Lagan Valley Hospital, and we perhaps need to look at how we can extend things further in the Downe Hospital area. We will not naturally fit in with every other emergency department in Northern Ireland, but there is more work that can be done there. This is a very clear message: the money will be made available if the doctors are available, but we cannot run facilities without doctors.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his information. He knows that I live fairly close to the RVH, and I understand that sometimes the flow of information to people may also cause problems. When people picked up on the publicity about what happened at the RVH, people were genuinely concerned that there was a problem there. Some of the questions that people raised included whether they would be treated on time at the RVH and whether it was a safe place to be.

Mr Poots: Certainly, the RVH is a safe place to be. I think that that is what is most important here. Some people's waiting times were longer than is desirable. However, for people who have had strokes, heart attacks and major traumas, which, essentially, are what an emergency department is about, it is a very safe place to be. As a result of decisions that have been taken, such as those to

extend the 24-hour cath lab and to make thrombolysis for stroke patients available, it is actually a much safer place to be in January 2014 than it was in previous years. So, we have the quality in our hospital system to provide the safety that the Member asked about.

Where admitting other people to hospitals is concerned, we have to continue to work to ensure that more people are admitted directly to hospitals without going through emergency departments. Therefore, more work needs to be done on having closer liaison between general practitioners, particularly out-of-hours general practitioners, and hospitals for direct admissions. I do not think that it is especially appropriate for older people in particular to be in emergency departments. They can very often be volatile places, given everything that goes on in them, the numbers that pass through them, and because some people are inebriated and their behaviour is of a lower standard than we would expect. They are not a great place for older people to be. I think that it would be much more dignified if we could actually admit more older people directly from their GPs to hospitals without their going through emergency departments. At the same time, that may well ease pressure on emergency departments to some extent.

Mr Beggs: In July 2011, the Minister indicated at the Health Committee that there were proposals for the City Hospital to concentrate on elective and planned surgery and for the Royal to concentrate on emergency surgery and operations etc. Within a matter of months, the City Hospital A&E unit closed and some 45,000 patients a year transferred to the Royal. How can the Minister assure those who have been reliant on services at the Lagan Valley Hospital that it will not be closed by stealth and that any temporary closure will not be followed by what happened after the temporary closure of the Belfast City Hospital's A&E?

Mr Poots: As for the City Hospital vis-à-vis the Royal, I have to say that things now actually work better. They would have been worse if the City Hospital's emergency department had still been open. I know that some people will challenge that. However, it is not borne out by the facts. The facts are that there are fewer 12-hour waits this January than there were last January. Indeed, there were fewer 12-hour waits this December than there were last December. In fact, we are looking at 12-hour waits having been reduced by around 75%. So, a lot of good things are happening, and good work is being done. Perhaps I should thank Mr McKinney for giving us the opportunity to put out some of the good. People want to tell us how bad and poor our hospitals are. We have some of the best hospitals in the world, with some of the best staff in the world carrying out their jobs. Perhaps some people in the media and, indeed, some elected representatives would do well to show a degree more respect for the hard work that actually goes on in our hospitals.

The situation at Lagan Valley Hospital and Downe Hospital, as I pointed out to a previous questioner, is down to the availability of doctors — nothing else. It is a matter for the South Eastern Trust to ensure that it has the appropriate number of doctors available. It lost two doctors at the tail end of last year, and it has a locum doctor who is taking a month off in January. There was nothing that we could do to stop that. Consequently, at that point, the service that would have been offered at that

point in Lagan Valley Hospital and Downe Hospital would not have been safe. That is something that none of us in the House would want to stand over. Nonetheless, I think that it is important that we get to the point where we have 24/7 front-door access to both those facilities to enable a lot of the people with chronic illnesses and our elderly population in particular to make good use of the very good resources that are available at both of them in a way that actually benefits the wider community and ensures that those hospitals can continue to provide a viable and vital service to the local communities.

3.45 pm

Mr McCarthy: I welcome the Minister's commitment to see A&E at Downe and Lagan Valley reinstated as soon as possible — if I heard him right. However, does he agree with me that all this stems from the initial closure of A&E at the City Hospital, with extra patients having to go to the Ulster and, indeed, the Royal? Does he also agree with me that, unless something is done urgently, the staff, who are under enormous pressure — we support and salute the work that they have done — will not be there and we will be in a poorer state of health than we are at the moment, and that, unless we put a halt to Transforming Your Care (TYC), which recommends the loss of 180 beds and probably the closure of other hospitals, we will continue to go from crisis to crisis?

Mr Poots: In the first instance, we need to be absolutely clear that, with the City Hospital concentrating more on elective surgery, there has been a considerable reduction in the waiting lists for elective care. The knock-on effect is that fewer people will be sick because they will receive the appropriate care that they need, which is some form of surgery, to enable them to resume a normal life. I welcome the fact that those figures have been coming down steadily. That is a course of work that we need to continue to focus and keep our attention on.

I should say that, through the Choose Well campaign, we have been encouraging people to play their part in ensuring that our emergency departments are not overloaded. People should consider whether they need to go to A&E or whether treatment can be sought from a minor injuries unit, a GP, a GP out-of-hours service or a local pharmacist.

I can tell you that, in one week at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, for example, over 40 patients turned up with an illness that did not require emergency treatment. They should not have been at the emergency department because the truth is that the illness, which was infectious, could have been dealt with quite easily at a primary care level. Nonetheless, people turned up to the emergency department with an infectious illness that a child had picked up and which should have been dealt with by their local GP. We need to ensure that people are properly utilising their GP and out-of-hours service. I utilised our out-of-hours service over the Christmas period for the first time, because we needed that bit of support. That was the right thing to do, and it worked out very well.

When we have emergency departments where people are coming in with major heart attacks, devastating strokes and major trauma, and then we have people coming in with back pain or something else that could be dealt with by a GP in the first instance, that is wrong. We need to ensure that people use the appropriate places at the right time. If

a GP believes that a member of the public should go to an emergency department and recommends that they do so, they are well within their rights to be there. So, we need to have an appropriate use of that and minor injuries units. We need to ensure that our emergency departments are just that: departments that deal with emergencies.

Mr McCallister: The Minister quite rightly identified some of the problems with A&E and, indeed, some of the pathways that need to change, as highlighted in 'Transforming Your Care'. Where does that leave the problems that we are having now with the target in TYC about reducing our A&Es from a possible five to seven? How would that fit in, and how is the Minister going to deliver that, or is he effectively going to allow the shortage of doctors to deliver it?

Mr Poots: I know that some Members expect magic from me but I do not think that I will ever be able to reduce five to seven, as the Member suggested.

Mr McCallister: Five to seven; between five and seven.

Mr Poots: Nonetheless, we are looking at our emergency care and what is being offered. I indicated very clearly that I thought we should be looking at 24/7 front-door services in the Lagan Valley and Downe hospitals. What has actually happened in the Downe, until now, is that GPs have provided a service for the 12 hours at night. That has worked very, very well. So, in spite of initial resistance to it, there has been pretty widespread acceptance of it as a service that is fit for purpose.

We need to be thinking outside the box in respect of these facilities to ensure that we can retain that front-door presence and ensure that people with a major trauma, such as a heart attack or stroke, bypass these hospitals and go to the Royal, the Ulster Hospital or the appropriate facility to get the appropriate care.

All those are areas that we can continue to work on, but I think that having front-door access in the likes of the Lagan Valley and Downe hospitals particularly, especially for our older population and the population who have chronic illnesses and who can be very well catered for in those hospitals, where there are beds available, would ease the pressure on the major acute hospitals, such as the Ulster Hospital, the Royal and Craigavon Area Hospital. That is something that we need to continue to work on and I have been very, very clear about that with the South Eastern Trust. It needs to be working to ensure that there is 24/7 front-door access to those hospitals.

I am very, very clear on the issue that the South Eastern Trust needs to ensure 24/7 access to the Lagan Valley and Downe hospitals because I believe that it is in the best interests of the public. It is also in the best interests of the health system in that it ensures that people with chronic diseases and our elderly people, in particular, do not end up in a large emergency department when that was avoidable and when there was a local hospital available to them that could have met their needs.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call for a supplementary question from Pam Cameron, which indicates that at least one negotiation ended successfully and happily.

Mrs Cameron: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for his answers to the original question thus far. I echo his praise for all staff who work in our emergency departments; I echo that praise fully.

They work extremely hard under an incredible amount of pressure, especially at this time of the year. What is the Minister's view on the broader trends in emergency departments, such as the 12-hour breaches?

Mr Poots: In December 2012, there were 580 12-hour breaches, for example, and, in December 2013, there were 166. In my opinion, that is 166 too many, but it is still only 25% of what took place in December 2012. It demonstrates to me that they are heading in the right direction. In the first 12 days of January 2013, there were 414 breaches; in the first 12 days of this January, there were 99 breaches. That indicates to me that hospitals are working much better at getting people treated in emergency departments and admitted to hospital or discharged home much more quickly.

I will re-emphasise this: 12 hours is the length of time from when a person enters the front door of the hospital until they exit it, having been treated or having been admitted to a bed. We are still aiming to have four hours as our preferred time, and that is a course of work that we will continue to do. People are not waiting for either four hours or 12 hours to receive treatment. That is the point of time when treatment is completed or an admission to hospital takes place. People need to be very clear that that is the case.

Mr Rogers: Thanks to the Minister for his answers thus far. I welcome his comment to Mr McCallister about 24/7 at Downe Hospital. Obviously, there will have to be learning as a result of what happened at the Royal last week. I will maybe find this out later, but have you any idea of what percentage of people could have been dealt with in a minor injuries unit? What percentage were recurring patients? Is there a process where they could be admitted straight to a ward? That is if there were a bed available in a ward. Finally, will analysis be done of where the patients came from at that particular time last week?

Mr Poots: Analysis is done of where patients come from. The Royal picks up a lot of the Lagan Valley patients. The Ulster picks up more patients coming from the Downe side. That is a natural thing because, particularly where you have a more significant emergency with an ambulance, they are not going to drive past the Royal, if they have travelled from Lisburn, to get to the Ulster. However, divers can be put in place. One of the things that potentially could have happened more quickly last week was that divers could have been put in place more quickly at the Royal.

Almost half the patients who attended the Royal last week required admission. That was one of the big issues. We were not dealing with lots of time-wasters; we were dealing with people who were genuinely sick. It was the numbers coming into the Royal, more so as opposed to some of the other hospitals. Some of the other hospitals were not under that much pressure during that time, although Craigavon was. They were under normal January pressures. The Royal had an exceptional number of people who required admission. Almost half of people who attended ED in the Royal in the first three days of last week required admission. Normally, it would be around a quarter of those who attend. Therein lies the problem. That is why I appeal to people very often to look at the facts instead of jumping up and down and saying, "We've found something wrong here. Let's make hay of it". Look at the facts of what happened. We had an extraordinary amount of people who required

admission to hospital. That caused a backlog in the emergency department, which took actions to deal with that.

The Member asked about regular attenders. Last year, 131 people attended the emergency department at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast 2,240 times. In Altnagelvin Hospital, 58 people were responsible for 876 attendances. In Craigavon Hospital, 98 people were responsible for 1,588 attendances. In Antrim, 67 people were responsible for 1,340 attendances. Across the UK, more than 150 people attended emergency departments more than 50 times a year. We have people who serially turn up at emergency departments. Whether they require treatment or not, they have to be taken seriously by the staff, who will deal with them appropriately. However, some of those people will very clearly require treatment on a number of the occasions when they attend. We have people who come to emergency departments very regularly. I suppose that we could drill down to seek more information, but I do not know whether it would be particularly beneficial to us to do that to deal with the situation.

It appears to us that the crux of the problem at the Royal last week did not arise because of the Downe or Lagan Valley situation, but because of a major influx of people requiring admission to hospital.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Jo-Anne Dobson for a very quick question, which might require a written answer.

Mrs Dobson: Minister, it has been reported in the media that so many of our hard-working doctors, nurses and auxiliary staff, whom we all have the utmost respect for, have been working under intolerable conditions. Many have been at breaking point. Why do you refer to 12- and eight-hour waiting breaches rather than the NHS target of 95% of patients being seen within four hours? That has deteriorated during your tenure as Minister.

Mr Poots: Things are measured differently in GB than in Northern Ireland. That is something that we need to take account of.

I think that I am the only Member thus far to have paid tribute to the staff. It is a matter of regret that, when Members had the opportunity to pay tribute to staff, they failed to do so; they want to concentrate on a problem.

The truth is that they do a magnificent job, a wonderful job, in very difficult circumstances. The House needs to get behind our hospitals, our emergency departments and the staff who work in them. I, as Minister, am behind them and will give them all the support that I can to ensure that their working conditions are good, that they can provide the public with the appropriate service and that they can do so in an environment where they are not abused and are able to carry out their work in an appropriate way. Since I took office, over 100 extra doctors have started working in the health service in Northern Ireland, and there are 3% more nurses. My commitment is to the front line, not to administration and management.

4.00 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order, Members. That concludes this item of business.

Mrs Dobson: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I ask that the Minister reflects on the Hansard

report in order to see that I did, at the start of my question to him, pay tribute to the excellent work of the doctors, nurses and auxiliary staff, for whom we have the utmost respect.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That is on the record.

Mr Givan: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. During questions to the First Minister, I was absent when my name was called. I offer my apologies to you and the House for being absent. It was an oversight on my part.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Thank you very much. I appreciate your coming to address the House on the matter.

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mivan

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Danny Kinahan has given notice of a question for urgent oral answer to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I remind Members that, if they wish to ask a supplementary question, they should rise continually in their place. The Member who tabled the question will be called automatically to ask a supplementary question.

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support her Department can offer to Mivan to help to secure the future employment of its workforce.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Invest Northern Ireland will continue to liaise with the administrator and his team to explore all options to secure the long-term future of the plant in Antrim. I have spoken to the administrator and offered the full support of my Department in finding a workable solution. I take comfort from the statement released to the press by the administrator, which states:

"With the support of key stakeholders, including the bank, the business will continue to trade while all options are assessed."

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer so far. Friday seemed to be a sad day for Antrim and for Northern Ireland and, indeed, for many places in the world where Mivan is a household name after four decades in the housing industry, employing around 300 people. I would like to pay tribute to Dr Ivan McCabrey and all those who work there for the success that the company has been in the past.

Will the Minister clarify what action has been taken to help the subcontractors and businesses that might go under in future? Hopefully, they will not, but subcontractors always seem to pay the ultimate penalty. We hope that there will not be too much change and that Mivan may stay working and successful in the future in some form. Will she also clarify whether there will be a drill-down into the detail of how Invest NI can help companies that work in the rest of the world so that they are helped to find a way forward, whether that is with legal problems or other matters that may turn up in different jurisdictions?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I join him in paying tribute to Ivan McCabrey and his management team and, indeed, all of the staff at

Mivan. I had the privilege of visiting Mivan and was shown its extensive operation at that time, including the work that it was doing with apprentices. We always know the mark of a good employer by how seriously it takes the future employment prospects of people in the area. I say that because I believe that Ivan McCabrey is a man who cares not just for his current staff but for future staff. He took that very seriously.

Looking to the future, I have, as I indicated, spoken to the administrator, who has indicated that the banks and customers are showing goodwill towards the company at present. I hope that that goodwill continues while the administrator tries to find a solution to the problems that Mivan has found itself in. I have indicated to him that, if he needs to know anything or a proposition is put to him and he wonders what the position of my Department or Invest Northern Ireland might be, he should lift the phone and we will be as open and transparent with him as we can. Invest has been in contact with the administrator's office and has made that position very clear to him.

We now wait. It is fair to say that time is of the essence in this case, because Mivan deals in a number of areas and we rely on the continued goodwill of customers. That is true for the main employees and for the subcontractors. You will recall that, on other occasions when there has been difficulty in the construction sector, the subcontractors have suffered greatly. I hope that, if we find a solution for Mivan, that solution will also be applicable to the subcontractors.

Mr Clarke: I want to join other Members in what they said about the owner of Mivan, Mr McCabrey, and the work that he has done to secure employment for so many years. It is a sad day for Antrim, but I want to put on record the work that the Minister and Invest NI have done. I was with the Minister on a visit to the Mivan site two or three years ago for the announcement of new contracts. Minister, we cannot take away from the work that your Department has done over a number of years to secure investment and to work with the company. How hopeful are you that someone may come in and that things in Mivan can be turned round in the interests of the future of Antrim and the sustainability of the jobs?

Mrs Foster: I suppose that that is more of a question for the administrator at this time; he will deal with interested parties to see whether there is a way forward for Mivan. There are significant contracts, and I hope that someone will look at the value of those contracts, as well as the value of the very skilled staff that Mivan is in possession of and at the possibility of and potential in maintaining the Antrim site.

It is fair that we should put it on record that Mivan is an international firm with an international status that is second to none. It has been involved in Disneyland Paris, the Millennium Dome, One Hyde Park and, dare I mention it, the palace of Saddam Hussein. It has worked in some of the most glitzy and glamorous locations around the world and provides a very good service. I hope that any potential buyer will look at all that history but, more than that, at the potential in that company.

Mrs D Kelly: Minister, I join you in your obvious concern for the employees and subcontractors adversely impacted by this devastating news. I also join others in their praise of Mivan. Minister, will your Department undertake an analysis or breakdown of the skills and expertise of the

employees across the sectors and of the subcontractors and provide any other advice along with your colleague in DEL to assist employees who may need retraining or upskilling?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for that question. We tread a very careful line because we do not want it to look as though there is no hope for Mivan at this time. However, I take her comments that we should have an audit of the skills that exist in the firm so that, if something goes wrong, we can use those skills in the future. I say to the lady that we will look at those skills and, of course, work with DEL to see what it can offer if circumstances require that.

Mr Allister: In these situations, we always want to know what the Department can do to help, but will the Minister tell the House whether the company came looking for any assistance in recent weeks and whether any assistance was offered? Was the Minister as surprised as everyone else? Can the Minister also tell us what assistance Mivan has had over the years?

Mrs Foster: I cannot give you direct figures for the financial or other assistance that Mivan has had, but I will certainly put those figures in the Library so that people can assess the help and support that Invest Northern Ireland has given over the years. As Mr Clarke indicated, I have been down to visit the factory, and I know that it has benefited from Invest.

I was made aware of the difficulties in Mivan. I do not think that it was a surprise. We had been watching the fact that Lagan Group was in conversation with Mivan and was looking at a possible takeover. I was made aware of the acute difficulties in Mivan towards the end of last week, about two days before the announcement was made public. I did of course say that we would do anything that we could to be of assistance, but at that point it was an issue for the administrators. Unfortunately, I was not made aware at a time when I could have been of use. However, I think that I may not have been able to intervene on any occasion.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far.

I seek some clarification of whether Mivan is still trading. I am sure that the Minister will agree that it is a bit early for a post-mortem on the subject. Does she believe that there is a viable core business that could be rescued by another company?

Mrs Foster: I absolutely believe that there is a viable core business. A number of customers are exhibiting goodwill towards the business because they have dealt with the company in the past and it has delivered for them. They know that the skills base is very much there. This is something that you do not often hear me saying, but I pay tribute to the bank in this instance. It has stepped up to the mark and worked with the administrator to deal with a number of issues. The administrator has made it very clear that all stakeholders are working with him to find a solution. However, I will say again that time is of the essence.

Ministerial Statements

Common Agricultural Policy 2014-2020: EU Budget Allocation

Business resumed.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We now return to questions on the statement from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I thank the Minister for delivering the statement on this important issue.

Out of the court decision, what standard operating procedures has she laid in place in her Department that will prevent the situation from happening again? The statement talked a lot about the current rural development programme (RDP) but mentioned very little about the new RDP. When will she prioritise the funding that is available in the RDP? When will she bring her findings to the Executive? When will she bid for additional moneys from the Executive, if she sees fit to do that?

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

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I thank the Member for his question. As to it happening again, the judge made a ruling that the issue was significant and controversial and outside the Programme for Government. That may have implications for all Departments. That is the outworking, and, in practical terms, that is what it means. We in the Executive will have to deal with and grasp that and take it forward as an issue. However, there will need to be a collective discussion, and I am up for that.

The examples in the statement around the rural development programme merely highlight the types of programme that have been successful. I was highlighting the fact that they were all aimed at farmers and farm families and that those schemes are potentially in jeopardy because we do not have the transfer of funding. That is why those examples were chosen and highlighted in the document.

I will be bidding for moneys, particularly through the Going for Growth package that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I have been working on. The 7% transfer was to look at a fair and balanced approach to rural communities, farmers and the environmental aspect. The majority of that funding would have been for the farm business improvement scheme and would have funded things for the agrifood strategy. The Executive have placed a lot of importance around that. I am delighted that we now have recognition of the excellence in the sector and that it will be a key driver for economic recovery. However, if that is the case and if the Executive value that, they will now have to fund some of that work going forward.

Practical examples of things that I would want to see funded include capital grant schemes, which is clearly a big ask that has been set out in the 'Going for Growth' document. What does capital grant schemes mean? It means fencing, sheds and all those things that farmers ask for. So, the onus is now on the Executive to deliver for that, and I will certainly not be shy about making that bid when the time comes. As I said, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I are working on bringing a proposal to

the Executive. Hopefully, that will be over the next number of weeks.

4.15 pm

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat. What type of rural development schemes would have been funded by the 7% transfer from pillar 1 to pillar 2 but now may not be transferred because of what has happened?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, my decision to transfer the 7% was very much based on a fair and balanced assessment and an analysis of the stakeholder views that we received as a result of the consultation. For me, that was an excellent opportunity to ensure that we had a balanced approach to rural communities in their entirety. I referred to this in my previous answer, but the types of scheme that we are talking about are farm business improvement schemes, health and safety training, BVD training, Focus Farms and the whole range. The farm modernisation scheme itself is a fantastic project. So, those are the types of scheme that are now in danger because we have no transfer. As I said, I will go to the Executive. I will make a bid, and I will ask the Executive. Hopefully, the Minister of Finance and Personnel will be willing to put up front the money that we need to bring forward the scheme to help the industry. We have a plan in place — the agrifood strategy — but we need to be able to back it up financially, and the onus is now very much on the Executive to allow us to do that.

I believe that the decision that I took was the right one. It was a fair reflection of stakeholders' needs. Having said that, I will not be distracted from what I need to do. We are where we are now, and we need to move forward. We have the consultation, which will close over the next number of days, and we will then have to take key decisions on moving forward to try to meet the agrifood industry's needs.

Mr Byrne: Why did the Minister not seek permission from the Finance Department to have co-match funding for whatever percentage she is going to transfer from P1 to P2 to make sure that we have a meaningful rural development programme without disadvantaging the farming community?

Mrs O'Neill: It is essential that the message is clear: there is no attempt to disadvantage the farming community. The majority of funding from pillar 2 in the current programme and what would have been the case in the new programme will go to farms and farm families through all those schemes that I highlighted in the previous two answers. I highlighted to Ministers, including the Minister of Finance and Personnel, that I was taking a decision on the transfer. I had no response from the Minister of Finance and Personnel. No issues were highlighted as significant or anything that he wanted to discuss. The only Minister who responded to that round of seeking views was the Minister of the Environment, who responded on agrienvironment schemes. He wanted to make sure that they were fully protected in moving forward to the new programme. So, I had to face down the challenge that was put in front of me. The Minister of Finance and Personnel took the court challenge. I went to court, defended my position and accepted the ruling that the judge made. I took a paper back to the Executive that did not get agreement. So, we are now in a position where we have no transfer. That is a difficult position for the agrifood industry. All those schemes with fantastic potential that we could do are now

in jeopardy because we have a smaller pot of money to deal with them. You have to remember that we are the worst in Europe in the allocation of rural development funds per head. That is a poor starting point, and we may now have a further reduction because we cannot apply the transfer.

I will come back to the transfer issue. There is an opportunity in 2017 to look toward 2018 and 2019 about moving moneys, and we will have to look at it at that time.

Mrs Dobson: I also thank the Minister for her statement. Will she confirm whether the High Court pantomime over Christmas has made it harder to channel additional funding towards farm safety measures? In particular, will she clarify the implications for the future of the LFA, capital grant and modernisation schemes?

Mrs O'Neill: It is certainly the right time of year for panto. On the decision that was taken, as I said, we are where we are now. I will not rehearse all the things that I have said previously, but it will make it very difficult for all those schemes. Obviously, we now have a reduced pot of money. It will be very difficult. We will have to prioritise schemes, and some things may lose out. However, in taking decisions and moving forward, I will make sure that it reflects the needs of stakeholders and that any decision that I take, like the decision on the 7% transfer, is based on the views that I receive from stakeholders. We are in a more difficult position, but, as I said, I will go to the Executive and bid for additional funding because the Executive will now have to support rural communities.

If we are serious about supporting the agrifood industry, the Executive will have to provide the financial backing for the plan that we have in place. Excellent work was done with government and industry working together in partnership. We do not want it to be a lovely document that sits on the shelf, with the support not there. The Executive will now have to weigh in, step up to the mark and financially support the plan.

Ms Lo: I very much share the disappointment of the Minister on the zero-rate transfer. It is shameful and short-sighted. Will the Minister comment on whether the Finance Minister's decision to take the legal challenge was more to do with electioneering than Executive procedure?

Mrs O'Neill: I absolutely agree with that assertion.

Mr Irwin: We all need to learn lessons from the events of the past few weeks. I also believe that many of the elements of the pillar 1 consultation on the reform of the CAP are significant and controversial. Will the Minister confirm whether she will bring those issues to the Executive before she makes any decision on the consultation?

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously, I am cognisant of the fact that we have a recent judicial ruling. We have not received the written ruling yet, but we will get that in due course. We will go through the document and decide on the way forward accordingly.

As I said in answer to Mr Frew's comment, this has implications for all Departments because what was deemed significant and controversial in this case when the judge made the ruling is relevant to quite a lot of issues that go on in every Department. The Executive will have to get to grips with that, or we could find ourselves constantly locked up in court challenges. I do not think that is good for anybody.

The proper forum for the discussion on this was the Executive; unfortunately, the Finance Minister did not take that avenue and decided to take it straight to court.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her statement. The question was posed by the Alliance Party, but I want to come at you again. What does the Minister think were the real motivations of the DUP in taking the court case?

Mrs O'Neill: It is unfortunate, to say the least, that the DUP and the Finance Minister decided to take the issue to court when there was a political forum where there could have been some discussion, so I can only ascertain on the basis of all of that that it was a politically motivated action in the run-up to the election.

It is unfortunate, to say the least, that the Finance Minister did not use the avenues that were open for further discussion. The reality is that the DUP has created a situation in which the British Government, through DEFRA, took a decision that impacts on local farmers and the local agrifood industry. We have locally elected Ministers. It is a disgrace that the DUP allowed that to happen. That should not be the case. We are elected by constituents to carry out a role, so it is disgraceful that we are in a position where DEFRA has taken a decision that has limited our ability to move funds into the rural development programme.

As I said, there will be challenges in moving forward, but there are other key decisions to be taken. I want to make sure that, in moving forward to the best of my ability, we have the most balanced rural development programme that looks after the needs of rural dwellers, the environmental side of things and the entire farming community.

Mr Buchanan: Minister, at paragraph 12 of your statement, you indicate that you took account of legal advice. Can you confirm to the House whether that advice was in written form, who it came from and whether it indicated that you could proceed with your decision without Executive approval? Was any other advice received, and will you, as Minister, publish that legal advice, if such exists, to confirm the accuracy of your claims?

Mrs O'Neill: I am sure that the member is not questioning the truth of me saying that I sought legal advice. I did, in fact, seek legal advice. I will enquire as to whether or not it is appropriate to share that advice, but I had it in writing and in verbal form from the Attorney General. Obviously, when it came to the court case, we had outside legal advice. I took the decision because I believed that this was the core remit of my Department. I have taken relevant and very similar decisions in the past, and they went unchallenged. The Finance Minister did not see fit to challenge my decision last year not to apply voluntary modulation, so what is different now? That questions the motive for the challenge being made at this particular time.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I remind the House that this was the second blow to the rural development programme: the Tories negotiated a 22% cut to it and were supported by the DUP at Westminster. The transfer decision was the second blow. Minister, will the decision impact on your ability and that of your Department to support the broader aspects of rural development?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his comments. Obviously, there will be impacts. As I alluded to earlier, given that we have less money, we will have to prioritise the schemes that we take forward. There is an opportunity for the Executive to step up to the plate and help fund the industry. We have a strategic plan in place through the work done on Going For Growth, so we need the Executive to support that. I hope that the Finance Minister will be supportive when the ETI Minister and I make a bid to the Executive for funding under the Going for Growth strategy.

As I said, we have the lowest rural development budget in Europe, and this decision has further impacted on that. We started with a difficult position anyway compared to England, where there is a 12% transfer, Wales, where there is a 15% transfer, and Scotland, where there is a 9.5% transfer. Because of the challenge, we have no transfer, and we will be in a difficult position in moving forward. I cannot at this stage confirm what our entire budget will be for the rural development programme because there are so many variables that we need to deal with, but I will not be distracted from making sure that whatever decision I take meets the needs of rural communities in their entirety.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Minister, you highlighted the idea of the Focus Farms in your statement along with the dissemination of good practice and making big farms better organisations. Are you saying that the extension of Focus Farms is on hold as well?

Mrs O'Neill: No, I am saying that there will be difficult decisions to be taken about the way forward. None of this has been decided. Obviously, we are starting with a reduced pot of money, so the decisions will be difficult. We will have to prioritise and make the most effective use of the money we have, so it is all in the mix. The consultation will close on 17 January, and I will take decisions on the way forward on the basis of that. I need to have an understanding of my DARD budget, so when we have had those discussions I will be in a better position to know what we can and cannot fund.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her statement.

Minister, in a debate on the Going for Growth strategy, you gave me a firm commitment that you thought that £420 million would come from the Executive to fund the strategy. Is that money under threat because of the decision, as you will now have to prioritise other funding in your Department and the funding that is coming from the Executive?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, a lot of the 7% transfer money would have been used for the farm business improvement scheme. You will be aware that, under the Going for Growth strategy, a number of commitments were required from different Departments. This is a joint project with DETI.

I have always said that one of the tools available to me, when it came to financial backing, was the rural development programme. If we had been able to transfer the money, we would have been able to use some of it to fund some of the work under the agrifood strategy. Obviously, I do not have that money in my budget, so I will have to go to the Executive and bid for it, which I intend to do. I hope to get the support of the ETI Minister when I do that. We have a fantastic piece of work done, and it would be a shame if the Executive did not support it and back it financially. As I have said in the House many times, the

financial contribution from the Executive would lever in over £1.5 billion from the industry. So, we need to take this opportunity. As I said, I will not be shy about going to the Executive, asking for the money and making a very firm case.

Mr McCallister: I draw Members' attention to the fact that I am the owner of a registered farm business, so I declare that interest.

The Minister joins the long list of Ministers deemed to have breached the ministerial code, that very important document that does not seem to mean that much.

Does she agree that it is important that the Executive get together and decide how they are going to handle these types of issues where there are deadlines in place, to call an emergency Executive meeting to get some type of agreement in the absence of a decision that now cannot be taken for four-something years?

4.30 pm

Mrs O'Neill: As I said earlier, the court ruling may have implications for all Departments in taking their decisions. It is very clear to me now that the Executive need to have a discussion on this moving forward. Nobody wants to see the Executive tied up all the time in indifference and having to take their issues to court. The Executive need to have that conversation, and we will do that on the back of receiving the written judgement from the courts.

Miss M McIlveen: I am disappointed but not surprised by the reference from Mrs Dobson to the court case being a pantomime and the comments by Ms Lo and the Minister that the actions of my party were purely politically motivated. This was obviously vindicated by the judge's decision, but will the Minister confirm that the Agri-Food Strategy Board shared the same view as the DUP by opposing any transfer from pillar 1 to pillar 2?

Mrs O'Neill: The Agri-Food Strategy Board has been very successful. I prioritised this Department as an economic Department; it was not recognised as such in the past. The piece of work that the Agri-Food Strategy Board has done and the asks that it has set out for government are very clear. It wants the Executive to put up the financial backing to be able to take forward the projects. The 7% transfer was going to allow the Executive to fund a firm business improvement scheme, which includes things such as fencing, sheds, capital grants schemes, and the whole remit of programmes that I have outlined earlier, including focused farms and health and safety training. Maybe the DUP does not think that those things are important, but I certainly do.

I took the decision to base the 7% transfer so that I could meet the needs of the farming and agrifood industry. The DUP put us in a position where a British Government Minister took a decision that impacts on our local farmers. The DUP has taken the decision away from a local Minister, and only you can answer to the public about why you did that. As other people have said, I am very clear on your motivation — I am very clear.

Mr Allister: The Minister is very anxious to keep the focus on worthwhile projects that she says are now jeopardised by this situation. She is less anxious to talk about the squandering that she oversaw under axis 3, such as, last year alone, £1.14 million of axis 3 rural development

funding given to whom? It was given to GAA clubs. That is supposed to be funding to help rural farmers and the community. Does the Minister not see that, if she had not overseen such an abuse of the system, there might have been a higher level of confidence in her ability to make fair decisions?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not agree with your assessment of the situation. I think that the axis 3 projects that have been funded have all been decisions that have been taken by locally elected representatives in their areas that reflect the needs of their local communities. A whole mixture of projects have been funded, and there have been fantastic examples of projects that have been funded.

People in rural communities deserve services, they deserve tourism potential and they deserve support from this Department. My Department is the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and core to that work is supporting rural communities and making sure that we have thriving rural communities. People in rural communities deserve to have sporting facilities, community facilities and all the other things that anybody in an urban setting should have. That is the key role of my Department.

I will stand over the projects that have been funded and the decisions that have been taken by locally elected representatives in their areas to meet the needs of those areas. I could list the job creation, the tourism potential and all the other benefits that we have seen from the rural development programme. I am not ashamed to stand over what I believe has been successful in getting money into rural communities at a time of economic recession. We are creating jobs and supporting people to live and sustain themselves in rural communities.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister outline what research was done on the impact on farm incomes that would result from any changes to pillar 1 and pillar 2?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said in the statement, were no transfer to occur, about half of recipients of single farm payments would receive payments of just under an additional €260. Again, I suppose that the message that the DUP is trying to put out is that this is money being taken off farmers. It is not money being taken off farmers; it is money that was being put into pillar 2 to fund all those schemes that I outlined earlier and do not need to go over again. However, it is money that was going directly to farmers through the schemes, and it was going to fund schemes that farmers are asking for, such as capital grant schemes and farm modernisation schemes. So, the money was not being taken off farmers, it was just a matter of how it was being paid out.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on her statement. Before the Minister for Regional Development makes a statement, I remind Members that they have all received the rules of behaviour and courtesies in the House, which include a rule that they are not to speak from a sedentary position.

North/South Ministerial Council: Roads and Transport

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Mr Deputy Speaker, I am not sure whether that advice was directed at me as Minister —

Mr Deputy Speaker: No.

Mr Kennedy: — or more widely to Members.

Anyway, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in the transport sector, which was held in Armagh on Thursday 28 November 2013. The meeting was chaired by Minister Leo Varadkar and attended by Minister Durkan and me. My statement will address the agenda items that relate to my Department, including the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport paper on EU matters. The Council discussed opportunities for further cooperation within the transport sector and asked that we consider relevant issues on strategic transport planning.

On major road projects, I will deal first with the A5. The Council noted that, following the court ruling on 8 April 2013, work is progressing on an appropriate assessment process, which, upon completion, might lead to publication of an updated environment statement and will be the subject of a public consultation exercise that is expected to take place in spring 2014.

We noted that the Northern Ireland Executive have agreed the reallocation of funds from the A5 to other projects in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 financial years. The Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive reaffirmed their commitment to the A5 scheme, and the Irish Government reaffirmed their funding commitment of £25 million per annum in 2015 and 2016. We noted that, once the environmental reviews are completed and the position on the project programme has been clarified, updated programme and project milestones will need to be prepared for agreement by the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, taking account of the financial commitments in place.

The Council welcomed that the construction work on the A8 project is progressing well and is expected to be completed by spring 2015.

On EU matters, we discussed the ongoing positive cooperation between relevant Departments on EU-related transport issues. We welcomed progress made since the last North/South Ministerial Council transport meeting on key EU dossiers of mutual interest, including the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) regulations; the connecting Europe facility regulations; the fourth railway package; the better airports package; the roadworthiness package; the clean power for transport package; and the ports policy package of regulation.

The Council agreed that officials should continue to pursue the possible inclusion of thematic objective 7, promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures, in the final INTERREG Va programme for 2014-2020.

The Council agreed to hold its next NSMC transport sector meeting in April 2014. That completes the statement.

Mr Spratt (The Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): I thank the Minister for his statement. I would be grateful if he would elaborate on the opportunities for further cooperation in the transport sector and the relevant strategic transport planning issues that he referred to in his statement.

What money has been expended on the A5 project to date? Is the Minister content that his Department will get right the environmental assessments that are being undertaken?

Finally, given the number of traffic collisions and accidents on roads right across the Province this morning, can the Minister tell us what level of grit was applied yesterday evening and this morning? Will he join me in sending condolences to the family of the 44-year-old man who was killed near Saintfield in County Down this morning, a death that might have been the result of ungritted roads?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Chair of the Regional Development Committee for his questions. With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will address the issue of gritting at the end of my answer, given that it is not directly related to the North/South Ministerial Council. I know that the Chair of the Committee sought permission to ask a priority notice question. In discussions that I had with him earlier, I agreed that I would take a question from him as part of this sequence of questioning.

The Chair of the Committee asked a number of questions, including on the opportunities for further cooperation to bring forward European schemes and even joint cooperation with the Irish Republic. I remain open to that prospect. He will know the strenuous efforts that I have made to advance, particularly in Europe, opportunities for additional funding. I am particularly keen on that. Indeed, I am proud to say that my Department has the best record of all Executive Departments when it comes to accessing financial support from Europe. We will continue to do that. As necessary, we will assess cooperation as it involves other people, including the Irish Republic.

The Member will note what I said in my statement about the A5 scheme. He asked what has been spent on the A5 scheme to date. In the region of £64 million has been spent on the A5 scheme to date, largely on preparation and development fees. That large sum of money reflects the scale of the Department. That expenditure has been and remains necessary if the scheme is to be delivered. The Irish Government and the Executive have reaffirmed their commitment to the A5 scheme. The Irish Government have reaffirmed their funding commitment of £25 million per annum in 2015 and 2016.

I turn now to the issue of gritting, which the Chair of the Committee raised at the end of his remarks. I was made aware this morning of another tragic death on our roads. I join the Member, and the whole House will join us, in offering our thoughts and prayers to those most affected by that tragedy. It is too early to indicate the reasons for it. Obviously, it will be subject to a full investigation. I will await the outcome of that before commenting further on that fatal accident. I was also made aware this morning that delayed gritting took place on roads in the southern division; it was later than that which took place in other divisions. I have been informed that that was due to a differential in forecasting and, therefore, decision-making across divisions. However, I consider this to be

a very serious matter and have asked for a full review of information to be provided and made available to decision-makers, as well as a review of the decisions themselves.

4.45 pm

Although I can acknowledge the clear need for gritting in the southern division this morning, I am not in a position to say whether weather information supplied was inadequate or decision-making post supply of information could have been better. It is important that there is not only transparency in decisions taken but confidence in future decisions. I will make my position very clear: this is an issue of public safety and not resources, and where there is any doubt in any decision to grit or not to grit, I expect decision-makers to err on the side of caution and, when in doubt, grit.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Predictably, I welcome the renewed commitment to the A5 in the NSMC report, particularly in the light of the fact that, in a recent report in the 'Belfast Telegraph', the Freight Transport Association predicted that the scheme would be abandoned. There have been two deaths already this year on the A5, including Patsy McCrory who is being buried today, and other people have been injured. In my correspondence with the Minister, he has said that the environmental reviews are ongoing and that he does not want to pre-empt the outcome of any process, but the public are demanding some sort of reassurance or —

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

Mr McAleer: — indicative timeline as to when the review might conclude and an idea of when we might be in a position to move on with public consultation and, indeed, the start of the scheme.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question, and I join him in extending my sympathy to the friends and families of those who were recently tragically bereaved as a result of the accidents on the A5 between Sion Mills and Newtown Stewart. We offer our thoughts and prayers to those who were injured that they will recover quickly and in full measure.

I attempted to indicate through the statement that it is very likely that a public consultation exercise will take place. That is expected to take place in spring this year. Rather than rely on the 'Belfast Telegraph' or other media outlets, the Member will perhaps continue to ask me questions about progress on the scheme.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's statement and the section on the A5. Can he give us an assurance that we will not have a lot of undue delays with the environmental reviews? How many will there be, and when will we have a conclusion and an actual start on the work?

Mr Kennedy: I thank Mr Byrne for his question. He has been a long-standing supporter of the scheme, and I understand his frustration over such matters. It is important that, as a result of the court action, we follow assiduously the judge's judgement and make sure that we comply with all aspects of it. That may take a bit of additional time, but it is better and safer to do so, and that is why we have adopted the position that we have. I know that the Member understands that, and we will keep the House and him updated as appropriate.

Mr Hussey: It appears that West Tyrone has the Floor for quite a while today.

I thank the Minister for his statement. I, too, want to be associated with the remarks about those who lost their life on the A5 and other roads in recent days. Minister, several references have been made to the A5, and I ask you to reassure the House that at no stage have you ever said that the A5 upgrade will not proceed. You said, quite rightly, that the 'Belfast Telegraph' is not the oracle and that you and the Executive are committed to the project.

Given the success that the Minister has had in securing EU funds since taking up office, what progress has been made in obtaining EU funding for the A8?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question and for his cautionary remarks about relying on me rather than any other outlet; that was very wise. What he said is completely accurate. The A5 scheme remains a delayed scheme; it is not an abandoned scheme. It is clear from my statement and from my answers that that remains the case in the attitude of the Northern Ireland Executive and, indeed, in the Government of the Irish Republic.

The Member asked about the A8. I am pleased to say that considerable progress has been made on that particular scheme. However, I am particularly pleased to say that we have been able to attract grant aid funding from the European Commission under its TEN-T funding. A grant of nearly £15 million, or over €18 million, has been made. I think that that is very good news indeed. The grant has reduced the cost of the scheme to the Executive and has allowed the Minister of Finance and Personnel to reallocate money to other funding priorities. I hope very much that, having achieved that landmark for him, he will acknowledge that in those reallocations to transport issues.

The grant will be paid in three instalments. The first instalment of approximately £4 million was received in December 2013. The second instalment will be paid in the 2014-15 financial year, and the third instalment will be paid on completion of the scheme. So, it is good news that the A8 scheme continues to make good progress and that we have been successful in obtaining additional EU funding.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his statement. I join him, the Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development and others in offering my sympathy to the families of those who have lost their lives on the roads of Northern Ireland so far this year and particularly to the family of the young man who lost his life in my constituency this morning.

On the last page of his statement, the Minister refers to EU dossiers of mutual interest, including a roadworthiness package. Will he elaborate briefly on what that entails? Is there something in it that would help to reduce road accidents as we move forward?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question and, indeed, for his sympathy to all those affected by the tragedy of road deaths.

Roadworthiness is one of the issues on which we cooperate and combine with my ministerial colleague Minister Durkan, who will make his statement on the same meeting shortly, immediately after questions to me. We seek to make improvements not only to the road infrastructure but to the products that we use in road

building to try to ensure that we construct the safest road surfaces that can be provided. There are aspects of vehicle roadworthiness that are Minister Durkan's responsibility, but there is mutual benefit in ensuring that that work happens and, indeed, in learning of other work that happens and operates in the Republic of Ireland.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's remarks about the £15 million that came from TEN-T, some of which assisted in the completion of the A8. As he will be aware, the A5 and A4 are now both on the comprehensive network. Will he indicate whether those schemes will receive any future funding from TEN-T?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question and, indeed, his encouragement. I know that he is always interested in obtaining the maximum amount of grant aid from Europe and attempts to assist with that. Of course, that is our intention. We will continue to press for funds to do with studies or reports as we prepare to bring schemes forward. A comprehensive network gives us that opportunity through TEN-T. That is a key responsibility of my Department, and we will pursue it with some vigour.

Mr Allister: The Minister tells the House that, at the North/South Ministerial Council, the Northern Ireland Executive reaffirmed their commitment to the A5 scheme. Does the Minister agree with me that there can be no binding commitment to the delivery of the A5 scheme unless and until it is included in the next Programme for Government and the next budgetary cycle? Neither of those can be gainsaid at the moment. Is that right?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his contribution. I think the Member is — I hope I have got this right — a stated opponent of the A5 scheme in its current form. I think that is fair to say. Although I understand the point that he makes, it is important to clarify that funding for 2015 and 2016, which had been under some scrutiny by the Government of the Irish Republic, remains confirmed, so it is still possible to assert at this stage that the A5 scheme is a project that the Northern Ireland Executive and the Government of the Irish Republic wish to pursue jointly.

Mrs Hale: I apologise to the Minister for not being here at the beginning of his statement. I want to reiterate, in part, Mr Spratt's question, because I did not detect an answer. Is the Minister content that his Department will get the environmental assessments currently being undertaken for the A5 right this time? At what stage are those assessments?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question. The Member will know the importance of the due care that we need to take in addressing all those aspects as we work through the requirements of the habitats directive and the potential for the public consultation. Those are matters of some delicacy. We are not pre-empting anything as a result of that and we are not taking anything for granted, but we will continue to work carefully through and adhere to the judgement that was handed down and that we should, therefore, be guided by.

North/South Ministerial Council: Road Safety

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the fifteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in the transport sector, held in Armagh on Thursday 28 November 2013. With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will make some concluding remarks that are additional to my original statement, but I assure Members that copies of my updated statement have been posted in their pigeonholes.

The meeting was attended by me, the Regional Development Minister, Danny Kennedy, and Leo Varadkar TD, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. Minister Varadkar chaired the meeting. I will address the agenda items for which my Department has responsibility: mutual recognition of penalty points, road user safety and vehicle safety policy and enforcement.

The meeting recognised the potential benefits of the Narrow Water bridge project. We are conscious that the priority at the moment is not to lose the available EU funding.

5.00 pm

The Council noted that the steering and working groups are continuing to take forward work on the mutual recognition of penalty points and to work through the issues identified, some of which are proving complex and difficult to resolve. We noted my Department's public consultation on the proposals, which ran from 12 March to 14 May 2013. The majority of responses were in favour of the proposals. We discussed a number of issues and asked officials to provide further advice to help us to decide how best to proceed.

On road user safety, the Council welcomed the continued sharing of knowledge and experience between both jurisdictions on the delivery of our respective road safety strategies and measures to reduce further road casualties and fatalities. We particularly welcomed the excellent new and ongoing road safety initiatives being undertaken in both jurisdictions, including the Once seatbelt-wearing campaign that I launched on 10 October 2013 in support of our Share the Road to Zero campaign; the Crashed Lives campaigns that my Department and the Road Safety Authority (RSA) ran over the Christmas and new year period; my Department's work with the PSNI and Coca Cola on its designated driver initiative over the Christmas and new year period; continuation of the road safety education and awareness campaign of the RSA; the RSA campaign to remind road users to ensure that their vehicles are serviced and winter ready; the RSA and Garda Síochána high visibility promotional campaign that culminated in a national high visibility day on 21 December; and the recently launched Check it Fits RSA child restraint roadshow.

I shared progress on our Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill, including provisions to tackle drink driving, further reform driver testing and licensing and make the wearing of helmets mandatory when riding a quad bike on public roads. I will introduce the Bill to the Assembly, subject to Executive approval.

We welcomed progress on Ireland's Road Traffic Bill 2013 that will also include provisions to further reform Ireland's driver-licensing regime as well as adjust its penalty points regime and make a number of amendments to legislation regarding commercial vehicle roadworthiness testing.

On vehicle safety and enforcement, we welcomed the continuing proactive cross-border cooperation, targeting a wide range of illegal activity in the goods-haulage and passenger-transport industries, including my Department's continuing recruitment of enforcement officers to increase the level of roadside enforcement; enhanced roadside enforcement as part of the Road Safety Authority's commercial vehicle roadworthiness reform programme, which has resulted in an increase in the number of roadside checkpoints and an increased focus on the standard of school buses; and continuing liaison on successful, targeted cross-border enforcement operations in 2013 in both jurisdictions, which has resulted in prohibition actions for non-compliance with vehicle and driver regulations.

We welcomed the focus in recent months on tackling the misuse of fuel in the freight industry. We also welcomed the close cooperation by the various agencies in this regard and the recent revocation of a number of NI road haulage operator licences following action taken by my Department's transport regulation unit.

The Council expressed concern at the continuing impact of fuel laundering on the transport industry and the environment and welcomed the expected impact of new technology of fuel markers in both jurisdictions. We also discussed the implications of HGV vehicle height differentials that exist between the jurisdictions. We welcomed the signing of the memorandum of understanding between Ireland and the UK on mutual recognition of vehicle type approval. We also welcomed the continued excellent cooperation on enforcement of EU tachograph and drivers' hours rules and the training exchange for enforcement officers that took place in 2013. Similar initiatives are planned for this year.

Mr Deputy Speaker, that concludes my statement on the fifteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in the transport sector. However, with your forbearance, Mr Deputy Speaker, it would seem remiss of me not to comment to the Assembly on events on our roads over the past few days, which have seen six people lose their lives.

Members will be aware of my consistently expressed view that one death on the roads is one too many. I have personal experience, as do other Members, of the effect of a life lost on the roads and the impact that that can have on a family. I join Minister Kennedy and all contributors in the House in extending my condolences to all families who were bereaved in that tragic manner over the past couple of weeks. We all have responsibilities to ourselves and others when we use the roads. Recent events have reinforced the fact that travelling on the roads is inherently dangerous. On occasions, we forget that. I therefore urge all road users to take their responsibilities seriously. One lapse can last a lifetime. It can cost a life. I know that I can rely on all Members to work together to reinforce that message. I thank those leaders of society who have done so already.

I have called a meeting of the road safety stakeholder forum for tomorrow to discuss recent events and consider

further actions. Every road casualty is a tragedy and an emergency for those involved. In recent years, we have made tremendous strides to reduce casualties on our roads. Further progress requires ongoing joined-up efforts. I am personally committed to playing a full part in leading that work.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I thank the Minister for his statement. I also want to join him in sending my condolences to the families who have lost loved ones through tragic car fatalities. I certainly welcome his calling a meeting of the road safety stakeholder forum tomorrow to discuss issues urgently.

I recall that, over the past few years, the Committee has heard about accident black spots on some rural roads that have not received the attention that they deserve or have not met the criteria for straightening or widening. Will the Minister speak to the Minister for Regional Development, who is also in the Chamber, about looking at those black spots and how safety can be improved on rural roads?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Chairperson of the Environment Committee, Ms Lo. I assure her that I will talk to and work with anyone and everyone who has any influence or power in improving road safety. Certainly, that includes my ministerial colleague, Mr Kennedy.

I want to be careful not to heighten expectations about what tomorrow's meeting can achieve. It is important that we hear reports on the tragic incidents that have occurred over the past number of days and see what patterns there are. As a longstanding Committee member, you referred to a pattern having emerged over previous years at particular rural black spots. That is precisely the kind of information I would like to acquire and work with others to resolve.

Mrs Cameron: I also welcome the Minister's statement to the House and the update on very important road safety matters. I would also like to join in sending my condolences and, indeed, those of my party to those who have been bereaved over the past number of days. Obviously, we can all do more as individuals on the road to ensure our own safety and that of others. It is only right that we do so.

Can the Minister provide any form or timescale for any planned introduction, by way of action, of mutual recognition of penalty points?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mrs Cameron for her question. I am heartened by the extension of her condolences.

Mutual recognition of penalty points is a very important issue. It is one that I, along with others in the House and our counterparts in Leinster House, believe will go a long way to improving road safety on the island. We do, after all, share roads with our neighbours, and, unfortunately, many people choose to abuse roads on both sides of the border.

Unfortunately, some technical issues have arisen of late with the introduction and implementation of the mutual recognition of penalty points. However, I and Minister Varadkar remain committed to overcoming those issues, about which I am not at liberty to say too much today, to get that introduced as quickly as possible. In fact, over the Christmas break, I noticed that Minister Varadkar had a front page article in the 'The Irish Times' on the issue, in which he stressed its importance. I am glad to see the seriousness with which it is being viewed in the South. I assure the Member that I will do my utmost to ensure that

we play our full part in moving forward as promptly as possible.

Mr Boylan: , Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement. I also offer my condolences to the families of those who have tragically lost their lives on our roads, in particular the gentleman who lost his life in the Newry and Armagh area over the weekend.

I want to bring up another issue with the Minister, and that is the HGV road user levy scheme. I know that a meeting in this format will not take place again until April, and, by that time, the scheme may be introduced here. I just wondered whether the Minister has had any discussion with his counterpart in the South about that scheme. Will he comment on how the scheme will impact on the road haulage industry and cross-border trade?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. We did indeed have some discussion about heavy goods vehicles, but, regrettably, that centered largely on compliance issues and not the topic to which the Member refers. However, I am certainly happy to meet the Member to discuss that further. I certainly give an undertaking here to take that wherever it must go, be it to Minister Varadkar or whoever.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his statement on a very important and serious issue. What specific legislative changes has he proposed to the Executive on the issue of learner drivers? Where does that sit in that system, and when are we likely to see it coming to the House?

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Eastwood. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Kennedy: I have not heard that for years. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Durkan: The road traffic amendment Bill is with the Executive, awaiting approval. A key aspect, if not the key aspect, of the proposed legislation is the changes in how people will learn to drive. It is a graduated driving programme for learners, which will see a reduction in the age at which people can begin to learn to drive. However, anyone who starts to learn to drive will have to take a year to learn. The sole reason for this is that, over the years, research has shown that there has been a gross over-representation of young and new drivers in our fatality and casualty lists. We believe that by extending the period over which people have to learn to drive to, say, a year, that will give learner drivers a real experience of what it is like to drive. They will be learning to drive as opposed to learning to pass a test. As it stands, someone can apply for their provisional licence and then take the test a month or two later, perhaps never having driven in the dark, in the rain, in the snow or on the motorway. We hope that those new measures will greatly assist learner drivers to become equipped for, if you like, the real road.

5.15 pm

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement and join others in expressing sympathy to the families of those who have lost their lives on the roads recently. Part of the Minister's statement referred to the continuing impact of fuel laundering. Can he outline what additional measures are being taken to combat that criminal activity, particularly the new technologies? When can we expect to see those in place?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Weir for his question. Fuel laundering is a huge issue and one that I remain determined to play my part in tackling, as do other Ministers. I recently met the Justice Minister here on the matter, and I have had discussions with Minister Kennedy on it. A new marker, if you like, has been introduced in the Republic. They tell me that it has proven to be very successful in reducing the amount of laundering going on. The marker is meant to be impossible to remove, but, unfortunately, as experience will tell us, it will not remain impossible to remove for too long. Trials are being carried out on a similar product in Great Britain, and they hope to extend that to the North within the next few months — by April, I believe.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for his statement. I, too, pass on my condolences to those families who have lost loved ones in recent road traffic accidents. It seems that this is something that we are having great difficulty in tackling, but that is no slight on the Department.

Can the Minister give us any indication of why, he feels, we are getting so few convictions for those who are engaged in such criminal activities as fuel laundering?

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Lord Morrow. Unfortunately, the number of convictions and arrests for fuel laundering falls outwith my remit. I know that while we may be getting few arrests, my Department is not getting fewer incidences referred to it or having to carry out fewer clean-ups that are required due to fuel laundering. I know that the point that Lord Morrow has raised is one that causes great frustration to people on the ground, particularly in certain border constituencies. As I said, I met our Justice Minister on this issue recently, and it is one of which he is acutely aware.

Mr Byrne: Following on the same line, does the Minister accept that bona fide legal haulage companies are finding it impossible to compete with other hauliers who are using laundered diesel? What can be done through Revenue and Customs to tackle the issue, because it has been softly, softly so far?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Byrne for his question. I very much agree that legitimate haulage companies and others who are doing things by the book are suffering as a direct result of fuel laundering. It is not a victimless crime. Legitimate businesses are suffering. They are having to lay off workers as a result of fuel laundering, and the environment is suffering due to the pollution that it causes. Following an earlier question, reference was made to a new marker that is being brought forward to be put into fuel at source. That will, or should, prevent it being laundered. That remains to be seen. It has proven successful in other jurisdictions, and I am hopeful that it will prove to be equally successful here upon its introduction in the next couple of months.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for his statement and join others in expressing sympathy to the families of those who have lost lives. I agree with the Minister that one life lost is one life too many. I think that we need to remember that.

In his statement, the Minister referred to the mutual recognition of penalty points. It almost seems like déjà vu. We keep revisiting this, and there always seem to be difficulties. Can the Minister provide us with some detail as to what those difficulties are? Are they difficulties that can be overcome soon? Or is it going to keep coming back that

there are difficulties with it? Are the problems on our side or theirs?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr McCrea for the question. I think that it is safe to say that, on this issue, we are both on the same side: there is just one side. It is not a case of déjà vu, because real progress has been made in advancing the work. Some key policy and operational issues have been agreed. However, as I said earlier, some other issues are proving to be complex and difficult to resolve. Minister Varadkar and I have discussed those issues and agreed to pause the project pending further work to allow us to decide how best to proceed with them. As I said earlier, I cannot go into the exact nature of the issues, but they are legal and technical. I met Minister Ford about one of them, on which there is work to be done with the judiciary in the Republic of Ireland.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for the statement. I, like others, add my sympathies to all the families bereaved in recent times because of traffic accidents. Right at the end of his statement, the Minister referred to EU tachograph and drivers' hours rules. Can he confirm whether the rules are the same in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland? Is their implementation and enforcement the same in both jurisdictions?

Mr Durkan: Solely on the tachograph issue, I believe that there is uniformity across jurisdictions. However, there are differences on other issues around vehicles. One is the height of certain vehicles, a point that your party colleague Mr Kennedy raised. There are some discrete differences between legislation in that regard, but there appears to be uniformity on the tachograph.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the fact that both relevant Ministers are in the Chamber for this focus on road safety. How closely does the Minister of the Environment's Department work with Roads Service to identify particular locations in rural areas where priority road safety measures need to be taken? Following this business, I will be writing to both Ministers about a particular situation at Altamuskin Road near Sixmilecross.

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr McElduff for his question. My officials work closely with DRD and, of course, the PSNI on road safety issues. We look at many issues, such as those that Mr McElduff raised and that Ms Lo raised earlier with particular reference to rural roads. I look forward to and await correspondence from the Member. I look forward to working with others, including Mr Kennedy of course, hopefully to address the issues raised by the Member.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his statement and answers. Given the severe weather that we have experienced, with high winds, flooding, and so forth, is there any mutual campaign that could be conducted between North and South to make motorists aware of their vehicular responsibilities and duties and to see whether we can in some way reduce the level of accidents resulting simply from poor weather?

Mr Durkan: Thank you, Mr Maginness, for that question. I believe that there have previously been campaigns here in the North run by DOE focusing on bad weather, bad driving conditions and what measures and precautions drivers can and should take in such inclement weather and driving conditions.

I am unaware of any cross-border road safety campaign. However, it is certainly something that I would be keen to explore. When discussing the mutual recognition of penalty points, I referred to the fact that we have many motorists driving in both jurisdictions on a daily basis, so it seems that a North/South approach would make sense in this instance. I do not imagine that there would be resistance from any quarter to an attempt to get such a campaign up and running.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That concludes questions on the statement. Members may take their ease while we make changes at the top Table.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Private Members' Business

Haass/O'Sullivan Proposals

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for the debate. However, as three amendments have been selected, an additional 15 minutes have been added to the total time.

The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Before we begin, I advise the House that the amendments are mutually exclusive. For example, if amendment No 1 is made, it would not be in order to put the Question on either amendment No 2 or amendment No 3. Similarly, if amendment No 2 is made, the Question will not be put on amendment No 3. I hope that that is clear to the House.

Mr G Kelly: I beg to move

That this Assembly acknowledges that the published Haass/O'Sullivan proposals represent a significant opportunity for political parties to show positive leadership, have the potential to make a meaningful contribution to the peace-building process, and offer an opportunity to take significant steps forward in a number of difficult policy areas; notes that Dr Richard Haass was invited jointly by the five Executive parties to chair the process and thanks Dr Haass, Professor O'Sullivan and their team for their very worthy contribution over the past six months; calls on the Executive to begin putting in place the foundations for implementation of the proposals; and further calls on all parties to support their successful implementation.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I begin by thanking Richard Haass, Meghan O'Sullivan and their team for freely giving of their time and effort throughout the six months of negotiations, which we completed in the early hours of last New Year's Eve. As stated in our motion, I also note for the record that they were invited here to chair the process by all five parties of the Executive. The Ulster Unionist leader seems to be somewhat confused on that point, at least in his public utterances.

Sinn Féin's approach to negotiations was based on the principles set out in the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent agreements. They include full respect for rights, just and equal treatment, mutual respect, parity of esteem and freedom from discrimination. We published our submission to the Haass/O'Sullivan talks, but we realise that there were approximately 600 other submissions. We also stated from the beginning that we were entering the talks with open minds. We wanted the talks to succeed and to finish in agreement. Sinn Féin also understood that, for five parties to reach agreement, there must be compromise on all sides. As Richard Haass said:

"agreement necessarily required compromise on some preferences, but not core principles, by all involved."

Hence, it is stating the obvious to say that this is not a republican document. It is more a document that republicans are prepared to support despite its flaws, in the belief that it will move our society forward in dealing with a shared and better future that is no longer hamstrung by its past or, at least, is less hampered by it. We took up the challenge and stretched ourselves, and we accept that other parties stretched themselves as well.

5.30 pm

It is our belief that significant progress has been made on at least two of the three issues that we set out to resolve. On parades and protests, we collectively created better structures in the proposals. Dialogue and mediation are crucial elements in the resolution of disputes, and it is worth repeating that only a handful of the 3,000 or more parades that occur in the North of Ireland every year are contentious. All parties agreed that there is still a need for a regulatory body to deal with parades and protests where agreement is not achieved. The regulatory body set out in the proposals is transparent and accountable, and criteria are proposed to assist in making consistent and measured decisions. The issue has been raised by every party in the Assembly on various occasions when they believed that successive parades commissions were making illogical decisions, at least in the view of a given party on a given day. A code of conduct is also contained in the proposals that would be enshrined in legislation and have the force of law.

On contending with the past, victims and survivors are, as promised, central. Their freedom of choice in the pursuit of information is at the core. Individuals can pursue information and truth privately through an independent commission for information retrieval, allowing many who thought that they might never get the truth to find out what happened to their loved ones. The flawed Historical Enquiries Team (HET) would be replaced by an independent and empowered historical investigations unit (HIU), which would be staffed by independent people but have the same powers as the PSNI. The burden of historical inquiries, at present dealt with by the ombudsman's office, would also be moved to the HIU. There would be an ability to look at the historical themes or patterns of deaths in the conflict on the basis of emerging and existing evidence. The long-standing issue of different narratives of our past could also be dealt with in a non-exclusive way.

There is a challenge to all of us in the section on acknowledgment. The suffering and hurt of the long conflict came from every side and was felt by every side. Statements of acknowledgement and responsibility for that hurt by those involved on all sides would, I believe, help with the healing process.

On flags and emblems, Sinn Féin was not alone in its disappointment as political unionism simply would not engage. They reject any regulation of the unofficial display of flags and emblems in public spaces.

The report also recommends a commission on identity, culture and tradition. Although Sinn Féin has stated clearly that it has no confidence that that commission will deliver, we will, nonetheless, engage in and with it to promote equality, respect and parity of esteem on issues of culture, identity and tradition, including, in particular, the Irish language. Although this was the weakest section by far,

I have to say that I look forward to the opening up of the discussion of Irishness and Britishness and, indeed, the intercultural variations that our society has now entered.

As I stated, all five parties of the Executive agreed to bring in the Haass/O'Sullivan team because, frankly, we could not come to agreement on these difficult issues on our own. We have created a huge opportunity that, I argue, we cannot afford to lose. The team led by Haass and O'Sullivan came here with no agenda except to facilitate. They brought our various positions as close to each other as they could and did so from an outside and objective point of view. Speaking in the wake of the publication of the proposals, Richard Haass was very clear on the conclusions that he came to.

I want to turn to the amendments for a moment. Sinn Féin will oppose all three amendments. The UUP amendment tries to rewrite the history of the talks by pretending that it is solely up to the First Ministers to sort out the problem. Normally, the UUP complains about not being allowed to be involved. Its leader was up for signing up to the agreement at the last plenary session, until Alliance spoke so strongly against the flags and emblems section. I look forward to hearing the reason for his change of mind at the last minute.

The Alliance amendment speaks only of implementing proposals on one issue, which contradicts Naomi Long's position on implementation stated yesterday on 'Sunday Politics'. I was glad of the clarification she gave yesterday, but again I look forward to clarity on the Alliance Party's position on implementation.

The DUP's amendment clearly removes the core issue of the motion and the Haass/O'Sullivan intent, which is to implement the proposals. I welcome the fact that the party leaders will meet tomorrow, but replacing the call by Richard Haass to put in place the foundations for the implementation of his proposals can only signify reluctance or, indeed, refusal to implement the agreement. To argue that the five parties should get together to renegotiate beggars logic and belief. We have had the negotiations, and more time will not bring us closer at this juncture. The society we serve and its people expect us to act, and they expect us to act together. I therefore argue that we all commit ourselves to implementing the recommendations.

Yesterday, the four Church leaders came out in support of the Haass/O'Sullivan proposals. It is also time that we heard clearly from the British and Irish Governments their view of the Haass/O'Sullivan recommendations. The two Governments are protagonists; they cannot fudge their responses. If they support the proposals, will they also participate and assist in their implementation so that the three toxic issues will no longer bedevil progress? The one thing that is certain is that, unless we act, these issues will continue to affect in the most negative of ways any progress that we are trying to make on having a shared and better future. The three issues of parades, flags and emblems, and the past are not going away. If we do not set a structure and process in place to deal with them now, they will continue to afflict us all for many years to come. There is an onus on the Irish and British Governments and, indeed, all the parties to maintain the momentum that has been created and build on the progress achieved. I commend the motion.

Mr Elliott: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Leave out all after the first "proposals" and insert:

"were a genuine attempt to resolve the controversial issues of dealing with the past, parades and flags; thanks Dr Haass, Professor O'Sullivan and their team for their very worthy contribution over the past six months; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to agree proposals for a practical and positive way forward on the three issues of contention."

I welcome the opportunity to move amendment No 1. I am assuming that a lot of people in the wider community and, indeed, the media are maybe getting just a little fed up with hearing about all the aspects around the Haass talks. It is very difficult to think of something new to say in the debate, so we will, I suppose, have to go over some old ground once again.

One comment in the preamble of the final draft of the Haass document said quite a lot:

"Although we believe this agreement constitutes a significant step forward, it does not resolve all difficulties around the issues addressed. We could not reach an accord on initiatives to manage the issue of flags and emblems. Moreover, while we agreed a number of steps to contend with the past, other steps proved beyond consensus. This document is a contribution to addressing these difficult issues, not a solution."

That says quite a lot: it is not a solution in itself, even if it were to be accepted. We spent a lot of time in the talks and negotiations. The Ulster Unionist Party went into it in good faith. I assume that all the other parties went into it in good faith, but they will obviously be able to speak for themselves.

Had there not been a very controversial decision in Belfast City Council in December 2012 to remove from Belfast City Hall the flying of the national flag of Northern Ireland, which is the national flag of the United Kingdom, the Union flag, on 365 days, I wonder whether all the talks and negotiations would have been required. The vast majority of people in the community realise that that was not a good decision. People realise that there was no consensus on that decision. I assume that, under the structures that we have now in Northern Ireland, we are meant to try to get consensus on issues. Obviously, that did not happen there, as in some other aspects.

I appeal to Members to actually think about some of the aspects of what they are going to say. We need to have a little calm reflection on what actually happened during the talks and why they were not totally accepted by everyone. I know that in the final negotiations — it is now public knowledge — that the Alliance Party representatives, who were mandated to take a decision there and then at those talks, basically rejected the proposals that morning. That set the scene for where we have come to today.

There are a number of issues. I listened to Mr Kelly, who indicated that there were only a small number of controversial parades, and that is right. I believe that there should be no controversial parades. Indeed, probably, had it not been for Sinn Féin activists, as Mr Adams has said, who clearly, in my opinion, provoked opposition to

parades, we would not be in the state that we are with parades at the moment.

There are clearly some aspects of the criteria for the adjudication of parades that I object to and do not like. There are two of those aspects in particular. One of them is, obviously, the number of parades passing an area or in an area, which was brought in at the very last draft and is an issue that I cannot accept. The accumulation of parades should not be taken into account in the criteria. The second of those aspects is the cost to public services. That was in at an earlier stage as the cost to policing. The cost to public services is really no different, except that it widens it out much more. Clearly, I cannot accept that a criterion can be taken as just about cost.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: Yes, I am happy to give way.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that including the cost to public services leaves a small group of activists able to increase the cost and, therefore, decrease the likelihood of a march happening?

Mr Elliott: I thank Mr Beggs for that. He is right. Not only that, but an argument would then evolve about whether that cost was to do with the parade or the protest and the objections. You would get into a whole new debate and argument on that aspect.

With respect to the flags issue, the Ulster Unionist Party had a clear process or initiative, on going into the talks, about the flags aspect, and that is that Northern Ireland is constitutionally a part of the United Kingdom. There is no question about that. Until there was an acceptance from all parties at the talks that Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom was quite clear and that the flag of the United Kingdom, which is, therefore, the flag of Northern Ireland, is indeed the Union flag, there could be no point in having discussions about other aspects of it. We were happy to take on the debate and discussion about having a new flag for Northern Ireland and trying to develop that, but it was not to be a replacement for the Union flag. First, there had to be acceptance and agreement that the flag of Northern Ireland was indeed the Union flag. Unfortunately, we did not seem to get agreement from other parties on that. They were reluctant to buy into that, but obviously it is up to them to say why that was.

Dealing with the past obviously started off as a very controversial issue. I know that there were people who said that this was going to be a real stumbling block. I felt that there was some progress, but there were obviously some very dangerous aspects to dealing with the past as well. We are quite clear: what we have at the moment is focused basically on the security forces and the actions of state services. We do not believe that is helpful; it needs to be broadened out much more if we are going to really deal with the issues of the past. I think that there is a problem from a large section or part of our community when they talk about getting truth or information recovery. Many people do not believe that we will get the full truth. In fact, a lot of people do not believe that we will even get a partial truth. That was accepted, even in the round-table talks that all the parties had when we did not have Dr Haass and Professor O'Sullivan present. It was broadly accepted by most parties that, indeed, any truth that we would get would be a very limited one.

5.45 pm

People indicated that they thought that getting that limited truth may be better than getting no truth at all, but sometimes that would only leave people, particularly innocent victims, even more frustrated. If they got a partial truth and did not hear it all, that would leave them more frustrated and they would want more. That would pose more questions for us as politicians and for the people who were given that limited information, but it would certainly not resolve the issues for those who had lost loved ones or been injured as a result of the Troubles.

People asked me about the terminology that was being used in the agreements. The Ulster Unionist Party indicated from the outset that we believed that people should recognise the causes of the Troubles. People needed to accept the causes of the Troubles. People needed to accept that there was terrorism and terrorists. One person said to me quite late on in the discussions, "My father, in 1987, was murdered by terrorists, murdered by people who were members of a terrorist organisation. Why will people not accept that?" People were convicted of being terrorists and being in terrorist organisations. Why will that not be accepted by those who were in the talks and negotiations? I cannot understand why not, and I would like to hear from some of those people why they would not accept that as the basis that we must start from. If we can get there —

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

Mr Elliott: — then there is a much better chance of getting a resolution if we have a much better start and honesty.

Mr P Robinson: I beg to move amendment No 2:

Leave out all after "months;" and insert:

"and welcomes the decision of the party leaders to meet on 14 January to consider the next steps."

I speak in my capacity as leader of the Democratic Unionist Party as opposed to that of First Minister. The debate should be welcomed as a good opportunity to take stock of where we are in the process and what the next steps may be. Nonetheless, I do not welcome the divisive nature of the motion. It sets up a party political position, and, with respect to the other political parties, each of their amendments is designed to set out their party political position.

The amendment in my name and those of my colleagues recognises that there is a tomorrow and we have to resolve the outstanding issues. None of us in the Chamber could be satisfied with the issues as they stand. The status quo is simply not acceptable. I am not satisfied that the sovereign flag of my nation is treated with disrespect in various parts of the Province. I want those kinds of issues resolved. I am not satisfied with the Parades Commission and the role and function that it carries out. Those issues have to be resolved. And I am not satisfied that we have some rewriting of the past. I want to ensure that the story of the past is told but in a fair and balanced way. I am not convinced that any of those three areas is dealt with properly under the status quo, and therefore we need change.

It has always been my position that no deal is better than a bad deal. I do not believe that, taken as a package, this was a good deal that was going to resolve the issues at stake and help to resolve parading, the flags problem and

the issues surrounding the past. I start from that process that it is worthwhile only if it will improve the situation, not if it will make it worse.

I will come to some of the issues in a moment, but it is right to express our thanks and appreciation to Dr Haass, Professor O'Sullivan and their team for the hard work that they did over a six-month period. We recognise that these are intractable issues. If they had been easier, we would have solved them when we were dealing with the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy (CSI) issue.

If they had been easier, we would have been able to resolve them when left to our own devices. However, very useful work has been done.

There is a misunderstanding on the part of the party opposite and some others in this Chamber, and perhaps even on the part of Dr Haass, about what was required. We left very clear instructions as to what was required. We put them on paper to the committee members on the panel and to Professor O'Sullivan and Dr Haass when we gave them their letter of appointment. The terms of reference state that the:

"Panel will be invited to: 'Bring forward a set of recommendations by the end of 2013'".

I could go into the rest of it, but it is the usual stuff about what they were to bring recommendations in relation to.

So, it was the task of the panel to bring forward the recommendations. The panel did not do that. The panel brought forward no recommendations whatsoever. Whether the recommendations were agreed unanimously by the five parties or, indeed, whether they were agreed by a sufficient consensus of those around the table, the job is still to be completed.

We have Dr Haass's view of what might be a fair and balanced proposition. I do not agree that it is balanced, but I do agree that, within the proposals that he brings forward, there are many issues that are satisfactory when it comes to taking the matter forward. I have been referred to as indicating that the broad structure outlined by Dr Haass is one that could house the structures that would take us forward, but there still is a requirement to get the detail right. You can have the most positive of proposals poisoned by detail that does not make the proposition work in the way that would be best and most fitting.

So, the parties still have not fulfilled the obligation that was placed on them to bring forward their proposals to the deputy First Minister and me. You can hide behind Richard Haass and say, "We like what he's done, and therefore that's the end of the story", but it is not. You were not there to get an agreement with Dr Haass: you were there to get an agreement amongst the five parties. Dr Haass will not be about here when there are problems with parades or flags or the past, but we will be. You have to get an agreement with us. The parties around this Chamber need to be satisfied with the way forward, and an agreement that simply brings the SDLP and Sinn Féin together is not going to resolve our problems, because you need to bring unionism along with you.

Having listened to Tom Elliott's remarks, I do not think that he said anything that I disagree with. I entirely accept his view that on parades there are two big issues still sitting there that have not been resolved. I can see the benefit of

the more transparent system that is outlined in the Haass document, but it is destroyed by two issues: criteria and code of conduct. Incidentally, those are two issues that we had resolved satisfactorily in 2010.

On the issue of criteria, cost has been added, which, as has been indicated, incentivises protesters and those who want to cause disruption to cause as much disruption as possible so that a cost is attached to a parade. That way, the police will put forward their bill for policing the parade, which will then be one of the criteria taken into account when deciding whether you allow a parade to take place or not. Quite frankly, if you incentivise those who want to stop a parade, you are not resolving the parades issue. So, we need to find out whether people really believe that there is a cost attached to people exercising their rights to assemble and to parade.

The second issue is a code of conduct. There is already a code of conduct, and it applies to those parades that are under a determination. The new code of conduct in the Haass proposals applies to every parade and to the supporters of parades. So, we have a situation where, under the Haass proposals, even those parades that have gone off peacefully will be included. Over and over again, I have heard Members from all sides of the Chamber indicate that we are only dealing with a small number of difficult parades. Therefore, why put under the criminal law the 95% or more of parades and their supporters where there is no problem whatsoever? It is unnecessary to do that, and I do not think that it should be done.

There are issues with the past, which Mr Elliott raised. I raise one further issue, which is that there is a suggestion that a body be set up that has one representative from each of the five Executive parties. Anybody who thinks that I am going to treat the electorate who vote for the Democratic Unionist Party in that way is mistaken. There is no way that it would be acceptable to have a party with eight Members in the Assembly given the same representation as a party with 38 Members. That is one issue, and there are other issues to be resolved.

What do we do by way of moving forward? I think that the leaders' meeting tomorrow is important. I agree to some extent with the remarks made by Gerry Kelly that there are difficulties. Looking back to the CSI period, you can see the length of time that it took to end up with the 'Together: Building a United Community' document. Therefore, there needs to be some impetus for a working group if it is to continue doing this work, but the one thing that we need to do first is for each of the parties to be honest and say which elements of the Haass proposals they agree with, which ones they could agree if they got some change to them and which ones are excluded altogether. We need to have that exercise among the parties.

I counted, and there are over 340 separate elements to the Haass proposals. We need to work out whether there are elements that all five parties are in agreement with and whether that agreement is sufficient to be able to allow us to move forward. Just as Dr McDonnell said in the House of Commons, I say that if there are areas on which all the parties are agreed and satisfied that we move forward, you start to implement and you legislate, and, as he also said, we work on the issues that are outstanding to try to resolve those, too. That is all that I am asking. If you do not do it now, let us be clear that you can hide behind Haass as much as you like, but in a month's time, six months' time or

a year's time, you are going to have to come back to these matters. It is far better to do it now when we have a clear insight into one another's views on the issues concerned, and then let us try to resolve the outstanding matters.

Mr Lyttle: I beg to move amendment No 3:

Leave out all after second "Executive" and insert:

"to take urgent steps to implement the provisions relating to dealing with the past and to develop a time-limited, independently chaired mechanism to reach agreement between the parties on outstanding issues on parades and flags, building on the progress made and delivering real change to meet the aspirations of the public who invested hope in the Haass process."

We believe that the Alliance Party amendment strengthens the motion. It is important to restate why progress on the unsettled issues is so important. Despite the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and the moves that we have seen from conflict to peace in Northern Ireland, in 2007, the cost of division in Northern Ireland was estimated at over £1 billion a year. Issues of sovereignty and identity remain contested by political parties and on our streets, with at times very violent consequences. The policing of parades and related protests between April and October 2013 cost approximately £26 million. The childcare budget for Northern Ireland for around four years is £12 million. That puts it into perspective.

An approach to the legacy of conflict and terror has failed to meet adequately the needs of victims and survivors or help deliver on the core principles of fairness, equality and mutual respect on which our society and a new and shared Northern Ireland should be founded.

The Haass process presented a unique opportunity to settle the issues that the Good Friday Agreement, the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy and Together: Building a United Community have all failed to address. There was a six-month internationally and independently chaired process, and it gained significant public participation. It is worth noting that key fact. There were hundreds of written submissions and meetings across our society. The Alliance Party extends its thanks to Richard Haass, Meghan O'Sullivan and their team for accepting the invitation to facilitate the process, which confirmed that the people of Northern Ireland are demanding leaders who are not afraid to compromise for the common good. My Alliance Party colleagues and I know well what it takes to compromise, and we will not be found wanting in that respect. We have made a significant contribution to the process and have acknowledged that the Haass proposals are a basis on which to make progress.

6.00 pm

The Alliance Party has given its clear commitment to implement what is in the document and to work to deliver timely progress on what is not. The real issue is not those who sign up and those who do not; it will be those who deliver and those who will not. However, we in Alliance have also given our honest assessment, which is that this is not the comprehensive agreement that the public demanded in their submissions or what the process was explicitly mandated to deliver. The fact that, as the document itself states, there is no agreement on flags and emblems is unacceptable and leaves community tension in our society and economy.

On the past, however, the document makes significant proposals that, if adequately resourced, implemented and supported by the British and Irish Governments, could improve access to justice, information and services for victims, and encourage reconciliation across our community. It also extends the terms of reference of a review of services for victims and survivors by the Victims' Commissioner, Kathryn Stone, to include an assessment of the financial needs of people seriously injured in conflict-related incidents. It does not draw a line under the past but seeks to deliver greater powers in the challenging area of historical investigation. It also creates the option, strictly on the principle of choice, for victims and survivors who wish to do so to engage with information recovery on the basis of the inadmissibility of that information in court.

The paper also provides for thematic issues to be reviewed by the independent commission for information recovery. That is another important element of addressing the legacy of the past. We have to be honest by saying that it is unlikely to provide all justice and all information to all victims and survivors, but it must be an improvement on the current arrangements. The Alliance Party has insisted that advocacy and counselling support be available to anyone engaging with these processes throughout. The implementation and reconciliation group would also create an implementation commissioner to ensure delivery of all the above. Importantly, civic society is included in the oversight of these mechanisms.

These proposals are substantive. They build on the work of many across our community: the Victims and Survivors Forum, Robin Eames and Denis Bradley, and many others who, in my honest assessment, met with significant agreement from all five Executive parties in the talks. However, I have listened to unionist parties raise objections in recent days in a way that I do not believe they did during the process. That gives me some concern about the desire of those parties to deliver progress on issues that we are nonetheless willing to address.

We, as a party, have always stood clearly for the rule of law. I have no difficulty whatsoever in stating clearly that terrorism was perpetrated on innocent people in our community and was wrong at all levels. However, to suggest that that was not addressed during the process or is in no way considered in the document is simply not true.

Alliance also worked to produce proposals on parades that would put in place an architecture —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: Yes, briefly.

Mr Allister: Will the Member refer to the section of the document that refers to the fact that this community was subjected to a vicious, vile, unjustified terrorist campaign and that identifies it as such?

Mr Lyttle: I am happy to do so at a later date. I have got quite a lot of information to get through. Thank you.

As members of a party that has always stood clearly for the rule of law — probably similar to Mr Allister — we also wanted, and worked to produce, an architecture that promoted dialogue, mediation and regulation only when necessary on the basis of the rule of law and shared space. Ultimately, though, like other issues, parading will be a matter of behaviour and attitude. Indeed, difficulties

that we have heard about on supporting a code of conduct and upholding determinations will need to be addressed.

For the document to state that there is “no accord” on flags and emblems should in no way be acceptable to the people of Northern Ireland. It is certainly not acceptable to the Alliance Party. Alliance put forward very reasonable proposals in this process for designated days for the Assembly, Departments and council headquarters; for exploring a Northern Ireland flag; for looking at the role of the Irish flag alongside the Union flag on state visits; and for the regulation of the unofficial display of flags on lamp posts. In my opinion, nationalist and republican parties were, at times, as dogmatic as unionist parties on flags. They were unwilling to consider the compromise position of designated days for official flags, which is supported most by people across Northern Ireland and, indeed, appears to be the only cross-community solution on the books. Unionist parties refused even to consider an Alliance Party proposal to deal with the unofficial display of flags on lamp posts, which is a visual aid for sectarianism, in the absence of any deal on the official display of flags.

How can the OFMDFM commitment to build a united community be taken seriously when the issue of sovereign and national symbols cannot be settled and, instead, is pushed into the long grass of more process and no progress? Until nationalist and unionist parties are willing to compromise on the respectful and balanced representation of sovereignty and identity in Northern Ireland, this issue will be contested in perpetuity, with all the associated human and financial costs. For me, that is completely inconsistent with building a united community, whether Irish, British, Northern Irish or otherwise.

Process might be a comfortable hiding place for people who do not want progress. However, in the words of Abraham Lincoln:

“You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.”

To those who are frustrated, I say this: I and my Alliance Party colleagues share your frustration but we encourage you to channel that frustration into positive action. In the words of Dr King, to those of us who value peace, I say organise and mobilise better than those who are content with division and war.

We are acutely aware that the public are tired of parties talking and arguing about these issues. The Alliance Party is clear that Executive party leaders should move to implementation of these proposals and delivery of a shared society. I have a young family and constituents who are in need of education, jobs and health, and who have huge talent and potential. I want to get on with focusing my efforts to improve outcomes for them and to help them to achieve their potential. Progress on the core issues of sovereignty, identity, cultural expression and the past is urgent and vital to deliver the social and economic stability and the shared society that we need to be able to get on with achieving those aims.

Dr McDonnell: I want to avoid the risk of splitting hairs or posturing from a party political point of view, because that gets us nowhere. From the outset, the SDLP held a clear goal for this process. We wanted a sustainable, comprehensive and honourable agreement on flags, parades and dealing with the past. I, like others, want to

put on the record that we owe a deep debt of gratitude to Richard Haass, Meghan O'Sullivan and their team for the long hours and the hard work that brought us so close to such an agreement.

The SDLP executive and Assembly group have backed the decision of our talks delegates, Alex Atwood, Joe Byrne and Mark Durkan MP, to give a general endorsement of the Haass/O'Sullivan proposals. They did so in spite of the failure to complete the agreement that we so much wanted, because so much was achieved in the talks and where we got to. Yes, there was no agreement on flags, which was the most vexed issue of the process. However, parties should now have a much greater understanding of the need to include and embrace the Irish national identity and the British identity in the current constitutional position through the display of official flags and emblems. Parties should now better recognise the need for leadership and legislation to tackle the blight of unofficial and illegal flags and of the wildcat erection of flags on lamp posts and other places that are then left to rot and fall down; there is not much respect there.

The progress made can be consolidated. Yes, some more work is required to agree a parades code of practice and conduct in law that comprehensively deals with how people should conduct themselves on the public highway, not least outside other people's homes, schools and churches. However, I believe that all parties now recognise that genuine dialogue is the key to sorting out the parading problems. The architecture outlined in the document focuses rightly on the key principles of rights along with responsibilities and, crucially, relationships that need to be sorted. In my opinion and that of the SDLP, progress there can be consolidated.

The strongest part of the Haass/O'Sullivan process was not the parties, the Governments or the facilitation. To my mind, the strongest part was the massive input by civic society, which yet again demonstrated its strong desire for resolution of the issues that plague us. None of that was clearer than in the input from the many victims and survivors who made submissions. It is for the victims and survivors of the conflict that we must take the opportunities afforded to us now to deal comprehensively and ethically with the past.

The past was the biggest test in the talks process. We were told at the start that there was no hope of progress, yet it was the area in which we saw the greatest progress. It still remains the single biggest obligation on all of us. Progress there must be consolidated and acted on. It is now time to grasp the nettle, take responsibility, take ownership and move forward on the basis of what we achieved in the Haass and O'Sullivan proposals.

The next steps are the responsibility of not just the five party leaders but the two Governments that are the co-guarantors of the agreements that we have made in the past. Any attempts at renegotiation will not work. The negotiation has all been done. We now know each other's position, and all that it will do is stall any progress that has been made. Indeed, it may very well squander the gains that were made. Our purpose now must be the implementation of as much of the proposals as possible, and the two Governments must now fully engage and exert their power and influence as the co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement to —

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

Dr McDonnell: — ensure collective implementation and the legislation necessary to bring resolution to the issues that remain. To embed peace in Northern Ireland, a meaningful prosperity process has to be created. Prosperity will not be achieved without stability.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Dr McDonnell: We will not get stability without a working solution to those three problems.

Mr Campbell: I support our amendment. First of all, I pay tribute to Dr Haass and Dr O'Sullivan, as I am sure every party has done through its own delegates, who, in our case, were Jeffrey Donaldson MP, Jonathan Bell MLA and the Reverend Mervyn Gibson. A significant amount of time was spent on making progress, and considerable progress was made. It appears from some of the comments earlier that there has been, unfortunately, a degree of retrenchment, but hopefully we can recover that in the next days and weeks.

It is unfortunate that, during the Haass process, a distinct difference developed in attitudes in each community to what was going on during the talks. It was fairly clear to me from reading what politicians in the nationalist/republican community were saying, and listening to what my own community was saying, that, on the core issues, it seemed as if what looked like possible agreement would, to many in the nationalist community, be banked as progress. That is what appeared to be stated, and it was claimed that progress was being made. In the unionist community, it was being viewed as the great insoluble problems remaining insoluble, such as the flag, which is not to be perceived as being some sort of negotiated ploy or policy whereby on the one hand we have the Union flag and on the other we have the tricolour, and how do we reach some consensus.

6.15 pm

In the unionist community, there appeared to develop an understanding that, within nationalism, there simply was not going to be, at that stage anyway, an acceptance — not a support for the Union flag; there was not even going to be an acceptance — that that is the symbolic nature of what this country is. In our community that is taken as read. There will be no negotiation on or departure from that; that is a given. That is the way it is, and that is the way it is going to be.

We have to get over that and not see it as a symbol of unionism, because it is not. It is a status of the United Kingdom, not a unionist United Kingdom but the United Kingdom of which we are all a part. We are not going to depart from it, because we are a part of it. That is all it is. It should not be used in any other way as a symbol of triumphalism. It is a symbolic flag of the nation state of which we are a part. That is the way it is.

We move on. I listened to Mr Kelly when he said that taking more time will not bring us any closer. That sounds to me like a defeatist attitude. Although, on most occasions, I would be very content to hear a defeatist attitude from Sinn Féin and would be very much prepared to bank all the defeatist statements, on this occasion, I think it is wrong, because he appears to think that there is no possibility that

further discussions will bring a form of resolution to our problems. I hope that he is wrong.

On the issue of the past, I agree with Dr McDonnell, who has just said that it was perceived at the start that there would be no movement on that and there was movement. We do not expect people to agree with this, but again, we have to get to the point where people understand that part of the reason why we are discussing the past is because an unambiguous terror campaign was inflicted on 98% of the population here, Protestant and Catholic, and it was inflicted by the Provisional IRA. It was unfortunately responded to by loyalist paramilitaries, but that does not change who inflicted the campaign in the first instance. Until we can get an acknowledgement that that is the case, I see further progress as being difficult to make, but let us not say that because progress is difficult to make, it is impossible to make.

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

Mr Campbell: Let us knuckle down to try to get an assessment of the current position on flags, parades and the past that the entire community can live with.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht seo, nó ceapaim gur díospóireacht an-tábhachtach í. I welcome this debate, which is very important. As Members know, the Haass/O'Sullivan negotiations finished in the early hours of Tuesday 31 December, the day before a new year began. Would it not have been a great message for people throughout Ireland, Britain and the world to wake up and hear the news that agreement had been reached on how we progress the very difficult and challenging issues of flags, the past and parades? It would have been particularly good for people in the North, across every community, who have watched and hoped that we would reach agreement.

Sinn Féin is absolutely clear on where it stands. I believe that we have shown enormous leadership in this process. I was at our pre-Christmas ardcómhairle and the most recent one in Dublin on Saturday. There was overwhelming support for the proposals and for how we move forward, not because everyone agreed with everything but because there was an understanding that, in negotiations, you have to compromise, that you do not get everything you want and that we need to move forward, ensuring that all sections of our community enjoy parity of esteem and equality.

My flag is the Irish national flag and my anthem is Amhrán na bhFiann. I am proud of that and I make no apology for that. Yet, I completely understand and respect other people's differing allegiances and their right to have them. I ask from them equality of respect. If we do not deal with the past, we are doomed to repeat it, not to mention the hurt and pain of victims and survivors.

Today in Banbridge the inquiry into historical institutional abuse began. It was heartbreaking to hear the voices of the victims. They want truth and closure. Some of them are very elderly and are afraid that they will die before they get it. Similarly, victims of the conflict want truth. They understand the need for that for real healing and closure to take place.

In some quarters of the Assembly there is a failure to recognise that there were different protagonists in the conflict. That is a bad failure on their part. We have had

a conflict with many actors and combatants taking part, including the state. I listened carefully, and I did not hear one mention of state violence from the opposite Benches. They can talk about violence from republicans or loyalists, but they are in denial about state violence and collusion. That is deeply disrespectful to the victims of state violence. Are the victims from Loughinisland, Ballymurphy and Bloody Sunday not victims too? Do they not deserve your support for truth? I believe that they do. There should not be a hierarchy of victims.

The vast majority of parades are not contentious; only a minority are. Let us deal with that. Gone are the days when people will accept being second-class citizens. What is the problem with a code of conduct to ensure that people behave with respect? If residents of an area have difficulties, what is the problem with sitting down and talking? There should be none. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: Sinn Féin went into the talks and all talks in the peace process with a can-do attitude over a period of two decades. I believe that we have shown leadership. Like many others, I am very disappointed by the reaction of the UUP and DUP. There has been a failure of leadership. Let us call a spade a spade. There have been Members speaking today making the same old comments, discounting the costs of policing and strangely silent on the number of police officers hurt, not to mention attacks on the Alliance offices and other sectarian attacks. I know that my disappointment is shared by many in the unionist/Protestant community. I know because they have told me. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: People in those communities are way ahead of their political parties. Members may joke and try to laugh it off, but that is the reality. We understand very clearly what is happening and who is being pandered to. It is the UVF, the loyal orders and retired RUC members who do not want the truth to come out. The British and Irish Governments are silent. They also need to speak out. I want to see the money that is being wasted now on policing these things being spent on schools, welfare and building a new future.

Mrs Foster: The motion is fundamentally flawed because it refers to implementing the proposals, but the proposals are clearly not agreed by the five parties involved in the discussions. That was, of course, recognised by Professor O'Sullivan just after the talks finished on New Year's Eve, when she gave an interview to the 'The Irish Times' and said that it was not a full solution. She went on to say that it was not the end of the process and suggested that we should have:

"a forum to advance the ball."

I think that that actually confirms the position of the First Minister and leader of my party in saying that work has been carried out and there has been good and meaningful progress on matters, but there is still much work to do. I am very pleased that a meeting has been called for tomorrow to try to bring that about.

I will touch on a few of the issues. On parades, I welcome the fact that it has been acknowledged that the fundamental flaw with the Parades Commission is that it

not only mediates on parading disputes but adjudicates on those matters. There was a splitting up of that, which I think is to be welcomed, because it will not allow the cross-contamination that occurs at present in parade determinations. That is a fundamental flaw that has been recognised.

I am disappointed that there is not more on tolerance and recognition of the fundamental right of people to gather together and parade. I echo the comments made by Mr Elliott on the criteria issue, and I believe that it intervenes in a very disproportionate way on individuals' rights and their freedom of assembly, but that I am sure that those issues will be revisited in any subsequent talks.

We have had Caitríona Ruane tell us that her flag is the Irish tricolour. Of course, she lives in the Republic of Ireland, so that is absolutely correct. The reality is that the Union flag and the sovereign position of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom are fundamental. That must be recognised in any negotiations. To be fair, it was recognised by Sinn Féin in 1998 in the Belfast Agreement, when it signed up to the consent principle. The consent principle is very clear: it says that Northern Ireland is to remain part of the United Kingdom until the majority states otherwise. That means that we are part of the United Kingdom and, therefore, the flag of the United Kingdom is the flag of this part of the UK. That is a very clear position, but they seem to want to move away from the Belfast Agreement and to cherry-pick the parts that they signed up to at that time.

Chris Lyttle talked about the Alliance proposals on flags, and I was very alarmed to learn from my colleagues, who put so many hours in and whom I commend for their work in the negotiations, that one of the proposals was that the Union flag would only fly on departmental headquarters buildings in Northern Ireland. I know that Alliance has no representation in the west of the Province, but I am a representative of the west of the Province, and I will not sign up to anything that causes the effective repartition of Northern Ireland by not having any Union flags flying on departmental buildings in the west of the Province.

Dr Farry: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Surely the Member will recognise that the Alliance Party proposed that designated days be applied to all councils right across Northern Ireland, which would avoid a Balkanisation of local government and would ensure that we had a standard approach that would include the west of Northern Ireland with respect to flying the sovereign flag of the UK on all council buildings on designated days.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have a minute added onto her time.

Mrs Foster: And then allow the new councils to reduce that back to zero. What is the problem with departmental buildings putting up the flag of this nation state? Alliance clearly has an issue with that, and I do not know what the issue is in the west of the Province. I will tell you this: there is no way that the DUP will sign up to something that would not allow the Union flag to fly at government buildings in the west of the Province. There is just no way.

I turn to the past, Mr Speaker. Of course, we have had Sinn Féin speak about different narratives of the past. A narrative is not a fact. One may have a perception of what happened at a particular time and in a particular place, but that is not a fact. The fact is that there was a terrorist

campaign in Northern Ireland. We have heard Caitríona Ruane say that we have not heard about state collusion: I did not hear about the disappeared from you.

Ms Ruane: Will the Member take an intervention?

Mrs Foster: No, I will not be taking any interventions.

There is no doubt that state collusion will be put up in lights by Sinn Féin and the SDLP, and that would be so unfair to the victims of terrorism in Northern Ireland. It would be so unfair and so disproportionate to everything that went on here in Northern Ireland over the past 40 years, and there is no way that we will allow that to happen. I want to bring this story to you as I finish, Mr Speaker. During the talks, I had two Fermanagh Roman Catholic brothers come into me whose brother had been murdered by the IRA. He drove his tractor over a bomb that was set for police. They said to me, "Arlene, there is no way you can allow the people who killed our brother to be held up in the same fashion as our brother". That proved to me that Roman Catholics and Protestants have all suffered at the hands of terrorism throughout the years, and this party will stand four-square with those people no matter what process we are in.

6.30 pm

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Coming to the debate, I reflected on why we asked Richard Haass to become involved at all and what our expectation of the process was. We identified three issues that had defied agreement between us over the past 15 years, and I think that we properly identified three issues that not only were toxic in the past 15 years but in recent months have demonstrated the capacity to make things even more difficult for us. In other words, it is a downward spiral. That is reflected in public opinion, the media and the atmosphere in the Chamber.

What did we expect Richard Haass to do? Did we expect him to draw up a document with whatever number of elements — we are told that it is 340 — that we would then take as the best guess at where we would find agreement among ourselves, or did we expect him just to join in and be a patsy because people were not sincere about agreement? I have to say that I redden with embarrassment when I think of how people look at this place. They saw the build-up to the Haass talks. During the talks, they listened to the commentary. They were amazed to find that the issue that was initially identified as the easiest to solve was, in fact, going to be the issue that could have stalled the entire process and forced Richard Haass and his team, to whom I, too, express my gratitude for their efforts, to take it off the table in order to keep the process moving forward.

What did we expect that team to do with the experience that they had, their objectivity and the evidence that they had gathered from a very significant number of organisations, the submissions that they received and all the individual representations and submissions from parties? We expected Haass to do what he did. We expected him to leave a document, which he did. What did he expect? Honestly, what did he expect us to do? Did he expect us to start to pick over the bones and entrails of it and to attempt to renegotiate?

I listened to Tom Elliott repeat something that struck me as very odd when Mike Nesbitt made the comment about the flags decision. Accepting that a democratic

majority in Belfast City Hall had taken that decision, he said that there was no consensus. I do not remember there being a consensus to fly the flag on 365 days. That was the position that some parties took into the Haass negotiations. Were we taking that man to be a fool? Do we care what he thinks of us?

When he looked at the issue of parades, he recognised the flaw in the Parades Commission. We were not entirely happy with it either. One of the flaws that I see is the fact that each new series of appointments starts it over again. There is no corporate memory. Therefore, there are issues with the consistency of decisions that really only exacerbate the problems. Richard Haass addressed those issues. He separated out the process, yet some people found it unacceptable that that implied that there then had to be a code that governed the conduct of protesters, marchers, their supporters and the bands that they bring along — all of which pointed towards a solution. Did we want a solution?

The past depends on your point of view. The point was made by the recent funeral of Nelson Mandela that one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist or the reverse. There are people in my community — I say this not to be offensive to people of the British tradition — who saw the British Army and British policy as terrorism on their community. That is a fact as well as a narrative.

Mrs Foster: That is not a fact.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: It is a fact. You cannot dispute what I am saying. It is a fact. If we are going to deal with facts and look for agreement, we should work together in a way that accepts that there are different perspectives, there were different experiences during the conflict and people have been traumatised and hurt.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. On the basis of what he has said, does Mr McLaughlin accept that the IRA, INLA, UVF, UDA and other organisations were terrorists and committed terrorist acts?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Thank you. I will take that as an attempt to be helpful and find agreement. I do not think that you would get that agreement from republicans any more than I would expect you, Tom, to stand up and declare the British Government a terrorist organisation that employed terror. I do not expect you to do it, so I do not demand it of you.

What I recognise is that, after conflict over so many decades, there are thousands upon thousands of victims and traumatised people in our community and society. We have an equal responsibility for them all. We should not try to segregate them. We should not try to reduce the suffering and trauma of one section of the community. They are all victims. Sometimes I hear people getting confused. I hear them talking about dead people as though they were going to get compensation and as though they are the people who are seeking redress and the truth. Too many people were killed in our conflict. They are dead. It is their families and the survivors whom we are obliged to look after.

We made the agreement with our eyes wide open. Issues have been raised about the constitutional position.

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

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I do not have a difficulty with the constitutional position. Why? It is because I know that we will have the power to change it when we have sufficient numbers. That is good enough for me; I am a democrat.

Mr Byrne: I add my voice to the thanks expressed to Richard Haass, Meghan O'Sullivan and their team for their great efforts and commitment over the past months. I am sure that they were glad to get on a plane on New Year's Day and go home for some time.

Including parading in the Haass talks meant that, in a little over 15 years, there have been six reviews of parading, protest parades and commemorative events. There has been a pattern in those reviews of the Parades Commission: the attempt to accommodate the demands of the marching orders and to undo the work, authority and existence of the Parades Commission. They do not want any regulation, statutory controls or restrictions. An absolute right to assembly and to parade is the priority without due consideration for others. In that regard, the unilateral actions that the Secretary of State took in December to reconfigure how the commission operates and to discard the depth of knowledge and insight of previous commission members was particularly unhelpful in the run-in to the final talks.

We are now in a transitional situation, with delicate determinations pending. The SDLP acknowledges that the commission has, at times, made questionable and flawed decisions and that parties, including ours, have, on occasion, had differences of opinion with the commission on specific determinations. However, the SDLP has held steadfast to the belief that the commission's authority and independence should be accepted and protected. The rule of law must be respected by all at all times in these matters.

Despite our support for the Parades Commission and in approaching the Haass talks in the spirit of compromise, we were willing to consider new parading architecture as long as the key principles of rights, responsibilities and relationships were firmly respected and embedded. From the outset, we stated that there must be regulation and legislative controls to have parades, protest events and commemorative events managed in a more adequate way. Surely last summer demonstrated the need for that. We strongly emphasised that sustained, face-to-face, genuine locally based dialogue must remain the primary means to address differences over parades. Let us have dialogue and therefore less contentious parades or public events. That is the challenge.

During the talks, the two main unionist parties and the Orange Order in particular worked to remove regulation and controls from parades. They tried to prevent the development of legislation for a parading code of conduct. Throughout the talks, the two unionist parties stated that they wanted the Parades Commission abolished. That would be a return to mayhem and disorder at such public events. The Parades Commission came into being to help bring about some order. Even though two new bodies have been proposed to deal with parades and public events, some issues must be dealt with in legislative terms.

The SDLP believes that it is vital that there are nominated organisers of parades and nominated marching band organisers who are held accountable for any difficulties or activities that may arise whenever such public events

are held. There can be no ambiguity about how any protester, bandsman or marcher conducts themselves in public. We believe that that requires a code of practice in law that comprehensively deals with how people conduct themselves on the public highway, not least outside homes, schools and churches. Therefore, this work is not yet finished.

It is essential that, as the five parties and the two Governments now move the process forward, we tie down legislation on parades and public events and finally put to bed the parading issue to ensure that parading tensions do not escalate further and to lessen the damage to community relations. We cannot allow further damage to community relations and increased community tensions. Civic society and normal business and way of life must not be held to ransom over controversial parades and public events. The situation in Ardoyne illustrates how bitter parading issues across the North could become if we do not act to cure this ongoing sore.

Mr Speaker, my voice is breaking because I have a dose. The Haass discussions provided an opportunity to make a start on dealing with the outstanding issues. Let us work together; let us be brave; let us give leadership on these issues.

Mr Kennedy: I am glad to have the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. I join others in paying tribute to Dr Haass and, indeed, Professor O'Sullivan and their team for all of their work. Like many others in the Chamber, I was there for the long days and the late nights in the run-up to Christmas and the new year. I was there because my party and I are mandated to seek agreement, to explore compromise and to establish common ground. However, we are not mandated to seek agreement for agreement's sake. That would not be a sensible basis for moving forward or, indeed, for making progress.

It is wise not to underestimate the importance of language and word choice, particularly with the present final draft of the Haass proposals. It is not human nature, nor should it be, to settle for any old form of words, because of their importance in imparting meaning to the reader. There are those here today who will want to criticise our position on language, but they will not ask themselves what efforts they have made to close that gap. Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams now find themselves saying that some IRA killings could be described as murder. Yet, only yesterday, Gerry Kelly was unable to say which, in his view, could and which could not. The Gerry Adams comments during the Haass talks period in relation to the murder of police officers Breen and Buchanan were words chosen to cause offence. They were chosen to stoke controversy and to overshadow the comments that Judge Smithwick made about the IRA's engagement with his tribunal, when he said that they were incapable of telling the truth. Even when republicans secured a form of immunity, they were incapable of telling the truth.

Earlier, Mr Lyttle quoted Abe Lincoln and Dr Martin Luther King. I will give you a partial quote from George Orwell:

"Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable".

There is simply too much political language in this text, and there is probably too much text in this document. Brevity, I think, is a virtue. Republicans may talk about engaging

unionists and being sensitive to unionist views, but their choice of language, time and time again, does not support that. They talk about —

Mr Hussey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: I will.

Mr Hussey: In a previous comment, Ms Ruane referred to unionists pandering to the UVF, the UDA and the Orange Order, and she included in that the RUC. Can I ask for an assurance that we will continue to pander to the needs of the Royal Ulster Constabulary?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his intervention. I was not going to pass any comment on Ms Ruane's contribution, because, as usual, it lacked any virtue.

Republicans talk about competing narratives, but they fail to acknowledge the importance of fact and truth. Too often, fact and truth seem inconvenient for them. What was visited on people in Northern Ireland for over 30 years by the IRA and others was terrorism. It was not the work of NGOs, as appeared in one draft, and it was not the fault of law-abiding citizens, which was hinted at too. It was the fault of those who decided to break the law and commit acts of terrorism, without caring for the victims or their families.

You cannot legislate for poor attitudes, but, with the right attitudes and in a genuine rather than a cosmetic spirit of compromise, progress can be made on difficult areas. This document — insensitive, not viable and unacceptable at present — will not produce the significant opportunity that the motion seeks to identify.

That said, we are not without opportunity. I do not dismiss the potential for resolving difficult issues. I look forward to hearing from the First Minister and deputy First Minister about their shared position on the report now in their possession.

6.45 pm

Mr McCallister: I am probably not just as complimentary as the First Minister was when he was speaking about whether it is a good idea that the parties in here are almost handling their negotiations in public and saying what bits they might agree to or what bits they have more problems with.

In getting to this point in time, we have managed to almost create a crisis on parades, flags and dealing with the past. I will give a brief quote. We heard from many others, including Abraham Lincoln, but I am going to quote from our First Minister:

"Unionism needs to think and act strategically. Adopting political strategies that will inevitably lead down a cul de sac is not politically courageous, it is politically crazy. Because if unionists are not seen to make Northern Ireland work within the Union then no one will."

I agree with those comments. I listen to what has been said, and I question how on earth Mr Robinson, as leader of the largest unionist party in Northern Ireland, and us have moved to the point at which we have created these crises, with flags becoming so prominent an issue. Thirteen months on from the vote at the City Hall, we still have no resolution. At the time, we even had threats that

people were going to push for a division on putting the flag up every day on this Building and that we were going to move away from designated days. Other parties that supported designated days at the time changed their view and moved away from that long-established position.

I agree with Mrs Foster when she talked about 1998 and the Good Friday Agreement. We should remember what we agreed in 1998. All the parties here agreed to the consent principle; we agreed that Northern Ireland would stay as part of the United Kingdom until people decided that that was going to change in a referendum. That is how it is going to be done. The flag is a symbol of the United Kingdom; it is not a cultural tool or weapon. It is not something that belongs to any individual; it represents the nation state. Therefore, when you see it being abused, hanging in tatters and the weather bringing it down, it is not respectful or helpful. When it is put up and flown only to mark out territory or to offend, that is not something that any of us should want to happen.

On all these issues, unionism has managed to get itself into a cul-de-sac. It created a crisis, a forum and this talks process, and then it did not really equip itself with any sense of a spirit of generosity about how to deal with that.

The last part of the First Minister's quote was about making Northern Ireland work. That is the very challenge that I put to Sinn Féin when I spoke at its conference in London: you have to start to make Northern Ireland work. It is almost 16 years after the Good Friday Agreement. We keep having crisis talks, and we keep lurching from crisis to crisis, from the Good Friday Agreement to St Andrews, Hillsborough, policing and justice, and now the Haass process. If we keep this sense of crisis, how are we solving and meeting the needs of our citizens, the people we represent? What are we doing about the economy? You only have to look at the levels of disengagement. If you look at the BBC poll, you will see that it showed huge disengagement. Although people may have been hopeful of an outcome through the Christmas and new year period, there was almost no surprise when none came. The headline in today's 'News Letter' —

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

Mr McCallister: It suggests that there is real disengagement from voters on flags and those issues when people are worried about the economy, their jobs, the state of our education and health services —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr McCallister: Those are the issues. This must be an act of a Northern Ireland Government who are acting together.

Dr Farry: We need to be very ambitious for our society. We need to deliver economic, social and environmental progress most clearly. Many of us are continuing to work on those issues, notwithstanding the very important discussion that we are having around the Haass process and its aftermath. Indeed, today, we are looking to a new model of apprenticeships for Northern Ireland. However, to fully capture the opportunities that are available to us and to build on the international goodwill that still exists for Northern Ireland, as most clearly identified by the generosity, with their time, of Richard Haass, Meghan O'Sullivan and their team, we must clearly move on to address some of the most difficult and challenging issues

that still afflict this society, which are the outworkings of the continued deep divisions that exist around us.

Solutions have to be sustainable. Our reservations and, to an extent, frustrations with the outcome of the process are much less about unwillingness to compromise on our part — indeed, we believe that we have compromised in a major fashion on some issues — but rather that too many outcomes from the process have instead tended to reflect the search for the lowest common denominator. It seems that we have not managed to reach that, given the reaction of some parties to the process. That said, while we have given an honest assessment across three strands, we are willing to see what has been presented in draft seven — the final text — implemented. Implementation itself will bring a need for clarifications and further discussions. We accept that and have to be realistic about it.

We should press on with those areas where there is already agreement or the potential for consensus to be reached in the coming days or weeks, and on the other areas as soon as we possibly can. There are huge dangers in an elongated process. That becomes in many ways a trap — an illusion that we are making progress and that we can say to the world, "Look what we are trying to do on these issues", without really showing a willingness to rise up, confront and reach an accommodation on the most challenging issues that are still facing us.

It may be useful to reflect on some of the detail around the three strands in order to see where we can go from here. I think that there was to be, in essence, an implicit deal on the issue of parades, which was the replacement of the Parades Commission in return for much stronger clarification around the commitment of those taking part in parades and protests to the rule of law, including a robust code of conduct. For many, the Parades Commission itself was never the problem. Although there may have been a few issues with the Parades Commission, those could have been resolved with a few tweaks here and there. The real issue instead was one of attitudes, although there was a willingness to compromise for the greater good and to consider a replacement of the Parades Commission. However, that has to be taken alongside a willingness to engage and to have respect for the rule of law. I simply cannot understand why there are concerns and reservations about a code of conduct applying to all parades. Surely sectarianism is sectarianism, wherever it occurs in this society and any other? The same goes for racism and other forms of offensive behaviour. Surely we should aspire to those standards being the case for all parades, not simply those that have been deemed to be contentious or otherwise subject to adjudication?

On the issue of flags, we have to reflect the real disappointment that there is no agreement at all to reflect upon. Unionists have failed to move on the issue of dealing with unregulated flags and that is a problem in this society. It is something that people responded to the Haass process about in their droves. This is not about the formal flying of flags in recognition of sovereignty. This is about the marking out of territory for the very particular end of dividing people from one another. Equally, nationalists have failed to rise to the challenge of reflecting Northern Ireland's current status in the United Kingdom by applying the model of designated days across the board. For the record, I want to say very clearly that Alliance did not endorse any opt-outs.

Finally, I think that it worth recognising the real prize that lies out there for us around the past. We are arguably closer —

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

Dr Farry: — than we have been since 1998. Let us not tragically miss out by not seizing the opportunity to find agreement over the coming days.

Mr Attwood: I thank Richard Haass and Meghan O'Sullivan. I also thank all the parties. There are others who I will thank in a minute.

I want to, first, respond to a comment that was made Arlene Foster. I struck me as a comment that, in one moment, displayed the misunderstanding around Haas/O'Sullivan and, at the same time, displayed how people can read into Haass/O'Sullivan their worst fears rather than best hopes. She referred to collusion and said that the SDLP and Sinn Féin would go on about collusion. I understand why she made that point. However, what she might not have understood and what others in the Chamber might not understand, never mind those outside the Chamber, is that, when the SDLP spoke to Richard Haass and Meghan O'Sullivan about collusion, we also spoke about the murder of people in border areas, the disappeared, the deliberate targeting of part-time members of the services and so on and so forth. The argument that we made to Richards Haass was that, to deal with the past, you had to deal with all the competing narratives, all the truths and all the facts and, in so doing, come to an understanding of the history of this place in a fuller way to assist understanding, accountability and national reconciliation.

I do not think that any party in the Chamber, Haass or O'Sullivan would contradict me when I say that it was the SDLP that made that argument to them to move this society forward. Therefore, when Arlene Foster talks about the SDLP and Sinn Féin and collusion, let people understand that the conversation with Haass and O'Sullivan was not about collusion but all the details of the conflict in this place over the past 30 or 40 years.

What we are now in danger of doing, and this debate has added to the risk, is denying families, communities and all the generations the fullest understanding of what happened over the years of conflict — not partial understanding, not the republican version or the retired RUC officers' version but all the versions and the fullest level of truth possible to understand the past and contribute to national reconciliation. We are in danger of denying the families who want to find out more information about what happened to their murdered loved ones the opportunity to have a mechanism whereby those who were responsible or who know details of those who were responsible can bring forward that information.

Richard Haass and Meghan O'Sullivan said that the strongest part of the process was the voices of victims and survivors. In September, they told me that they did not agree with the SDLP that the issue of the past could be comprehensively dealt with. Yet, on the eve of the talks ending, they told Joe Byrne and me that they accepted that they were wrong. Will we now compound the potential for wrongdoing by denying victims and survivors, communities and all the generations the fullest possible explanation, accountability, truth and investigation in that regard? It

seems that, whether by design or default, we are stumbling towards that conclusion unless we show the wisdom, insight and understanding that victims and survivors demonstrated during the six months of the Haass process. We are now in that moment. The biggest and boldest part of Haass/O'Sullivan could begin to be unpicked and unravelled in a way that denies individuals and communities what they have argued for over the past six months. If that were to transpire, whether because of the actions of all the parties or the actions of some, it would be a withering indictment upon all that sacrifice and all the wisdom they demonstrated over the past six months.

7.00 pm

There are issues around Haass/O'Sullivan. That is why we gave a general endorsement. However, the way to resolve them is through working with the two Governments that have sovereign responsibility —

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

Mr Attwood: — in a number of matters and working forward in implementation and legislation and, in that space —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: Yes.

Mr Lyttle: Does the Member recognise that the British and Irish Governments have not only a political but a moral obligation to show leadership and support for the issue of dealing with the past?

Mr Attwood: Our advice to the two Governments is that they should show their good authority by saying that, arising from Haass/O'Sullivan and in agreement with the parties, they will bring forward implementation legislation and resourcing of Haass/O'Sullivan, especially on the past. That is why it was an act of leadership last Friday when the Tánaiste of the Irish Government said that his understanding of Haass/O'Sullivan was that, in the event that there was agreement on dealing with the past, they would bring forward state records to inform the process. It is a pity that the British Government have not taken that leadership. I ask them to do so now. However, the act of leadership that we want is not more debate. It is to hear the voices of victims and survivors —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr Attwood: — and to take forward Haass/O'Sullivan.

Mr Allister: I am in this House unashamedly and unapologetically as a unionist. Therefore, when I read the seventh document from Haass, I make no apology for asking this question: what is in this document for unionism? Sadly, I find nothing, effectively, for unionism.

I consider the issue of the national flag. The document does nothing to restore the Union flag to its rightful place on Belfast City Hall. It does nothing to give it more prominent display on this Building. On flags, it delivers nothing for unionism.

On the past, this is a document that fails even to grapple with one of the most obscene, objectionable matters that touches on the past: the definition of a victim. It does not at all address the issue of the equivalence that exists between the victim-maker and the victim. In that, it is a gross betrayal of innocent victims. I think that anyone

supportive of innocent victims should have, within that process, made that the beginning and the end of the test of whether or not there was anything attainable. That has been a scourge in this society that has been used by the victim-makers to validate themselves and to provide equivalence with those they made victims.

I come to the document and look to how it will deal with terrorism. I am still waiting for Mr Lyttle to put me right, but I find that it has nothing to say about the fact that, for 30 years and more, this Province was subjected to an unwarranted, vile campaign of terrorism. Instead, it sanitises it down to "the conflict". It talks about actors. Mr Speaker, it was no actor who firebombed the La Mon Hotel; it was no actor who took 10 innocent workmen out of a van at Kingsmills and slaughtered them in cold blood; it was no actor who planted the bomb in Enniskillen; it was no actor who went into a public house in Greysteel. They were terrorists, one and all. Anyone who fails to address that fundamental foundational issue in dealing with the past is making no serious effort to deal with it. On that, these proposals hopelessly flounder.

You then move, within that, to discover that innocent victims are meant to be exhilarated and encouraged by the fact that they might get some sanitised, self-serving version of Provo or UFF truth about why their innocent relatives died. It can even be anonymous. It is certainly untestable. That is itself an insult to innocent victims, who suffered so much at the hands of terrorists.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr Lyttle: Does the Member acknowledge that there are innocent victims in Northern Ireland who have lobbied for, asked for and requested the very process that he has just so fundamentally objected to?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Allister: If there are innocent victims who want to be satisfied with a self-serving, Provo version of the truth that they cannot test, that will raise more questions than it will answer and that might even come from an anonymous source, it is a matter for those victims, but, I must say that I do not know too many of them. The innocent victims whom I know crave justice, and justice is someone being held accountable for the villainy that was visited on them and their family, not hearing some self-serving story that is part of the rewrite of history by perpetrators of terrorism. That is the vehicle that the Haass proposals offer, in, of course, the diminution of and as an alternative to the proper pursuit of justice. On parading —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: No, I have given way.

On parading, the proposals open up a whole new vista, where anyone, anywhere can object to any parade anywhere and then require the parade organisers to subject themselves to negotiation with that individual. We are meant to think that that is progress. Like everything else that seems to be in the proposals, that is not progress and not an advance.

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

Mr Allister: What the proposals represent — this is why Sinn Féin is so enthusiastic about them — is another opportunity to pocket what Sinn Féin sees as some advance until the concession meter next needs to be fed, and then it will be out demanding more.

Mr Agnew: The Green Party NI sees the Haass proposals as a small but forward step rather than the game changer that we had hoped for. However, it becomes particularly disappointing when we cannot, it appears from today's debate, get agreement to implement even those small steps. The agreement proposed is far from perfect, but the question that I would pose is this: if it were implemented, would we be in a better place than we were before the process started? By the assessment of the Green Party NI, we would.

What we were promised and the objective of the Haass talks was the delivery of agreement on the three issues of the past, parades and flags by the end of the year. There was a failure in that regard, as that was not achieved. That has fed public cynicism. Already, questions are being asked about whether the five Executive parties, working together, can deliver on the economy, social issues and environmental issues. However, such a focus was put on the Haass process at the outset, and the failure to produce an agreement has fed public cynicism. The public expected failure, and the Executive parties delivered it.

Mr Lyttle: I realise that the Member's time is short, so I will take that into consideration. Has the Member any intention of outlining alternatives to any of the issues up for discussion?

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for his intervention. As I said, I do not believe that the document itself is a failure. It is disappointing that there were not resolutions on all issues, but I believe that there is much good in it. We believe that, if implemented, it would take Northern Ireland to a better place.

As I said, it was the failure to reach agreement again and the continuing divisiveness in some of the post-Haass comments that really fed into public cynicism. However, I agree with Peter Robinson that, where there is agreement, the parties should outline the bits that they are happy with, and, where there is consensus, they should absolutely get on with implementing those elements. As the document states:

"Further delay will risk an increase in levels of public disengagement."

We in the House have to give the public the narrative that we can work together to achieve progress. The longer we delay, the more disenchantment and disengagement there will be and the greater likelihood of unrest on the streets.

From the outset, the Green Party has challenged the process. That because it has a fundamental failing. I heard people pay tribute to those who put in the hundreds of submissions — I think that it was in the region of 500 — to Haass. Mr Allister said that he did not believe that he would be representing victims if he accepted it, and I do not believe I would be representing civic society if I said that being allowed to put in a submission was sufficient. We need genuine civic conversation, bringing the public in to the process.

The Good Friday Agreement was called the people's agreement. Everyone endorsed it — well, 72% did, and everybody had the opportunity to endorse it. What we had were closed-door meetings that people have been allowed to feed a submission into, but they were kept out of the discussions. Indeed, the discussions were private, and now we have, "You said, and you said", and nobody knows because we did not see the process.

We need to bring the public into the peace process. It has to be a public process, because, if we want any sustainable solution to the problems that were outlined, we need something that communities, not politicians, can endorse. All 108 of us could agree to the proposals, but it would not necessarily stop the trouble on our streets. That is because we need communities to agree to them. To do that, we need to bring communities with us, and to do that we need to include communities in the process.

We need a process that serves the common good. Again, it is a failure of our whole peace process and a failure of our politics that we still have people saying, "Our community does not accept this". This is the Northern Ireland Assembly, and it is here to represent the people of Northern Ireland. No politician should be talking about "our community" separate from "their community" when we are talking about other people in the House.

If you look at the Hansard report of Gregory Campbell's speech, you will see that he is clearly a man who is still entrenched in the idea that "I serve this section of society". That is indicative of some of the attitudes that were brought into the process. I am here to represent all sections of society in Northern Ireland, and that is what we should all be here to do. We should improve Northern Ireland for the common good and for everyone. People should not go into these processes with a self-serving agenda; they should go in to serve the common good, take Northern Ireland forward and make real, genuine progress.

Mr McNarry: When a deal results in a parades policy that enforces the curtailment of civil liberty, it is inequitable. When we find that a flag policy is contemplated that endorses the removal of the national flag on any day, we see that it is iniquitous. When attitudes, as we heard, on innocent victims abuse their dignity, the deal is indefensible. Yet, this evening, we appear to have a scramble in hot pursuit of momentum that puts at risk the advances made since 1998. Of course, if you hold no allegiance to the flag of the nation, despise and detest the culture and traditions of Orangeism and do not really give a toss about innocent victims and far less about their families' needs, what would you care about sharing in Northern Ireland when some of you cannot even come to this place and bring yourselves to name it properly?

7.15 pm

I hear the siren chatter of the liberal luvvies, most of them on the well-paid appointments list, putting their penny's worth into backing a deal that is not a deal. From the triumphant flag-removing coalition of Sinn Féin, Alliance and SDLP, I did not expect much, and I was not disappointed. What aches me is seeing unionists having learned nothing, having gained nothing and rushing forward to regenerate the Haass proposals — not their proposals, but the Haass proposals — and put back on the table concessions that they clearly left behind on New Year's Eve. They will not argue so, but, when they refuse

to tell what they have already conceded in reaching 90% agreement, is it not reasonable for some of us to suspect that they will go back to have their pocket picked again? Will they tell us here and now that preparations are being made for the flag to fly all year round instead of being parked away, as they have all agreed? Will they tell us that Portadown and Ligoniel Orangemen are being notified, as we speak, to gather for their return walk home? I suspect not.

They say there are good things. Are they in the 90%? Where is the bad? I sense the realisation is kicking in that the political offshoots of republican terrorists will never be satisfied. Is that not the ugly? Is the ugly not also that they cannot let go of agitating? They will not let things rest, and they will not hold back from creating division. I thought, mistakenly, that it would be enough to be settled in this place and to share in the Union. I thought we could move on inside that settlement, rather than see people seek to rip it apart at the first opportunity. It takes 10 minutes to read this deal, but it will take 10 years to explain it, because it is going nowhere.

The commentator Ed Curran recently wrote:

"The 40-page final Haass draft is a verbose, convoluted mishmash of irreconcilable views."

How right he is. If we are going to talk on a level playing field, does that not mean talking when the flag is up, when the men are back home and when the victims are satisfied? If not, our time would be better used improving the quality of life for a lot of our people.

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

Mr McNarry: Hopefully, by tomorrow, the reality check will kick in. I trust that it will be kicked into touch.

Mr Ford: I add my thanks to Richard Haass, Meghan O'Sullivan, Charles Landow and their team for the work that they did, which moved us significantly forward from the place that we were in of failure to reach any agreement among the five parties before we started the independently chaired process last year.

A number of Members have referred to the meeting of the five party leaders that is to be held tomorrow. It seems that there is a certain amount of hope being invested in that meeting. I am committed to attending that meeting and approaching the issues before it in a constructive fashion, but we need to be absolutely certain that we do not settle on some kind of process as a substitute for progress. Those investing hope in that meeting need to ensure that we see genuine ambition and not just the illusion of activity as a substitute for meeting the needs of the Province. Otherwise, those outside who are cynical and those in the Chamber who are being negative will have been proven to be correct.

We owe it to the people of Northern Ireland to move significantly forward from where we are. There is no doubt that, after the process was set up because of the failure of five parties to agree without any outside assistance, we saw some significant progress being made over the past six months. There was progress on the past, a limited amount of progress on parades and, unfortunately, none at all, as Chris Lyttle and Stephen Farry said, on flags.

There were other points made in the debate that are worthy of discussion. I agree with the unionists who expressed in robust terms their support for the rule of

law and their opposition to terrorism, but I have to ask the unionists from both parties what they gained by the insertion in the paper of the reference to "one's man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter".

Mr P Robinson: We never asked for it.

Mr Ford: Unionism asked for that, but, when Mitchel McLaughlin referred to it, the snorting that came from the DUP Back Benches was a fascinating example of what exactly they achieved. That was what they achieved when they asked for terrorism to be mentioned: a fairly pointless reference to it. Instead of looking forward, they were seeking to look to the past in a way that did not help them at all.

We owe it to victims and survivors to build on what was achieved by the Haass talks around the issues of the past. There are proposals that we could put in place as a matter of urgency if the Assembly, the Executive and the relevant Departments were willing to take things forward and if we had the necessary support from the British and Irish Governments in carrying some of the points through. Alliance believes that the final text from the Haass talks provides a blueprint on legacy issues that could provide real benefits for victims. For some, it could provide the opportunity for justice; for others, who recognise that after a period of years they will not get justice, it could provide the truth that they have been denied, because some recognise that truth is better than having nothing at all. It would improve the services generally available to victims, and it would provide the opportunity to move generally on reconciliation.

The five party leaders and, subsequently, the Executive and the Assembly must move to refine the proposals. Sadly, it appears that some people in this place and, indeed, some people in Westminster are seeking to row back from the points that they and their colleagues agreed at an earlier stage during the talks. We need to ensure that we continue to make progress and see progress carried through on parades and flags.

Flags was probably the most disappointing example of all — the unwillingness to engage at all, the unwillingness of some to discuss designated days as an appropriate way, within equality guidance, of recognising the constitutional position, and the unwillingness of those on the unionist side to take any stand at all against the unofficial displaying of flags on street furniture. I meet many people who regard the Union flag as their flag, and they are utterly opposed to the way in which it is left as a tatty rag, a point highlighted by John McCallister and Stephen Farry.

So, there are points where progress is possible, and there are points where we need an urgent, time-limited, independently chaired process to move on from what we experienced under Richard Haass and Meghan O'Sullivan. That is how we can reach agreement in a short time and move forward to deal with the real issues of this society: the economy, public services and improving the system of government here.

Mr Bell: As a DUP MLA, I speak in support of the amendment proposed by the DUP leader. I worked alongside the DUP team and wish to record my thanks to Reverend Mervyn Gibson, Jeffrey Donaldson MP and the party leader, who stayed with us through 22 hours of negotiations at times and through every stage of the negotiations, lengthy though they were. He brought

with him the forensic intelligence that he has been able to advise and guide the party with over the past four decades. I would also like to thank the party officers for their support throughout the process.

Our thanks also go to Professor O'Sullivan and Dr Richard Haass, who engaged in a Herculean task, put in a massive effort and brought a considerable degree of clarity and, on elements, progress across the three critical issues.

I agree with elements of what John McCallister said about the Union and with his quote from my party leader on its benefits. I agree that Northern Ireland is working. I agree that we have the lowest average unemployment in the United Kingdom. I agree that, compared to many European Union states, we have got some of the best records — as bad as it is here — on youth unemployment. I agree that there are many things, right across the board, to show that Northern Ireland is working, and working the best of any constituent parts of our United Kingdom.

I think that we have to bring truth —

Mr McCallister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Bell: I will, but I want to make progress first.

I believe that we have to bring truth and clarity to the process. The flag issue is settled. This is a sovereign part of the United Kingdom. It is not optional, it is not negotiable and there is nobody in the Chamber, I believe, who will live under anything other than the sovereign position of the United Kingdom. Why? Because the people of Northern Ireland clearly, freely and of their own choice and volition wish to remain within the United Kingdom, and the sovereign flag of the United Kingdom retains that part.

Parts of nationalism and republicanism fell short when they agreed to engage in fantasy politics of Irishness. We had Cairtriona Ruane talk about the fact that she lives in the Republic of Ireland and wants to show her allegiance to the country that she lives in. Fair play to her, but this is the United Kingdom. If she wants to cross the border — we are part of the European Union and there is the free movement of work — she comes into the United Kingdom, where the sovereign flag is that of the United Kingdom.

Turning to parades, I put on record the massive contribution made by the Orange Order, the Apprentice Boys, the Royal Black Preceptory and the Independent Order, who made a serious effort to bring clarity and make progress on these particular issues. However, we are not going to settle for a situation in which we take a stick to criminalise one section of the community via over-regulation and by putting in double remedies where law already exists. It is time for the ending of that hatred of Orange culture. It is also time to end attempts by those who would bring in some form of apartheid against Orangeism and its cultural expression.

The past is the area where we do get clarity. That is because 60% of deaths in Northern Ireland were brutal murders by republican terrorists. In many cases, that was responded to by loyalists, who committed 30%. Only 10% of deaths involved the state, including deaths such as those at Loughgall, where terrorists got their just desserts as they went out to murder and to maim. So, let us have 90% of the attention focused on the terrorists, as opposed to the current situation where we have 10% of attention focused on terrorists and 90% on the 10%. Let us remember that 60% — the majority of murders — were

carried out by republican terrorists and 30% by loyalists. Only 10% of deaths involved the state.

We did object — you were there, Mr Ford, when I objected directly — to Mr Haass referring to a terrorist and a freedom fighter in the same breath, and the notion of equivalence. You were there when I said to Mr Haass that there was a difference between the terrorists who flew the planes into the twin towers and the innocent victims who were working there and who were murdered. You were there when I said that there was a difference between the terrorists and the terrorised —

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

Mr Bell: — and when I said that we needed to look at the genocide along the border and the torture of civilians.

In conclusion, the DUP will look to work positively with the other party leaders. We will not say no to everything. We will not say yes to just anything. We will say yes to —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr Bell: — the right agreement, if the five parties can bring it together.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank Mr Kennedy and Mr Elliott, who so articulately defined our position. In opening the debate a couple of hours ago, Mr Kelly, a Member for North Belfast — I am sorry that he is not with us — mentioned me and the Ulster Unionists, I think, three times. I want to be careful to take the time to give an appropriately detailed response to his three points. On point one, he is wrong; on point two, he is wrong; and, on point three, he is wrong.

7.30 pm

Mr Kelly and I were on the BBC yesterday. We did not quite get into a proper debate about narratives. Sometimes I think that Mr Kelly thinks that I do not get it. Well, I do get it. He and I will never agree on a narrative. The sections of the population in Northern Ireland will never agree on a single narrative about what happened during the Troubles. I have no doubt that Mr Kelly will offer a narrative that says that, at one point in his life, he thought that it was a jolly good idea to try to blow up the Old Bailey. I will never accept that narrative. I think that it was a jolly bad idea to try to blow up the Old Bailey. However, the narrative is different from the fact.

When I woke up last Friday morning, I heard a very interesting piece of news on the BBC. The former leader of the Democratic Unionists, Ian Paisley, was offering a narrative about the reasons behind the Dublin and Monaghan car bombs in the mid-1970s. I think that that narrative is abhorrent. He seemed to imply that, in some sense, the people of the Republic brought those bombs upon themselves. That is a narrative, but I absolutely reject it. Actually, I find myself with Eamon Gilmore, the Tánaiste and Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, who reacted by sticking to the facts of what happened in Dublin and Monaghan and describing them for what they were: terrorist acts carried out against innocent people.

I can call that a factual description because we have an Act of Parliament called the 2000 Terrorism Act, within which is an interpretation of what is and what is not terrorism. It is part of the law of this land. I believe that every party in this House says that it upholds the

rule of law. Therefore, all the parties support the 2000 Terrorism Act, which says that detonating a no-warning car bomb — whether it is in Dublin, Monaghan or Belfast on Bloody Friday — planting a bomb at La Mon or blowing up McGurk's bar are, by definition, acts of terrorism. Let us stick to the facts and agree those, and then we can disagree about the narratives.

People are saying that we have got a lot closer to dealing with the past. I wonder whether we have. Our concern has always been that the four processes that we use — public inquiries, the HET, the Police Ombudsman and article 2 compliant Coroners' Courts — put an almost exclusive focus on the actions of the state and the security forces. We want to see that spotlight spread and shone into the dark corners of the IRA, the INLA, the UVF, the UDA and all the rest. I question whether the proposals in Haass 7 did not simply shine a brighter light on the state and the agents of the state.

It is not a matter of academic or historical significance and interest whether it was terrorism or not. Patrick Azimkar and Mark Quinsey were murdered by terrorists at Massereene. Stephen Carroll and Ronan Kerr were killed by terrorists. David Black was killed by terrorists. The bombs at Victoria Square and the Cathedral Quarter over Christmas were live acts of terrorism. We have to name it for what it is, otherwise we will relive our past.

The Minister of Justice and leader of the Alliance Party talks about the insertion of the word "terrorist" in Haass 7 and the equivalence with freedom fighter. Let me make clear to him that the use of that phrase in that document is no more acceptable to me and the Ulster Unionist Party than his words on 3 December 2012 when, reacting to the vote at Belfast City Hall to bring down the Union flag, he stood up publicly and said that it was a great victory for the Alliance Party. Well, it was no victory for community relations.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank my colleagues Gerry Kelly and Caitríona Ruane for bringing this motion to the Assembly. I am quite disappointed by the tone of some Members in the debate, but I think that it is important that we have this debate because these issues are very important to people living in our communities. I am just disappointed that the debate did not send a more positive message to them.

I pay tribute to Richard Haass, Meghan O'Sullivan and the rest of the team. We have to remember that the Executive invited them in. So, when we are dealing with this, we need to mention the time that they put into the process and the sincerity with which they conducted themselves. I am sure that everyone who was involved in the talks will commend them and all the team for that.

My colleagues pointed out that our party felt that we made significant progress on at least two of the three issues, and, as others have said, the set of proposals was a compromise. That is the key word: compromise. People in the Chamber today do not seem to get that compromise is not about getting everything that you want. Indeed, our party did not get everything that we wanted. So, when people talk about it, they need to remember what a compromise is. We believe that it is a compromise on a way forward and that people should not cherry-pick parts that they like and do not like because that is when it will all start to unravel. Even Richard Haass and Meghan

O'Sullivan said that, if implemented, the proposals will be beneficial to everyone who lives in the North of Ireland, particularly victims and survivors of the conflict. They are the people who we need to implement the proposals for.

A lot of people have gone into detail on parades, and I want to touch on it briefly. It has always been our party's position that the best way to deal with contentious or controversial parades is to have meaningful, direct dialogue and that, when that does not work, there is a need for a robust regulatory body to deal with that. The proposals would allow for legislation to be brought forward to devolve that responsibility to the Executive and have a set of criteria and a code of conduct by which all parades could be monitored. Why would anybody resist a code of conduct or, indeed, criteria if they want to have a lawful demonstration or a lawful parade? Why are people so afraid of that? We have to face up to our responsibilities and, as elected representatives, particularly elected leaders in the Assembly, we need to tackle the difficult issues of sectarianism and deal with all the controversial issues that we are talking about today, which are parades, flags and legacy issues.

I believe that the proposals that have been put forward to deal with the past and the legacy issues have, as my colleague Gerry Kelly said in his introduction, the interests of the victims and survivors at the centre. He outlined how the historical investigation unit and the independent commission for information retrieval will work, and it will give families the choice of what way they want to go. It is important that it is their choice on finding out the truth about what happened to their loved one. The reality is that victims and survivors — I am sure that other people have had meetings — are helped by some of the key elements of the proposals. That is acknowledgment, the services for victims and survivors, justice, truth and information recovery and, indeed, reconciliation. That is what the victims and survivors told us and Richard Haass and Meghan O'Sullivan.

Once again, some Members used the Chamber to treat the past like a contest and something that has to be won by someone. Whether you are a member of a political party or a member of the community, nobody has the right to treat the past as a contest or to use victims and survivors for their own narrow political objectives. I see that time and time again, and I wish that people would stop doing that because we owe it to the victims and survivors out there to help them and see to their needs. We will never reach an agreement on a single narrative for the conflict, but we can reach agreement on a mechanism to deal with it. I hope that we can go forward doing that.

Our party has difficulties, just like everybody else, with some aspects of the proposals, particularly those on the commission on identity, culture and tradition. We have a difficulty thinking that it will resolve the serious issues that we want resolved. Those issues should be of interest to everybody, because they are about equality and respect for all cultures, traditions and identities and the principle of upholding the right of people to express their Irish identity on an equal basis, not dominating anybody else, with those who see themselves as British. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms J McCann: Why would anybody not want to let a person have that right? We are coming to this in a positive

way. We welcome the fact that these issues will be brought forward and that everyone will see them as essential elements for any society. We cannot go forward without them.

I want to touch on a few things in finishing. I want to say clearly that negotiation is what the dictionary says it is. It is about give and take. It is about making compromises and making concessions, because none of us can come out of this as winners or losers. The important thing is that it is about compromise. The proposals are a challenge to us all. Indeed, there are issues that we did not get either, such as the Irish language Act, equality, parity of esteem and the bill of rights, but you do not see us standing up here shouting about it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms J McCann: We want to work together to implement the proposals through the Executive. We, too, have stretched ourselves and are up for the challenge. I want to ask the other parties this direct question: are you up for that challenge? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms J McCann: Are you going to go back out on to the streets and tell people that they can expect more of what we got last year — the violence on our streets — because we do not have a mechanism to deal with controversial or contentious parades? Are you going to go back out there and say to victims and survivors that we do not have a mechanism to deal with their issues? I am putting this up to you: are you up for it? We are certainly up for it over here. I just want to say that we want to bring the proposals forward. We want everybody to work together to bring that positive message. That is what we need to do here today.

Mr Speaker: I remind the House that if amendment No 1 is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2 or amendment No 3.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 12; Noes 89.

AYES

Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Elliott and Mr Nesbitt.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Dickson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCreagh, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan,

Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Fearon and Mr G Kelly.

Question accordingly negated.

Question put, That amendment No 2 be made.

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. I have been advised by the party Whips that, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A), there is agreement that we should dispense with the three minutes and move straight to the Division. If that is agreed, I call for Tellers. Let us all try to finish the business before we are left in the dark.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 38; Noes 63.

AYES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

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

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hussey, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McNarry, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Fearon and Mr G Kelly.

Question accordingly negated.

Question put, That amendment No 3 be made.

Mr Speaker: Order. There has already been agreement to dispense with the three minutes — *[Interruption.]* — Order. We will now move to ask for Tellers. *[Interruption.]* There seems to be cooperation around the Chamber, so let me put the Question again.

Question, That amendment No 3 be made, put and negated.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 49; Noes 52.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Fearon and Mr G Kelly.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Overend and Mr G Robinson.

Main Question accordingly negated.

Adjourned at 8.22 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 14 January 2014

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statements

Autism: Strategy and Action Plan

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make the following statement to the Assembly to formally launch the autism strategy 2013-2020 and accompanying action plan 2013-16. The all-party group on autism brought forward the Autism Bill, supported by parents and carers under the umbrella of Autism NI, which the House passed on 15 March 2011. The development of the autism strategy, which was led by my Department, as required by the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, is the first of its kind. It is a cross-departmental strategy addressing the whole-life needs of people, families and carers living with autism in Northern Ireland. The Act requires my Department, as well as leading on the development, to lead on the implementation, monitoring and reporting of the autism strategy, with other Departments obliged to cooperate. The work began in autumn 2011 and has culminated in the autism strategy and action plan, which I and my Executive colleagues approved for publication on 28 November 2013.

The successful development of the strategy and action plan can be attributed to the effective work of the multi-agency, multidisciplinary project board, coupled with the proactive input of the autism community throughout Northern Ireland. From the very earliest stages of development, the autism strategy project board engaged with and ensured the involvement of people, families and carers living with autism, as well as representatives from all Departments, Health and Social Care organisations and the community and voluntary sectors.

To inform the content of the strategy, a number of pre-consultation events were held across Northern Ireland in which people were encouraged to highlight individual and/or local community issues about services or gaps in provision for families living with autism.

I recognise and commend the effective role that the voluntary sector played in facilitating those events. Most importantly, we engaged with children, young people and adults with autism, as well as parents and carers, and that engagement was repeated when the draft autism strategy and action plan were issued for formal consultation.

The public consultation engagement events were well attended, and those, along with questionnaire responses and submissions from a range of organisations, offered the opportunity for those closest to autism to comment on the draft document.

Departments worked to address as many of the issues highlighted in the public consultation feedback and responses as possible to produce the final version of the strategy, which is being published today. The autism strategy 2013-2020 and action plan 2013-16 outline the Executive's commitment to improving services and support for people with autism and their families throughout their lives. These documents represent a major step in fulfilling the requirements of the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The prevalence of autism is a key element outlined within the strategy, and the document includes an assessment of the current position on data prevalence using data already held. New arrangements are being introduced in health and social care (HSC) trusts to monitor, record and collate autism-specific data in respect of children and adults living in Northern Ireland. A prevalence of autism subgroup is in place to take that forward. The strategy presents a high-level overview of the range of services and support available to people with autism and their families across a range of sectors and Departments. That will provide a baseline starting point for Departments when evaluating the strategy in the future.

I wish to recognise the substantial work that has been carried out along the way to where we are today by Health and Social Care, following the independent review of autism services in 2008. That work included the launch of the regional autism spectrum disorder network (RASDN) in 2009, chaired by Dr Stephen Bergin. RASDN's achievements include the development of specialist children's autism services in every HSC trust and improved waiting times for diagnosis/initial assessment of children; the establishment of a regional autism spectrum disorder (ASD) coordinator post, with ASD coordinators and cross-agency operational groups in each HSC trust; the development and launch of 'The Six Steps of Autism Care' for children and young people in Northern Ireland and 'Autism: A Guide for Families' in October 2011; and the publication of the 'Autism Adult Care Pathway' in June 2012. These autism care pathways provide the basis upon which Departments can build and enhance a joined-up approach to autism service delivery.

This strategy sets out 11 key themes that are aligned to strategic priorities. They have been developed in accordance with articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and also form the basis of the action plan. The themes are awareness; accessibility; children, young people and family; health and well-being; education; transitions; employability; independence, choice and control; access to justice;

being part of the community; and participation and active citizenship.

Some of the key deliverables from the strategy and action plan include: an autism awareness campaign, comprising a comprehensive training awareness programme for government front line staff and proposals for a wider public awareness campaign; planned improvements in accessibility to goods and services — for example, access to communication and information and to travel and transport services so that they better meet the needs of people with autism; support for families living with autism, including more access to information about support and services available within local communities; the establishment of a multi-agency autism advice service pilot in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, which will be a signposting and referral service and, I am happy to tell you, is being launched in Ballymena this afternoon.

Within Health and Social Care, we will concentrate our efforts on developing our adult autism services in parallel with reviewing and, where necessary, reconfiguring children's autism services to meet increased demand. Within Education, the actions attributed to education sector bodies will assist in meeting the strategic priority of ensuring that children and young people with autism receive a high-quality education that prepares them for life and work and enables them to fulfil their potential. Within Justice, a new autism guide for criminal justice professionals will be developed.

An overview of the implementation approach and structures is outlined in the strategy. An autism strategy regional multi-agency implementation team is to be established and will coordinate and manage the implementation of the strategy on a cross-departmental basis. The group will be chaired by the regional autism coordinator, when appointed. This is a post originally funded by my Department within the Health and Social Care Board in 2009 to lead and manage the service improvement and regional coordination of health and social care autism services. Still within the HSC Board, the role is now broadened to include the additional responsibility of leading the implementation team to progress the strategy and action plan. The new post is being advertised this month.

The regional implementation team will be supported at a local and community level by subgroups. They include five local autism forums, the prevalence of autism subgroup and the Northern Ireland autism strategy research advisory committee. It is planned that the local autism forums will evolve from the reconfiguration of the established regional ASD networks, which historically were led by Health and Social Care. They will be strengthened to include relevant representation from all the key sectors. Effectively, they will be operational hubs responsible for implementing the strategy locally.

It is vital that we retain the voice of people with autism, their families and carers on operational issues. The establishment of five local autism reference groups, which will work in tandem with the local autism forums, should assist in achieving that aim. A prevalence of autism subgroup has responsibility for overseeing the requirement in the Autism Act for all health and social care trusts to provide data on the prevalence of autism, and they will continue to do so throughout the lifetime of the strategy. The group is chaired by my Department.

In April 2012, I requested the establishment of a research advisory committee to assist Departments as required with research findings and best practice on autism, relevant to the needs of their policy areas. I invited Dr Arlene Cassidy, chief executive of Autism NI, to chair this committee.

In November 2013, in addition to approving the autism strategy and action plan, I asked my Executive colleagues to commit their Departments to cooperate with the regional autism coordinator in the implementation of the strategy. I am encouraged that Executive colleagues have committed to the implementation approach and the monitoring and reporting structures and roles at strategic and operational levels. That will help to deliver the joined-up approach to autism services that the autism strategy sets out to achieve.

The regional coordinator will report to the interdepartmental senior officials group, which will report to me. As required by the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, I will lay a monitoring report on the implementation of the strategy before the Assembly at least every three years.

I know that you will agree and acknowledge that the plans envisaged in the autism strategy and initial action plan can be achieved only through the continuing commitment of Departments and other statutory bodies, working alongside people, families and carers living with autism, and in cooperation with the community and voluntary sector.

Within my Department, additional resources of £1.64 million recurrent from 2008-09 have been provided primarily for children's autism specialist services teams within health and social care trusts. Further investment of £250,000 in 2013-14 from the Health and Social Care Board has been made to commence development of adult autism services. Although it has not been possible to secure significant new or additional resources or investment in respect of the strategy and action plan, Departments and agencies are committed to making more effective use of available resources.

My Department has submitted a proposal to the Northern Ireland Executive advertising programme for 2014-15 to secure approval for funding to be set aside for a government advertising campaign with the aim of raising public awareness about autism. If approved, I will seek to have funding earmarked and provided for from within my Department's 2014-15 allocation. Providing the proposal is approved and the funding secured, the advertising will deliver an important element of an autism awareness campaign, as prescribed in the legislation.

I thank my ministerial colleagues for their cooperation to date and for the support that their officials continually provided to my Department throughout the development of the autism strategy.

10.45 am

My Executive colleagues and I remain committed to commissioning, developing and delivering services so that we can collectively maximise the potential, participation and inclusion of people with autism throughout their life and, at the same time, provide support and encouragement to them and their families.

I earlier acknowledged the vital role of the community and voluntary sector in the development of the autism strategy. Its continued collaborative input will be a key part of the

strategy's implementation, too. By their nature, voluntary organisations constantly compete with one another to attract the support of members or participants, to generate income, to raise their public profile and to deliver a range of services and support, augmenting that which the statutory sector provides to their target populations. Autism is no exception, and there are a number of local organisations, branches and national bodies working with and for the autism community here.

As we move into the future, I very much hope that their energies and priorities are channelled even more towards cooperation and improving the lives of people with autism, their families and carers. As the development of the strategy has shown, working in tandem with the statutory sector, we can achieve so much more.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his statement, for his work on autism and for making it a priority in his Department. As the strategy is cross-departmental, will Executive Departments pool funding to implement it?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the question. Departments have recognised the need for greater collaboration across agencies to deliver services for people with autism and their families. In striving to achieve that, Departments will endeavour to make more effective use of existing resources, and if additional investment becomes available for autism services, Departments and their service commissioners may, if appropriate, consider the possibility of pooling resources to deliver the joined-up priorities identified in the initial action plan.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for the statement. I welcome the fact that Departments may pool resources, but given the importance of early intervention and multidisciplinary teams, with child psychologists, teachers, classroom assistants, parents and the community working together, what steps does the Minister plan to take with his colleague in the Department of Education, John O'Dowd?

Mr Poots: There are a number of Departments involved in helping us bring the cross-departmental effect to autism care, and the Department of Education is a key one. Its role includes committing to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people in our society, including those with autism. That is a commitment that it has made. Since 2003-04, as the Member will know, an additional £17 million has been provided by the Department of Education to support various positive measures specific to autism. The establishment of the Middletown Centre for Autism in 2007 on a North/South basis provides support for children and young people with autism whose needs are more persistent, challenging and complex.

Of course, education does not stop at the age of 16. DEL also has an important employment role to play. That role includes supporting an increase in the number of people with autism entering all levels of employment and safeguarding the rights of people with autism already in work; increasing the opportunities for people with autism to attain skills and qualifications through access to appropriate training and lifelong learning opportunities; recognising that people with a barrier to participation such as autism can face multiple issues and therefore need additional personalised support; and supporting a social

economy project to provide young people with ASD with two-year placements, where specialist staff can provide an all-encompassing and innovative pathway to employment.

Mr Beggs: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. Key deliverables listed in the strategy and action plan include:

"An autism awareness campaign comprising a comprehensive training awareness programme for government frontline staff and ... a wider public awareness".

Will the Minister outline the extent of the training that will be provided for that and when he expects all front line staff to receive such training? He also mentioned a multi-agency autism advice service, which I welcome. However, when will every primary-school child be entitled to receive multi-agency support at every primary school, should it be needed?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the question. Where schoolchildren are concerned, we are turning assessments around much more quickly than was ever the case before. We are seeking to ensure that children are assessed as quickly as possible — within a few months. That will greatly assist schools and other bodies in identifying needs.

We are establishing project teams that will have a responsibility for various areas to ensure that the appropriate training is applied. So, flowing from the Act in the first place, the strategy will create opportunities for that course of work to be done through the teams that are established under the strategy.

Mr McCarthy: I very much welcome the Minister's statement, and I speak as a member of the all-party Assembly group on autism. We have come a long way from the times when we were talking about a Bill for people with autism. Like the Minister, I express my delight at the strategy and at the work that so many voluntary groups have carried out to get us to where we are today. Will the Minister assure the Assembly that appropriate services will be made available as soon as a child is diagnosed with autism? As a public representative, I find that people do not know where to go to get support in the initial stage. If we can overcome that, and if the strategy is put in place, I think that we will have cracked a lot of the problems. However, it is about getting the initial services that are needed early.

Mr Poots: I do not deny that it can be hugely problematic for a parent who discovers that their child has autism to identify where to go next. Part of the awareness campaign will be about helping people to understand where they should go next. I should say that a total of 695 children were waiting for assessment in November 2013. Of those, 184 had been waiting in excess of 13 weeks and the rest for a shorter time. The board has made £305,000 available to help trusts to meet the target by March 2014 of having everyone seen within 13 weeks. However, it should be noted that there has been a rise in demand for autism services, so, given that rise, there remains a risk that the standard will be difficult to maintain. So, that is something that we have to keep a watching brief on.

I certainly think it important that, once people learn and it is confirmed that their child has autism, they need to know what the pathway is, as the Member quite rightly pointed out. A key HSC action in the autism action plan is to complete a regional validation exercise of children's

and adults' autism care pathways by March 2014. When I receive and review those reports, and if various specific needs are identified, we can consider what actions should be taken thereon. So, I think that it should be of some comfort that that pathway will be established, hopefully by March 2014. That is certainly what we are aiming for.

Mr D McIlveen: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. He referred to a public awareness campaign that will be part of this launch and proposal. Will the Minister indicate how he plans to fund that public awareness campaign?

Mr Poots: As most Members will be aware, advertising is now dealt with centrally by the Northern Ireland Executive. We have to make a proposal to have funding approved through the Northern Ireland Executive's 2014-15 Government advertising programme. If we receive approval — and we are very hopeful that we will, given that it is part of the Act that we are to have that advertising campaign — I, as Minister of Health, will then have to consider whether we have sufficient funding in the Department to allocate to this element of the awareness campaign. Again, as it is part of the Act, it will be very difficult to resist. We are under considerable financial pressures. Nonetheless, this is very important to us. Therefore, we will be doing our best to ensure that we have a comprehensive advertising campaign that will adequately raise awareness of autism services.

Mr Craig: I welcome the Minister's statement. It is a big step forward in the implementation of the legislation. I also pay tribute to the all-party group that brought it forward. Who will be responsible for ensuring progress on the implementation of the strategy and the achievements made under it? Strategies are OK, but, if they are not implemented, they have no effect.

Mr Poots: I reinforce the Member's comments about the all-party working group. It might not have been quite "all-party" but all parties were welcome. Mr Bradley chaired it, and Mr McCarthy, Mr McCreagh, Mr Easton and the Member who has just spoken were all key players in ensuring that the Autism Act 2011 was passed. Although there was resistance to it, it was the right thing to do given the number of young people with autism. Around 2.6% of boys have been diagnosed with autism. Fewer girls have been diagnosed but, nonetheless, a very significant number of young people have autism. It is an illness and a condition that we have been coming to terms with and trying to understand over the past 20 years. It is only in more recent years that we are really beginning to understand it well and identify potential solutions to the many problems it throws up.

The Act stipulates that my Department will lead on implementation. In my statement, I outlined the role and remit of the regional autism coordinator and the other implementation and reporting structures. A regional multi-agency implementation team, chaired by the regional autism coordinator, will direct, coordinate and manage the implementation of the strategy and action plan. However, each Department and its agencies will be responsible for implementing, whether on an individual or joint basis, the aspects of the strategy and action plan that are relevant to them. All Ministers will need to be held to account for their role in carrying out those activities.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister and apologise to the House for not being in the Chamber when the Minister began his remarks. I will focus on the role of the regional

coordinator. Notwithstanding the Minister's comments about Executive colleagues and their departmental commitments, how will the role have real teeth in pushing the other Departments to make this an effective cross-departmental strategy in the spirit of the legislation given that it is funded solely by the DHSSPS?

Mr Poots: The teeth come from the Ministers. It is a matter for me to persuade other Ministers of their responsibilities on autism. I have not been pushing at a closed door; I have been pushing at an open door with my ministerial colleagues. If there are issues or problems in a Department in providing the services, it is a matter for the relevant Minister to ensure that things are changed and that the actions are carried out properly. If Members identify such issues, they should raise them with the relevant Minister, and it is for that Minister to ensure that the proposals and actions committed to are seen through.

11.00 am

Mrs Cameron: I also welcome the Minister's statement and add my apology for not being in at the start of it. What are the plans for the multi-agency autism service pilot, or the one-stop shop, in the Northern Trust area?

Mr Poots: It is a very exciting development, and I am very pleased that the Northern Health and Social Care Trust is launching a pilot adult autism advisory service this afternoon in the Braid in Ballymena. It is a fluid pilot project and will evolve over time. It will learn as it goes along. Officials from my Department will meet policy leads from the other UK jurisdictions in Scotland this Thursday to learn and share experiences specifically in that area, and, in addition to the Ballymena pilot lead, we will join officials for two site visits to one-stop shop models that exist in Edinburgh and Dunfermline.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I begin by apologising to you, Mr Speaker, and the House for arriving shortly after the Minister began his statement.

I have been impressed by the commitment of the Minister, his officials and the voluntary sector to shaping the cross-departmental strategy on autism, and I thank the Minister for that commitment. Indeed, today, he ended on a very strong note when he looked to the future and said that he expected his colleagues, like himself, to:

"remain committed to commissioning, developing and delivering services so that we can collectively maximise the potential, participation and inclusion of people with autism throughout their life".

The Minister also referred to the discussion on pooling resources. In light of that, is the Minister now prepared to push his Executive colleagues to establish a cross-cutting budget to provide for the services and actions of the strategy?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his kind comments; I am always impressed by how we come together on issues such as this. On issues that affect vulnerable people, the Assembly very often steps up to the mark and demonstrates that we are an Assembly that cares about our public and wants to act in the best interests of the people we serve.

I outlined the role of the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning,

and, in responding to Mr Bradley's question, I should perhaps identify some of the roles of some of the other Departments. For example, the Department for Regional Development has a role in updating the guide 'Travel Safe' with help from the Autism Network NI. There will also be a new Translink access guide for disabled users and funding for the transport buddy scheme, which will use volunteers with autism.

The Department of Justice has a role in working with my Department on the Mental Capacity Bill, including actions in the justice system to take account of people with hidden disability such as autism. It encourages reporting of disability hate crime and supports victims, including those with autism, and ensures that people with autism are treated equally by the law, have access to justice and can live safely in their own community. The DOJ autism working group, set up in 2012, has produced an autism guide for criminal justice professionals and a training model for criminal justice organisations.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, through promoting greater awareness about autism, seeks to improve access to culture, arts and leisure activities for people with autism and their carers to enable fuller participation in local activities and to enhance their quality of life. For example, the Armagh Planetarium has catered for groups with ASD and their families by providing bespoke shows. Museum staff are trained to support children with ASD during their visits, and operating hours can be adjusted for groups. Recently, libraries have been providing for people with special needs, including having speakers with information about autism. Northern Ireland Screen is updating its disability action plan, addressing a training programme and putting signage at offices to help persons with autism.

The Arts Council has committed itself to delivering bespoke autism and ASD awareness training to all staff.

The Department for Social Development provides supported independent living options for people with autism. Through its Supporting People programme, people with autism or people who have family members with autism will be able to apply for assistance to allow for adaptations to meet their needs. DSD provides advice and support to all disabled claimants, including those with autism, and it will address the impact of welfare reform on people with disabilities. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has responsibility for the themes and strategic priorities in the Executive's disability strategy, 'A strategy to improve the lives of people with disabilities 2012 - 2015', and a number of other policy development areas.

That gives you a flavour of the range of things that we are doing across Departments. Whether we can pool all that into one area that is related to autism or whether it is better kept a little more disparate, with each Department focusing on its own key areas but having that constant monitoring role that I have to provide to the Assembly every three years, remains to be seen. Let us move forward as proposed here, and if it is not working correctly then we can readdress it and seek to change it. However, we will consider pooling money at a future point. At this point, we need to continue to make progress, while considering how we can do things better if we identify that that is the case.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, thank the Minister for his statement, and I will follow

the trend by apologising for being late for the beginning of his statement.

The public awareness campaign is very important because there is often a perception that only children are affected by autism and that they may grow out of it or whatever. Does the Minister agree that it is important for his colleagues in DSD and DEL to be very aware of that situation? Adults being migrated from incapacity benefit to employment and support allowance (ESA) who are going for work-focused interviews often find it very difficult to articulate their situation. Does the Minister agree that it is important for his colleagues in DSD and DEL to be very aware of that situation?

Mr Poots: I do not know whether Members all slept in this morning, whether we should blame Minister Kennedy for not having the roads well enough gritted or what the score is.

I accept what the Member says. It is important to recognise that autism is not something that ends at 18. For many people who are now adults, autism continues to be an issue and a problem for which they need support. In some instances people need care, and in many instances they need help. Department for Employment and Learning staff and, indeed, DSD's Social Security Agency staff provide an outreach officer for improving benefit uptakes. The Northern Health and Social Care Trust representatives and DEL, through the Northern Regional College, will provide careers advice or student finance input. Things are being done to ensure that that is the case. Some of them are in the very early developmental stages, and that is something that we will need to continue to work on to ensure that adults with autism receive the appropriate support. Often that will be within existing resources and structures but with a better knowledge of the needs of people with autism.

Mr I McCrea: I, too, welcome the statement. We have come a long way since we started even discussing the possibility of an autism Bill. Maybe it is not the Members who are late; maybe, for a change, the Minister is early. We will not argue about which one is right or wrong on this occasion.

On a number of occasions in his statement the Minister referred to the regional coordinator, who will report to the interdepartmental senior officials group, which will, in turn, report to the Minister. The Minister will be aware that time and again in the all-party working group we hear of people who have slipped through the gaps. Unfortunately, that happens more often than not. Can the Minister assure the House and, indeed, people who have family members affected by autism that the work that he has referred to the House today will try to ensure that people who have been slipping through the gaps will be picked up and will not be allowed to slip any further?

Mr Poots: I cannot stand in the House and give a guarantee that that will happen in every instance, unfortunately. However, I think that, as a result of the launch of the strategy today, people will be much better informed in the future, and, consequently, considerably fewer people will slip through the gaps. That is very important. We will all have a role in that information flow. I expect that, even as MLAs, we will all have a role, because we will have people calling into our offices to find out information. It is important that we, as Members of the Assembly and as constituency representatives, fully understand the services that are available and ensure

that those services are made available to members of the public who seek our help with family members who have autism. So we all have a role to play in ensuring that as few people as possible slip through the gap. This is a very important step in the right direction today.

Schools: Development Proposals and Area-based Planning in East Belfast

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Le do chead, a Cheann Comhairle, ba mhaith liom ráiteas a dhéanamh ar mo chinntí ar na sé mholadh forbartha do sholáthar iarbhunscolaíochta neamhroghnaithí, agus iad don chuid is mó ag freastal ar oirthear Bhéal Feirste. With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on my decision on the six development proposals for non-selective post-primary provision that are aimed largely at serving east Belfast. There has been significant interest in the proposals, and the proposed changes are of such significance for the east Belfast area that I felt it was important that I formally report my decisions to the Assembly. The purpose of the statement is, therefore, to inform you of my decisions and the reasoning behind those decisions and to outline the next phase of area planning in that area.

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

As Members may be aware, the Belfast Education and Library Board and the South Eastern Education and Library Board published six development proposals affecting seven post-primary schools in the east of the city and Holywood. The purpose of the proposals is to reshape controlled secondary and controlled integrated provision, largely for the east Belfast area, to meet changing demographics and the future needs of the area.

The area covered by the proposals includes inner-city and suburban Belfast east of the Lagan from Newtownbreda to Holywood, as well as Dundonald. The area straddles the boundary of two separate administrative bodies, namely the Belfast and South Eastern Boards, but it forms a distinct planning area for the provision of post-primary non-selective education. There are 12,700 post-primary pupils currently attending schools in the greater east Belfast area. The proposals will directly impact on around 3,500 pupils attending the seven schools affected.

The significant issues raised in the proposals have clearly highlighted the need for area planning. In particular, it has become evident that managing authorities need to coordinate their activities and ensure that related and interdependent development proposals are brought forward at the same time. That will provide clarity for everyone on the proposals and the impacts and will enable a holistic consideration of the area solution and proposed changes.

In bringing forward the development proposals, the boards have rightly highlighted their responsibility to deal with immediate issues such as underachievement, raising standards and closing the gap, budgetary constraints, surplus places and poor accommodation. However, it is important that administrative boundaries do not impede coordinated planning for a distinctive geographical area such as east Belfast. At the centre of the process must be decision-making in the best educational interests of children and solutions that can be implemented in a manageable manner.

As Minister, I have the responsibility of scrutinising proposals presented to me from the perspective of the pupils and the communities that they are designed to serve. The proposals put to me for consideration in

this case are these: to amalgamate Newtownbreda and Knockbreda High Schools; to close Orangefield and Dundonald High Schools; and to increase the size of Ashfield Girls' and Boys' High Schools and Priory Integrated College in Holywood.

As I have already stated, the scale and impact of the proposed changes are significant. They reflect the need to restructure provision in the area to best meet the future educational needs of the population. I take this opportunity to commend the Belfast and South Eastern Boards for the work that they have undertaken to identify the issues and develop proposals for change. Both have recognised that change was necessary, because the young people of the area deserve to have high-quality education that will improve and enhance their life opportunities.

11.15 am

As I have said, east Belfast straddles the boundary between the Belfast and South Eastern Education and Library Board areas, and there is significant movement of pupils between the two planning authorities. This in itself presents a set of unique challenges for the two boards, challenges that would be easier to manage if there were a single planning authority as envisaged through the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. In advance of ESA, it is my view that the only way forward is for the two boards to engage in high levels of collaboration and constructive coordination to ensure that proposals take account of the needs of all the young people in the area. When all is said and done, the proposals will set a pattern of education provision to serve this community for the foreseeable future and most certainly for at least the next 20 years. In assessing the proposals, I must have confidence that the changes represent the best solution for the pupils in the area and are coordinated, robust and future-proofed as far as possible. For a number of the proposals presented, the evidence for my decision was unequivocal. However, for others, I believe that further work is required, and, that being the case, I am not in a position to approve them at this time. I will ask the two planning authorities to jointly reconsider a number of issues and come back to me with more compelling evidence, and I will look at the new proposals with an open mind.

I turn to the decisions and, firstly, the amalgamation of Newtownbreda and Knockbreda High Schools. Enrolments at Knockbreda have steadily declined from 574 in 2007-08 to 395 in 2012-13. This is significantly below the minimum enrolment threshold of 500 set out in the sustainable schools policy. The performance of both schools at GCSE level has been significantly below the average. However, there have been some signs of improvement in recent years. The amalgamation proposed will result in a school of around 1,000 pupils. I have decided to approve this proposal. I believe that it will provide the opportunity for the development of a viable and sustainable school. This will be a new school focused on improvement and addressing the issues faced by both schools in the past. Initially, this school will operate on a split site. When the time comes to consider a newbuild, I will require the South Eastern and Belfast Boards to work together to determine the most appropriate location for the new school to best serve the local population. Schools should be in the heart of the communities that they serve and be easily accessible for all pupils. The amalgamation will take place

from September 2014 or as soon as possible thereafter, depending on the arrangements needed to give effect to this amalgamation. I want planning to start now to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements. My officials will work closely with the South Eastern Education and Library Board to ensure a managed transition.

My next decision relates to Orangefield High School. The sustainable schools policy is clear: the core issue for a school's sustainability must be the continuing provision of high-quality education for the pupils. As enrolments in a school fall, the number of challenges that it must overcome to provide a high-quality education rises. With only 92 pupils remaining in Orangefield High School, it has declined to such an extent that it is no longer feasible to delay its closure. Regrettably, this is an example of where it has been left too late to turn the situation around. Again regrettably, the only reasonable option available to me regarding the future of Orangefield High School is to approve its closure from 31 August 2014. In making this decision, I have advised the Belfast Board of the need for it to work closely with any schools that will receive Orangefield High School pupils to produce an action plan for improvement in outcomes in public examinations.

I turn now to the future of Dundonald High School. I have considered very carefully the proposal that the school should close and can see many reasons why this would be, as is the case in Orangefield, an appropriate course of action. However, I believe that a case exists to explore a very different solution for Dundonald and its young people. Dundonald is a large urban area with a significant population of school-age children. There is no other inclusive post-primary school close by. From my engagement with local representatives, it is clear to me that it is a community whose young people need and should rightly expect to be able to access good-quality secondary education. It is equally clear that that has not been happening. The provision in Dundonald High School has, quite simply, not been good enough. Although the last follow-up inspection, which took place just a couple of months ago, highlighted some modest improvement, it painted a graphic picture of low attendance, low attainment and low aspirations. However, the school is in the right geographical location: the young people are there, and the community, like all communities, needs and deserves a good school. Therefore, on this occasion, I have decided not to accept the proposal for closure. Dundonald High School will remain open.

For the school to flourish and its young people to achieve to their full potential, however, it is clear that attitudes, expectations for pupils' attainment and provision will need to change. My Department and the South Eastern Education and Library Board will play their part in delivering the change that is necessary. That will not be easy — we will not be able to do it without the help of the community — but we are prepared to do our utmost. The South Eastern Board will use the opportunity presented by the current reconstitution exercise to reinvigorate the school's board of governors in the coming months, ensuring the appointment of people with the skills necessary to deliver progress on an extremely challenging agenda.

A recruitment process will commence shortly to appoint a permanent principal, a visionary leader capable of providing clear strategic direction who is accomplished at raising and sustaining achievement, can demonstrate a

proven track record of supporting teaching and learning and sets high standards and expectations for all the young people. The South Eastern Board, supported by my Department, will put in place an intensive support programme designed to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom, the quality of leadership and management at all levels and the educational experience of pupils. However, that alone will not be enough. For Dundonald High School and its young people to flourish, the support of the community and its elected representatives will be necessary. I have met many from the community who made the case for the school to remain and been impressed by their passion, enthusiasm and determination. I have listened, but my decision does not mean that they have achieved their goal. That goal cannot be merely to sustain a school; rather, it has to be to sustain a good school, one that is characterised by excellent leadership, by high-quality teaching and learning, by high expectations for pupils' attainment and by the support that it receives from its community.

Therefore, to the people who called on me to keep Dundonald High School open, my message is simple: your campaign is not over; it has just begun. Show me and, more importantly, the young people in your area that you are serious about demanding a high-quality education and are determined to stamp out inadequacy and to raise achievement and expectations for your young people. Show that you value and believe in what the young people of Dundonald can achieve. My Department and the South Eastern Board will play their part, and you must play yours. This is the beginning of a journey, and I do not expect that it will be an easy road to travel.

The proposals for the expansion of Ashfield Boys' High School, Ashfield Girls' High School and Priory Integrated College are aimed at covering the northern end of east Belfast. However, I am not convinced that the proposal for Priory Integrated College provides part of the solution for the greater east Belfast area, as it largely serves the north Down area, so I will deal with it separately.

The proposed additional 490 pupils at the Ashfield schools represents a large increase and would have a significant impact on other schools in the area. Neither of the schools has spare places, although both were undersubscribed for year 8 first preferences in the current year, 2013-14, and some previous years. There is also a significant number of unfilled places in other controlled schools in the Belfast Board and South Eastern Board areas. The proposed sixth form increase at both schools amounts to 255 places, resulting in a combined sixth form capacity of 400 places. Such large increases in sixth form provision would also impact on other schools in the area.

I carefully considered the Ashfield proposals in the wider context of the whole east Belfast area. The area plans for both the Belfast and the South Eastern Boards indicate that expansion in several post-primary schools in the areas is anticipated. However, there is insufficient evidence that a proper, coordinated, strategic examination of sixth form provision that includes the grammar and integrated sectors has been undertaken. Taking that into account, I have concluded that I am not in a position to approve the proposals at present. I want to see a coherent set of proposals from the boards that reflect the longer-term needs in the area, particularly for sixth form provision. I believe that the proposals as currently structured are

premature, and further work is required to ascertain exactly what provision is needed to meet the needs of pupils in the area in years 8 to 12 and in sixth form. I need to have an understanding of the total area solution proposed before making decisions on individual proposals. I believe that the Ashfield schools have the confidence of the community that they serve, and I want to get it right so that that confidence remains. There will be change, just not at this time.

Finally, I considered the case for Priory College. As I have previously stated, on the basis of the demographic information presented, the school is not a natural provider for pupils from the east Belfast area. It has a catchment area that largely covers north Down, but its proximity to east Belfast means that decisions taken for either area will have ramifications for the other. So, it cannot be totally divorced from the overall pattern in the area.

The school contends that it is currently capped below the level set out in my Department's sustainable schools policy and should be afforded the opportunity to grow to that level. The proposal is to increase the enrolment at Priory College to 600, which would allow the school to grow to the sustainable schools policy's minimum enrolment for an 11-to-18 school. The actual enrolment figures point out that the school is currently undersubscribed in first preferences. There has been no substantive growth in overall enrolment in years 8 to 12. There were 425 pupils enrolled in 2008-09, compared with 430 in 2012-13. There has, however, been growth at sixth form.

As with my decisions on the Ashfield proposals, the issue of the number of sixth-form places in east Belfast and neighbouring areas needs to be considered strategically by the South Eastern and Belfast Boards. Provision at Priory may form part of that consideration. I looked closely at the issues raised in the proposal and took account of my duty to encourage and to facilitate integrated education. I want to give the school the opportunity to demonstrate that there is a need to provide for unmet demand for integrated education in the area. I have therefore decided to approve the proposal but with a modification. I am approving a modified enrolment of 500, with a year 8 admission number of 100. That will enable the school to grow over time to a sustainable level, if the demand materialises.

Some will say that the school is capped below the sustainable schools level for an 11-to-18 school. To that I say this: I want to see a managed increase from year 8, which is why I am setting an admissions number of 100. That is necessary to preserve the balance between the lower school and the sixth form. If I see a marked increase in the lower school within three years and should the demand for places require any further increases, I will happily consider a further development proposal from the board at that stage. It will be for the South Eastern Board to keep the situation under review to ensure that the enrolment number is fit for purpose. I will watch with keen interest how the school develops.

I have outlined to you my response to the proposals that have been presented to me. I know that you will want time to consider this in more detail, so I will place on my Department's website a copy of the full submission on which my decisions were based.

Turning to the next phase for east Belfast, I have made it clear that area planning applies to all publicly funded

schools. No sector can be planned for in isolation, and no publicly funded school can remain outside the process. In the case of east Belfast, I believe that an opportunity was missed when all publicly funded post-primary schools were not brought into the equation and subsequent planning process. In such a radical overhaul of school provision, I expect the planning authority to ensure that all school types have been factored in to its considerations. For that reason, I emphasise that I see these decisions as very much the first phase of reshaping provision in the area.

The next stage of planning for east Belfast will be led by the Belfast and South Eastern Boards, which will work closely with all other sectors and with my Department to ensure that there are adequate places for the area in years 8 to 12 and at post-16.

11.30 am

My officials will meet the boards to discuss the details of how they will progress my priorities for the next phase of the development of post-primary provision to serve the area. I want that done urgently to ensure that there are adequate places, in the right location, to meet future demand. On foot of that work, further development proposals will be published.

Although some schools may be disappointed by these decisions at this time, my decisions do not rule out further changes following additional analysis and consideration of all the options by the two relevant boards.

Although east Belfast is a unique area, I expect that the lessons learned from this area-specific work will inform the future area-planning work of all our education boards.

It is clear that area planning is complex, multifaceted, and requires coordination, discussion and pragmatism. The planning authorities need to bring forward interrelated and linked development proposals that clearly set out the overall proposals for any area for all concerned. All publicly funded schools must be accounted for in area planning. Only by doing that can we properly assess the impact on the lives of our young people.

Is soiléir ó na moltaí atá agam go bhfuil mé ag dúil le réitigh cheantair. I gcás nach mbím sásta go bhfuil na moltaí ag dul chun leasa na ndaltaí i gceist, beidh tuilleadh oibre de dhíth.

I have given a clear indication through this set of proposals that I expect area solutions. Where I am not satisfied that the proposals are in the best interest of the pupils concerned, I will require more work.

Tá na cinntí seo ró-thábhachtach le láimhseáil ar dhóigh ar bith eile. Is í an óige ár dtodhchaí. Tuilleán siad togha an oideachais, agus ba mhaith liom a bheith ró-shoiléir go bhfuil tús áite ag daltaí ní ag institiúidí.

These decisions are too important to do otherwise. Our young people are our future; they deserve the best possible education. I want to make it absolutely clear in finishing that pupils, not institutions, must come first.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I thank the Minister for his statement. I also thank him for the time he gave to me and the vice-Chair this morning to meet him and discuss the statement.

Following the confusion and the regrettable way in which the then proposed closure of the Orangefield High School was handled, I thank the Minister for coming to the House today and, at least, setting out a road map for the future. The Education Committee will be relieved that some clarity and certainty has been given and provided on the provision of controlled post-primary provision in east Belfast and south Belfast.

The delays and failure to consult effectively, the contradictory messages from one of the education and library boards, and the lack of coordination between the boards, which have characterised this process, are not acceptable. I know that the Minister is planning to revise the guidance on development proposals. Does the debacle in respect of Orangefield High School, and the poor coordination of sometimes conflicting proposals, prove that the development proposal process does not sit well with current area planning? Does the east Belfast experience show us that it is time for a more fundamental review of the way in which we consult on the reorganisation of our schools and bringing forward new development proposals?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Chair for his comments and question. I do not agree with his description of this as a debacle. Clearly, lessons have to be learned from it. When you are dealing with parents and pupils about educational future, you have to ensure that you are approaching them with correct and accurate information, that they are given that information in a way that they fully understand, and that they are aware of what steps will be taken next.

I want to thank the two boards. Yes, mistakes were made, but the two boards recognised that changes had to be made in this area, and they brought forward proposals. I called on them, during my statement and in engagements with them, to ensure that lessons were learned from this. The six development proposals should not have been brought forward as individual proposals; they should have been brought forward collectively, following intense engagement between the boards. However, lessons have been learned. As I said in my statement, although east Belfast is a unique geographical area, lessons can and will be learnt for other such significant development proposals that come forward in the future.

The Member alluded to the fact that I am reviewing guidance on development proposals. Development proposals are fit for purpose for area planning if the process is used properly, there is openness and transparency throughout and everyone is fully briefed on the way forward. Where lessons need to be learnt, I assure the Member that they will be learnt from the experience.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome this morning's statement. I welcome the announcement about Dundonald High School. The Minister is taking a chance and giving the people of Dundonald a chance. How can the school and community best grasp the opportunity that has been given to them?

Mr O'Dowd: In my last meeting with staff and supporters of Dundonald High School in the school, my parting words to them as I left the meeting were that, if I agreed to keep the school open, their challenge was only starting. Today, their challenge starts. They deserve and require the support of my Department, the board, local elected representatives and the broader community to ensure that Dundonald High School not only stays open but does so as

a very good school that each and every one of them can be extremely proud of. That can be achieved.

I deliberated long and hard about this decision. It is not a change of tack in how I view sustainable or unsustainable schools. I have always said in the Chamber that each school has its own characteristics and story to tell. I am not fixated on numbers regarding the sustainable schools policy. The people of Dundonald, the school and its elected representatives have convinced me to keep the school open. Now, they need to convince the community of Dundonald that they can and will build an excellent school in that area. They have the capacity to do so.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister. I will focus on the Newtownbreda-Knockbreda proposal. Some of the drivers are clearly around dwindling school population and performance. The Minister pointed out the falling roll at Knockbreda, but he did not reflect the growing population at Newtownbreda. He focused on the improvements in both schools. In that context, one might expect Newtownbreda to remain. Why, then, is he effectively and administratively recommending not the amalgamation but the closure of both and the replacement of both with a new school?

Mr O'Dowd: It is a procedural matter. It is how the proposals come forward to me from the board. It is only a procedural matter. This is about a new beginning for the pupils served by both those schools. I am not interested in the institution or its name. I said that all along. Indeed, in the closing remarks of my speech, I said that this is not about the institution; this is about the pupils our education system is there to serve. If we bring together those two schools under a new beginning, we are delivering a new beginning for the pupils they serve in that community. We will provide a sustainable good school for the future.

I had to announce the closure of Orangefield today. If an intervention had been made in Orangefield several years ago and plans had been put in place for its sustainability, I would not have the unfortunate job of standing here today and closing the school. This is about long-term planning and sustainability and serving the needs of schools. I congratulate all those involved in providing education in institutions, but if an institution has to close, amalgamate or come together with another school to provide good education, that is the best way forward.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister, and I welcome his decisions today. It shows that it is important to listen to the communities and that, particularly in Dundonald's case, the geographical and demographical needs in that area need to be listened to. He has done so. Will the Minister make sure that, in future, boards work more together, maybe instead of ESA? It seems to be a better way forward. Will he ensure that development proposals and decisions are properly and thoroughly worked through, almost to the point at which each child's future in which school is known?

Mr O'Dowd: It is crucial that boards work together in the absence of ESA. I do not believe that it is preferable to, or a better way forward than, ESA, but it is crucial that boards work closely together in its absence. Despite a number of hiccups in part of this process, the boards are now focused on working together. They clearly recognise the significant cross-fertilisation of pupils back and forth between the boards and the need to provide sustainable education; that

one board cannot do it on its own; and that they have to plan together. That is moving forward.

As to listening to the views of the community in Dundonald, I was extremely impressed by the people who I met who were in support of Dundonald High School. That is not to say that I was not extremely impressed with schools that I have closed in the past. I have said to the Member previously that I often have to judge whether the intervention by a community support group, or its action, has been on time. It was just on time in Dundonald — just on time.

The motivation, energy and determination among the parents, community activists and senior teaching staff who I met was clear. They now have to sustain that, and there will be good days and bad days. They will need support through both critical and supportive actions and words from my Department, from me, from the board and from elected representatives. The hard work continues and intensifies from today. I think that they have the potential to do it, but there are still a few hard days ahead for them.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for bringing the statement to the House today. I know that it has been long awaited by pupils, staff and parents alike. I welcome the decision on Dundonald. If pupils are to realise their full potential, they need to attend the school, and we have seen a real improvement in that. There has been a better atmosphere over past months, and I pay tribute to the staff and community for that.

I have a question on the closure of Orangefield: given the Minister's decision not to increase the numbers in Ashfield at present, how can we ensure a smooth transition for those pupils from Orangefield, especially those who are currently in their exam years?

Mr O'Dowd: I have asked the boards to specifically engage with the parents and pupils who will be departing Orangefield to work with them in the provision of their new school. I have no authority to determine which school those pupils will attend: it is still down to parental preference and available spare capacity.

I do not believe that keeping Orangefield open would have benefited in any way the educational provision for those pupils that currently attend. A strategic intervention should have taken place at that school many years ago, but that was not the case. The best way forward, as regrettable as it is, is for those pupils to leave that school and attend other good schools in the area. As I said in my opening remarks, the boards will engage with parents and pupils on the best way forward for each individual pupil.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for his statement today. I particularly pay tribute to the fact that the next phase of planning for east Belfast has been mentioned. I think that the Minister has hit the nail on the head on many of the aspects that were creating a confused situation. Perhaps if we had taken the route suggested in the next phase, Orangefield, Knockbreda and Ashfield Boys' might be in a different situation today. For Knockbreda and Ashfield Boys', there is more work to be done in east Belfast.

Minister, you said:

"to the people who called on me to keep Dundonald High School open, my message is simple: your campaign is not over; it has only just begun."

I think that the parents recognise that fact, but as the process of enhancing the permanent teaching staff goes on, investment in school buildings is also critical.

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

Mr Newton: When will the investment take place, along with the process to enhance the teaching staff and curriculum?

Mr O'Dowd: The board and my Department will assess any application for enhanced facilities at the school along with applications from elsewhere. In touring the school, you can see that it is a building from around the 1970s. The fabric of the school is not in a significantly poor condition. The history of the school is affecting the quality of education. Whether it was faults inside or outside the school, by the administrators or whoever else, those faults are to blame for the poor educational outcomes of the young people in that school. It is not the physical shape of the school nor its facilities.

11.45 am

I believe that we can and will enshrine a new beginning in the school. The reconstitution of the board of governors will be vital in that, and I encourage local elected representatives to identify key figures from the business community or with a community background etc and ask them to make themselves available for appointment to the board of governors. Those people will be a driving force behind the school. I also believe that we can identify a new strategic leader for the school. Those who have been in place have acted valiantly to keep the school going, and we now have to put in place a new leadership to bring the school to a new stage. If, when we have done all of that, or in conjunction with doing all of that, an application for infrastructure is made by the school, I will consider it.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I suppose that, in his response to Mr Newton, he answered some of my questions.

As he stated, this is the beginning of a new journey for pupils in that area. How will the changes improve educational outcomes for the pupils? What specific assistance will be given to pupils and staff to ensure that the journey is a smooth one?

Mr O'Dowd: I have asked the board to work closely with my Department and the school to bring forward a support package for the school. At this stage, the key thing is the reconstitution of the board of governors. We need to bring in new members to strengthen the board of governors. We need people who are determined to ensure that only high-quality education will be accepted for the young people who attend that school. We need people with a range of skills and backgrounds to do that, and, as I said earlier, I encourage representatives from the area to identify people who are prepared to give up their time and dedicate it to the school. I believe that the appointment of a new principal will clearly signal a new beginning for the school — a visionary leader and someone who is prepared to make a personal mark and a mark on the education of the young people. If further financial support etc is required, I will consider that as part of the board's improvement plan for the school.

We will do all of that. However, if the community and local representatives do not continue their campaign of support and continue to work with the school, none of that will work. If there is all-round support, which, I have to say, will have to go on for a number of years to make a difference in the school, it has the potential to be a very good school and one that supports a community that deserves very good education. It may also be an exemplar for other schools that face similar problems.

As I said, each school tells its own story. This is not a change of direction or policy; I have assessed all the issues around Dundonald and decided to go down this pathway. Other circumstances in other schools may mean that this is not the course of action for them.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his statement. As he said, there has been a tremendous amount of commitment, passion and support from the parents and the community. I thank the Minister for having an open-door policy in relation to Dundonald High School in particular.

Given the way that these things tend to pan out, there could be many difficulties with the rejuvenation of Dundonald High School. Will he give us a commitment that his door will remain open and that we can come to him and get help and support to encourage the rejuvenation of that school?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes, I have a continued role to play, as does my Department and the board. I am always keen for elected representatives to come into my office and discuss the educational well-being of their constituents. I think that that process has worked well with Dundonald and that it has been very informative.

From the outside, I understand that the community involved may have been suspicious of a Sinn Féin Minister or felt that I had ulterior motives and that I would act differently with that school than I would elsewhere.

At times, political parties have a responsibility to prove that the perceptions of citizens who would not normally be dealing with them are not always right. I want to ensure that communities, regardless of where they are, including Protestant working class communities, have access to high-quality education. If we have to go the extra mile to do that, let us do it.

Mr Copeland: Minister, thank you. Credit where credit is due. I will keep my comments largely to the schools in east Belfast: the two Ashfield campuses, Orangefield and Dundonald.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind the Member that he must ask a question, please.

Mr Copeland: The future of Dundonald remains in the balance, given that there are targets and other things to be achieved. Whilst I accept that Dundonald must meet certain criteria and progress and that you have undertaken to assist them in that, will that assistance be formal? In other words, will the school be given a set of things that it must achieve within certain time frames, and will it be given understanding and credit when it does so and a bit of leeway with the slippage that always occurs with such things?

Mr O'Dowd: The future of Dundonald High School rests with the community that it serves. I have confidence that that community has the ability and the willingness to make Dundonald a success story, but I do not underestimate the challenges that they face and nor should they.

The school remains subject to a formal intervention process, which means that support is already in place. We are going to intensify that support. The education board will work closely and intensely with them. If that has to be initially on a day-to-day basis, that will be the case.

Let us not underestimate the reconfiguration of the board of governors and the potential that has. We are looking for the best of the best to be members of the board of governors of that school. That is the sort of support we need. I appeal to the business community and trade union leaders who may be listening to this to step up to the challenge and make themselves available. Educationalists who have retired, or whatever it may be, and believe they have a role to play should come forward and take a look at this.

When the advertisement goes out for the principal's post, I appeal for experienced educationalists to look at it favourably and ask themselves whether they can make the difference in Dundonald and make a significant mark in education in that community.

The board will be working with the school and my Department and I will be working with the board and the school to introduce support mechanisms to the school. If financial measures are needed, I will look at them and judge each on its own merits. The school and the community will have additional support mechanisms in place to assist the school in its journey.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his statement to the House this morning. Far be it from me to throw a spanner in the works, but it affects not only east Belfast but south Belfast, given that Newtownbreda has pupils from Sandy Row, Belvoir and the Village.

Given that the amalgamated school will have 1,000 pupils, will the Minister give some guarantees on future capital funding, and will he discuss the long-term future of a sustainable school in south Belfast? Will he meet with me and my colleagues to discuss the long-term plan for a school in this area?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. I am acutely aware of where the population for the new school flows from and the historical reasons for that, including a number of amalgamations and closures.

I am more than happy to meet with the Member to discuss the issue further. This is a sustainable school. I said in my statement that we are looking at planning 20 years into the future. We have made an intervention on time for both schools and for the education of the community in that area. We can move forward confidently with a sustainable school. In terms of capital investment, I have to take each application on its merits. We have a significant backlog in building programmes that we are trying to work our way through. I want to see infrastructure follow on from amalgamations etc but I cannot commit directly to that now. However, I commit to the Member that I will engage with him and discuss how we will reach that point.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his statement, particularly as it concerns Holywood Priory. I welcome the increase in enrolment there to 500, although it is somewhat conditional.

Does the Minister now recognise the need for a newbuild in Holywood? I record my thanks to him for coming fairly recently to look at the Holywood situation and to see at

first hand the need for investment. Does he recognise now that we need new buildings in Holywood? Priory is suffering. It is a substandard building in very poor condition, as are the primary and nursery schools. Is that the first step for getting a newbuild? Does the Minister recognise that it is very difficult to attract pupils to a building that is dilapidated and crumbling? In the case of Priory, such conditions make life most difficult for them.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. I am considering requests from the various managing authorities for the next building programme. I have reached no decisions. I am acutely aware of conditions at Priory, which the Member and I visited. We need to make a decision on its future one way or the other, because it is the key to other developments in the area. There is almost a domino effect involved. I assure the Member that I am considering the proposal as part of other proposals that have come in from the managing authorities, and I will make a statement in due course on the next phase of the capital building programme.

Mr Allister: These schools are well outside my constituency, but I have been in receipt of representations from parents in Dundonald and about Ashfield. I very much welcome the Dundonald decision, but I am disappointed about Ashfield. Ashfield is fully subscribed. Orangefield is now going to close, yet the Minister gives no increase to the Ashfield schools, whereas to Priory, which has been stagnating in numbers for five years, he gives an increase. Is he not being unfair to the controlled sector?

Mr O'Dowd: If I were to make a decision on the Ashfield schools now, I would be being unfair to the controlled sector, because it would not be part of a thought-through process with sufficient research or information available to make an informed decision. I could make a decision about the Ashfield schools, which are sustainable, good schools that will be part of our education fabric into the future. However, that decision could have an impact on other controlled schools in that area. I think that it would be foolish to do that, because you do then end up with the Orangefields and other problems. Let us do this in a planned, organised way. I said in my statement that expansion will not take place now but in the future. I have a statutory duty to the integrated sector to promote and facilitate integrated education. I was conscious of that when I allowed Priory to expand. I have allowed the school to expand in a managed way.

On pupils leaving Orangefield, I said that I wanted the boards to engage with parents and pupils over how we manage pupil transfer to whichever schools parents and pupils express a preference for. We will manage it in that way. If I have to use my power to give additional numbers to a school, I will do so. However, I will work with the boards on the matter to ensure that pupils transfer in a managed way.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the statement, the recognition that the Minister has given to community support for Dundonald High School and the commitment that he has given to develop high-quality education in the area. I also welcome the modest increase in year 8 admission numbers, from 85 to 100, that he has granted Priory Integrated College. However, I suggest that he underestimates the current demand for places at the school, as does Mr Allister, and I disagree with the language that he used, which — inadvertently, I hope — diminishes the significance of the

school to pupils and parents in east Belfast. I ask him to reassure the House by telling us just how much account he has taken of his statutory duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education in east Belfast and beyond.

12.00 noon

Mr O'Dowd: I could not hear the Member's full comments. Is he suggesting that I have undermined Priory School? I am not saying that he did, but if I picked up that he is suggesting that I am undermining Priory School, I can tell him that that is certainly not the case.

I want to see Priory flourish and expand. I said in my statement that it is the board's responsibility first and foremost to manage and monitor the numbers at the school. If it is the case that the school continues to expand, even through year 8, there is nothing to stop the board from bringing forward a further development proposal to me. If the school's sixth form continues to expand, I can manage that from Department level and work with the school to do that.

However, if we were simply to accept the proposal on Priory that was initially published, we would find that, although the figures look good, you would end up with a school with a very large sixth form and that the numbers coming in through year 8 would not match the other end of the school. So, you would end up with a school that is unbalanced in its pupil demographics.

I am prepared to work with Priory, and I am prepared to ensure that it continues to deliver integrated education in the area. We will do that in a managed way with the school.

Executive Committee Business

Public Service Pensions Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton, to move the Consideration Stage of the Public Service Pensions Bill.

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

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments detailing the order for consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate in the provisional grouping of amendments selected list. There are three groups of amendments, and we will debate the amendments in each group in turn.

The first debate will be on amendment Nos 1 to 7 and amendment No 16, which deal with pension boards, types of scheme and valuations. The second debate will be on amendment Nos 8 to 12, which deal with the normal pension age for members of schemes set up under clause 10. The third debate will be on amendment Nos 13, 14, 15 and amendment Nos 17 to 21, which deal with Assembly control of secondary legislation, consultation requirements for pension scheme regulations and transitional provisions for existing schemes.

Once the debate on each group is completed, any further amendments in the group will be moved formally as we go through the Bill, and the Question on each will be put without further debate. The Questions on stand part will be taken at the appropriate points in the Bill. If that is clear, we will proceed.

No amendments have been tabled to clauses 1 to 4. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group these clauses for the Question on stand part.

Clauses 1 to 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5 (Pension board)

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now come to the first group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 1, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 2 to 7 and amendment No 16. Members will note that amendment No 2 is consequential to amendment No 1 and that amendment No 4 is consequential to amendment No 3.

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I beg to move amendment No 1: In page 3, line 2, leave out from beginning to "workers)," in line 3 and insert

"(1) Subject to subsection (2), scheme regulations for a scheme under section 1".

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In page 3, line 6, leave out "must provide" and insert

"may make the provision required under subsection (1) above by providing".— [Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

No 3: In page 3, line 30, leave out "member representatives" and insert "trade union representatives".— *[Mr D Bradley.]*

No 4: In page 4, line 4, at end insert

“(10) In this Act a ‘trade union’ has the meaning set out in Section 1 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.”— [Mr D Bradley.]

No 5: In clause 8, page 5, leave out lines 9 and 10.—
[Mr D Bradley.]

No 6: In clause 8, page 5, line 26, leave out “negative resolution” and insert “the affirmative procedure (see section 34(1))”.— [Mr D Bradley.]

No 7: In clause 9, page 6, line 11, leave out “5” and insert “10”.— [Mr D Bradley.]

No 16: In clause 13, page 9, line 20, after “qualified” insert

“and must not be
(a) an employee of the responsible authority;
(b) the scheme manager;
(c) a scheme member; or
(d) an employee of the Department of Finance and Personnel”.— [Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel).]

Mr Hamilton: Clause 5 relates to the governance of the new public service pension schemes created under the Bill. It requires each pension scheme made under the powers in clause 1 to establish a pension board. The board’s role is to assist the scheme manager in securing effective and efficient governance and administration of the pension scheme and any statutory scheme connected with it. In particular, the pension board will be charged with helping the scheme manager to ensure that the scheme is administered to an appropriate standard and in compliance with statutory requirements.

Amendment Nos 1 and 2 deal specifically with the constitution of the pension board for the local government pension scheme in Northern Ireland. The early draft of clause 5 provided that only the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers’ Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) could act as the pension board for the local government pension scheme. Amendment Nos 1 and 2 will remove the requirement that NILGOSC must act as the pension board for that scheme and will specify that it may perform that function. The change was requested by the Department of the Environment. The amendment was developed and agreed in the course of the work of the public service pensions working group of officials from across the main public service pension schemes. The working group was established by my Department in 2013 to provide an interdepartmental forum to ensure that the provisions of the Bill adequately reflect policy requirements and local conditions for each of the schemes affected. The amendments achieve that by providing the same flexibilities for the local government pension scheme in Northern Ireland in the appointment of its pension board as exist for the other schemes created under the Bill.

The amendments are in line with the reform approach to deliver improvements in standards for scheme governance across all public service schemes and have been welcomed by the Department of the Environment and the Committee for Finance and Personnel during the scrutiny stage of the Bill. Therefore, I commend amendment Nos 1 and 2 to Members and seek their support.

I will now comment on the other amendments tabled in this group. I have already highlighted that the purpose of the reform is to deliver advances in standards for scheme governance for public service pension schemes. Amendment Nos 3 and 4 severely restrict the scope of those improvements by limiting the provision for the representation of public service pension scheme members on pension boards to those who are members of trade unions and within the limited definition of trade unions proposed by Mr Bradley. The illogical and perverse effect would be that the interests of scheme members could not be represented through the pension boards unless they are members of the particular trade unions on whose behalf Mr Bradley and Mr Rogers appear to have agreed to petition for in bringing forward these amendments.

It is wholly inappropriate to restrict scheme member representation to a defined trade union grouping in the primary legislation. The purpose of the provision is to provide employee representation. Trade unions are not employees. In fact, the danger of these amendments is that there is the potential that a scheme could be left in the scenario where a pension board cannot exist if it is not unionised, as the clause, if amended, would specify “trade union representatives”. The amendments also have the potential to discriminate against provision of member representation for pensioner members and other interest groups, which scheme members are free and entitled to be part of, including, for example, the Civil Service Pensioners’ Alliance (CSPA). That is an independent, non-party-political organisation with nearly 60,000 members across the United Kingdom. It has been campaigning on behalf of pensioners across the United Kingdom for over 60 years to protect and defend the value of members’ pensions. The Civil Service Pensioners’ Alliance is affiliated to the Public Service Pensioners’ Council representing the interests of retired public servants.

The provisions for representation on the pension board in clause 5 are already suitably and adequately constructed to describe the overall requirement for schemes to appoint the necessary range of persons who will be representative of scheme members to the pension board, including those scheme members who choose to be members of trade unions.

The secondary legislation process provides scope for Departments with scheme responsibilities and the various scheme member representatives, including trade unions, to further refine the constitution of pension boards on the basis of the existing provision in this clause, which is rightly inclusive and sensible. Therefore, I ask Members to oppose amendment Nos 3 and 4.

Amendment No 5 seeks to amend clause 8 and provides another example of a short-sighted and restrictive approach, which some Members have allowed themselves to become lobbyists for, to the purpose and intent of the reforms. The intention of the clause is to establish adequate flexibilities in the primary legislation to ensure the maintenance of adequate scheme designs that are sustainable and continue to deliver decent levels of income in retirement. This amendment would include an unnecessary restriction on the scope for future scheme designs to deliver these priorities, potentially to the detriment of future scheme members.

The broad power at clause 8 to create pension and benefit schemes of different designs is intentionally

comprehensive, as it should be in primary legislation such as this. It includes capacity for defined contribution schemes and also allows appropriate scope, in principle, for positive advances in other scheme designs to be considered, should they arise in the future. The amendment would restrict the range of pension options already available to public service employees.

For individuals in a scheme such as the Civil Service partnership, they will, when the new career average revalued earnings schemes are introduced, have to join the new career average revalued earnings arrangements. The key point here is that the option for schemes to offer arrangements in the future, such as partnership, will be removed.

Defined contribution schemes already exist in the public service, such as the aforementioned Civil Service partnership scheme. It provides staff with choices for pension saving as an alternative to the main defined benefit scheme. A number of civil servants have elected to join this arrangement. By March 2012, there were 102 members in that Civil Service partnership scheme, which had been introduced in 2002. Its key attraction for members is that they do not pay employee contributions. However, this is only a stakeholder scheme with limited benefits. Nonetheless, the provisions for a scheme design at clause 8 therefore are designed to provide options, but there is no compulsion.

The policy intention of the Bill is that the new career average revalued earnings schemes, which are recommended by the Independent Public Service Pensions Commission as a replacement for final salary models, are designed to last for a generation at least. This is set out quite clearly at clause 22, which provides a commitment in primary legislation to protect elements of the career average revalued earnings scheme until 2040. The Bill includes effective protections for scheme members against the proposed introduction of any future scheme design that would compromise the 25-year commitment to the career average revalued earnings scheme design that I referred to.

Clause 22(2) states that the responsible authority must consult scheme members or their representatives with a view to reaching agreement with them and lay a report before the Assembly. This provides enhanced processes for the trade union side at consultation and for Assembly scrutiny, which will automatically be triggered to apply in the event of any proposal to change the career average revalued earnings scheme design. Changes to benefit accrual rates and members' contribution rates, which are outside the normal operation of the cost-cap mechanism, will be protected under the 25-year protected period.

It should be clear, therefore, because of the commitment to the Hutton principles for reform that this Bill is founded on, that there is no intention to provide defined contribution schemes or any other scheme design instead of the career average revalued earnings defined benefit schemes recommended in the independent commission's report. To some, that may appear to be a mixed message but, to be clear, there is no intention to provide defined benefits schemes at this time. I therefore ask Members to oppose amendment No 5.

Amendment No 6 seeks to amend the Assembly procedure for regulations to establish schemes, as detailed in

clause 8. My response to the previous amendment should have demonstrated that the Bill incorporates sufficient protections to safeguard against the inappropriate use of the general power to make scheme designs, which clause 8 provides. The negative resolution procedure is entirely adequate here. Any proposed new design would be required to be implemented through scheme regulations, which are, as a matter of course, subject to the negative procedure and will require statutory consultation with member representatives under clause 21.

Again, it should be noted that any proposal for a change of scheme design of a kind that would propose to diverge from the career average revalued earnings model would engage the procedure, which I outlined, for protected elements at clause 22, and so require extended consultation with the trade unions with a view to reaching agreement on the proposal and would require a report to be laid in the Assembly. The negative resolution procedure allows appropriate Assembly scrutiny of the provisions of scheme regulations and the opportunity to debate those regulations, if the Assembly so wishes.

As the SDLP tabled amendment No 6, it may be of interest to it and other Members if I cite some examples of legislation brought forward by SDLP Ministers that include provision for negative resolution.

They include the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013, section 43 of which states that regulations under the Act are subject to negative resolution; the Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010, which was brought to the House by the then Minister, Margaret Ritchie, in which article 6 had regulations that were subject to negative resolution; and, most significantly, the Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and the Pensions (No. 2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, which were also brought forward by Margaret Ritchie when she was Social Development Minister. Sections 10 and 13 of the Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 are subject to negative resolution.

12.15 pm

I should point out that the protocol for negative resolution was never changed for state pensions legislation made by DSD while the Department had an SDLP Minister. Indeed, the accepted practice has continued. Why does the SDLP now want a different approach for public service pensions in this Bill? It is rather inconsistent, to say the least.

Finally, any proposal for a change of scheme design outside of the career average revalued earnings model described in the Bill would engage the higher protections provided at clause 22 and require extended consultation with trade unions and a report to be laid before the Assembly. Once again, I ask Members to oppose amendment No 6.

I move on to amendment No 7, which is proposed to clause 9. The current provision for revaluation at clause 9 allows persons who have taken a break from pensionable service of up to five years to be treated, for pension revaluation purposes, as if they had remained in pensionable service in the scheme. The amendment seeks to double the five-year limit to 10 years. Five years is an appropriate level. It is in line with the general norm of terms for career breaks currently permitted in public service employment. A period of five years is considered reasonable, adequate and generous.

It is unfair to expect those who choose to stay in service or take standard-length breaks from service to foot the bill for those who choose extended breaks beyond the established norm and which this clause already makes adequate provision for. The secondary legislation provides scope for each relevant Minister to consider what variations may be possible and appropriate for each of their schemes, and they must ensure that the variances are accounted for within their overall scheme cost envelope. I ask Members to oppose amendment No 7.

Amendment No 16 is proposed to clause 13. This amendment relates to provisions for cost controls for the local government pension scheme for Northern Ireland. It seeks to make it explicit in the clause that the person appointed to check the aims of the valuation process in that scheme is suitably independent. As drafted, the clause requires the person appointed to be appropriately qualified in auditing terms, and that should imply the necessary independence. I believe that the existing provision is adequate and that this amendment is not required. However, this is a relatively minor issue, and I will leave the efficacy of amendment No 16 to the judgement of Members.

In summary, I ask the Assembly to support amendment Nos 1 and 2 in this group and to oppose amendment Nos 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I would first like to take a degree of latitude as Chairperson to refer briefly to the Committee's scrutiny of the Public Service Pensions Bill.

I have no doubt that all Members will be keenly aware of the implications of their decisions today and at subsequent stages of the Bill. Indeed, the Bill will have an impact on upwards of 216,000 employees in the public services, which represents over 30% of the total workforce across the North. Those affected will include civil servants, local government officers, teachers, health service workers, prison officers, police officers and firefighters.

Given the scale of the proposed reforms, the Committee undertook scrutiny at three levels. These covered the policy intention of the reforms; the structural and operational aspects of the provisions in the Bill; and the technical drafting of the Bill. This detailed work, which was informed by stakeholder evidence that was collected in advance of the Bill's being introduced to the Assembly and at Committee Stage, resulted in a wide range of issues being raised with the Department of Finance and Personnel. In that regard, the Committee acknowledges the contribution of the stakeholders, including the various trade union representatives, in informing the Committee deliberations and the responsiveness of the Department in seeking to provide clarification, explanation and assurances on issues arising from the evidence.

In its report on the Bill, the Committee agreed a number of key conclusions and policy recommendations aimed at providing sufficient safeguards and minimising, where possible, the impacts on our public sector workers. A key conclusion from the Committee's scrutiny noted the variability in the estimates of the financial penalty — between £262 million and £300 million per annum — that Treasury has confirmed will apply if the public sector pension reforms provided for in the Bill are delayed or not

implemented in line with those in Britain. The Committee accepts that, given the existing financial framework for devolution, the direct reduction in the block grant as a result of not proceeding with the reforms would place a substantial pressure on the Executive's budget and, in particular, on the funding available for delivering priority front line public services in the North. That said, given the significance of the reforms in the context of the predominance of the public sector in the economy here, the Committee considers that, in expecting the Executive to follow parity on that devolved matter, the London Government should have provided a macroeconomic appraisal of the Hutton reforms at a local level. That would have ensured that decisions on the reforms could be taken on the basis of a more complete evidence base.

The Committee welcomes the amendments in group 1 to clause 5, which were indicated by the Department during Committee Stage. As the Committee did not consider amendment No 1 and the others tabled by the SDLP due to the timing, I cannot convey the Committee's position on them. However, I note that the issue addressed by amendment No 6, which is about negative resolution versus the affirmative procedure in clause 8(5), arose in the evidence to the Committee.

I will now turn to the Committee amendment to clause 13, which is listed in group 1 as amendment No 16. In the course of its deliberations, the Committee noted that clause 13 of the Bill specifies that employer contributions in defined benefits schemes with a pension fund, most notably the funded local government pension scheme (NI), are set at a level that is sufficient to ensure the solvency of the pension fund and the long-term cost-efficiency of the part of the scheme to which that fund relates. It also requires actuarial valuations of the fund and provides for the responsible authority to appoint a person to review whether such valuations are in accordance with the scheme regulations, consistent with other valuations and whether an applicable rate of employer contributions was set. The clause requires that the person appointed must, in the view of the responsible authority, be appropriately qualified.

The Committee noted that the explanatory and financial memorandum accompanying the Bill refers to the reviewer as an "independent person" undertaking an:

"independent verification of the assessment of the scheme's assets and liabilities and to confirm whether appropriate employer contributions will be paid to meet those liabilities."

However, it was also noted that clause 13 does not appear to include specific provision to ensure the independence of the appointed person. Although members acknowledged that the term "appropriately qualified" in clause 13(7) could be interpreted as implying independence, it was not deemed to be sufficiently clear. On raising that issue with departmental officials during oral evidence, the Committee was assured that the Department would consider enhancing the provisions in clause 13 to make it absolutely clear that the person appointed to undertake the review is independent. In its subsequent written response, the Department appeared not to be prepared to table an amendment to ensure the independence of the person appointed. It stated:

“this is a technical exercise where financial or actuarial expertise is the primary requirement rather than independence”.

As a consequence, the Committee agreed that an amendment, which would aim to ensure the independence of the person appointed would be drafted for consideration. The intention behind amendment No 16 is therefore to make explicit the requirement for independence in that regard.

In his response to the Committee's report, the Minister stated that the amendment:

“will not divert from the policy intentions of the Bill”.

I take note of his comments today that it is a minor issue in comparison with other aspects of the Bill in all three groups. I welcome that, and I call on other Members to support the Committee's amendment No 16.

I will speak very briefly on our party position. We support the ministerial amendment Nos 1 and 2, the Committee amendment No 16 and broadly support all the other amendments in group 1 that have been tabled by the SDLP. We look forward to the debate on that group. We realise that the thrust of the debate is probably in the second group of amendments, which will take place after Question Time. We broadly support the amendments that have been tabled by parties in the first group.

Mr Weir: I will try to keep my remarks brief. This is, obviously, a very important piece of legislation. As a member of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, I know that going through the evidence on this group of amendments was a very valuable exercise. We got submissions from a wide range of witnesses, and we had very good interaction with departmental officials. Sometimes, when one looks at the issue of pensions, unless you have a degree of expertise in the subject, a lot of the terminology can be a little bit confusing. It is important that, as a Committee, we were able to plough our way through the potential minefield that is there.

I will, obviously, make specific reference in the second group of amendments to the issue relating to firefighters and deal with it at that stage.

I will now turn to the first group of amendments. Amendment Nos 1 and 2 are departmental amendments. The DUP is very supportive of these amendments. The interesting thing, in many ways, about this legislation is that it is a mixture of creating a structure around public sector pensions with a certain level of enabling legislation. A lot of the detail and flexibility that will need to be put in place will be put into individual pension schemes, and, in many ways, it will be guided by Departments. This is very apposite particularly to amendment Nos 1 and 2, which deal specifically with the NILGOSC provisions. Maybe I should declare, if not quite an interest, a previous involvement as a former member of local government. To allow that degree of flexibility is useful; it is something, as I understand it, that was requested by the Department of the Environment. Amendment Nos 1 and 2 give us that level of flexibility, which, I think, seems to be fairly sensible.

I will now turn, perhaps less favourably, to some of the other amendments in this group. Mention has been made of amendment Nos 3 and 4, which deal with the issue of representation. The point that the Minister made is very

appropriate. We are talking about member representation rather than trade union representation and, in many cases, that may end up being the same person; it may be somebody drawn from the trade unions. However, to try to tie it down and make it specifically that it has to be a trade union representative would be wrong for a number of reasons.

First, as was mentioned by the Minister, not everybody who is going to be part of the scheme will necessarily be a member of a trade union. Consequently, therefore, they may feel themselves to be unrepresented. Although a lot of good work has been done by a lot of trade union officials, I am sure that we have all come across occasions where there has been a degree of tension between former employees who see themselves as retired and those who are current employees. On occasions in different walks of life, and particularly in the public sector, we speak to retired people who are pensioners who do not feel necessarily that the trade union represents them any more. They are not a member of a trade union, and they feel at times, perhaps, that decisions are taken, understandably by a trade union, that are very much focused on a union's current members rather than its retired members. Consequently, there is a danger with amendment Nos 3 and 4 that people will feel a little bit left on the shelf and unrepresented. As I said, on a lot of occasions, it may well be that the representative of the members of that group is a trade unionist. I have no problem with that, but to restrict it to that is wrong, and consequently I will oppose amendment Nos 3 and 4.

Again, as has been indicated, there is a restrictive quality to amendment No 5. Different types of schemes will be permitted under the Bill. As indicated, a lot of the detail will have to be sketched out, quite often on individual schemes, by Departments. Therefore, to preclude particular types of schemes is wrong. In many ways, it interferes with the role that potentially is there through other Departments. There is not a particular intention to provide defined contribution schemes instead of the CARE-defined benefit schemes. We cannot have a crystal ball to gaze into the future or, indeed, gaze into other Departments as to what necessarily would be the case.

Again, as a lot of the legislation is ultimately meant to be enabling, I think that amendment No 5 is too restrictive.

12.30 pm

I will now deal with amendment No 6. An issue that quite often comes up is whether we do things here by affirmative or negative resolution. As someone who has seen large amounts of legislation go through the House over the past 15 years, I am often struck by what I think is a false dichotomy between those two types of resolution. Negative resolution has the advantage, because, if everything has to be by affirmative resolution, you clog up the system with large numbers of such resolutions that, despite in many cases being utterly uncontroversial, create a certain level of delay and add unnecessary time.

However, the idea that the affirmative resolution procedure provides much better and additional scrutiny is a false one. What we have to realise about the negative resolution procedure, particularly given the sensitivities around pension issues, is that, if a Committee — on this or any other subject — wishes to pray against an amendment, it will automatically come to the Assembly. There is that

high degree of safeguarding. Therefore, in many ways, there is no additional advantage provided by affirmative resolution, on the basis that the safeguard is already built into the legislation. On the flip side of the coin, we may end up going through the motions time after time on a range of affirmative resolutions. That does not strike me as sensible.

Similarly, I think that amendment No 7 would shift the goalposts if “5 years” were to be replaced with “10 years”. If you look at the case for getting a career break in a lot of the branches of the public sector, be it for teachers, police, the Civil Service itself or prison officers, often a maximum of five years for a career break is granted. Indeed, I think that firefighters are restricted to a three-year career break. To expand that to 10 years would massively shift the goalposts and is not in line with current Civil Service practice.

There is an opportunity for some scope on behalf of Departments. They can look at individual circumstances and fit the scheme to what they believe to be best, but clearly, concerning the generosity of the scheme, there is a potential cost impact of a shift towards 10 years. I am certainly not persuaded on amendment No 7.

Finally, the Chair teased out where we as a Committee stand on amendment No 16. There is an argument to be made about whether it is strictly necessary, but, in many ways, it is a choice between what is implicit in the clause as it stands, and what can be read into from the explanatory and financial memorandum, and making the clause explicit. From that point of view, a reasonable argument has been made. The argument was, I think, accepted across the Committee that there is no harm in making the clause explicit. Therefore, although the argument can still be made about whether, strictly speaking, the amendment is necessary, it does no harm to make the clause explicit if it provides people with an additional reassurance. We on these Benches are therefore happy to accept amendment No 16.

I will make remarks on one of the other groups, but I commend amendment Nos 1, 2 and 16 to the House. I do not think that the implications of amendment Nos 3 to 7 are to the benefit of the Bill, so I urge the House to oppose them.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I propose therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first business when we return will be Question Time. The Consideration Stage of the Bill will resume after Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.34 pm.

On resuming (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We will start with listed questions. Question 10 has been withdrawn.

Sport: Stadium Development

1. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the funding is now in place to allow the redevelopment of Windsor Park to begin immediately. (AQO 5277/11-15)

2. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the regional stadium development at Windsor Park, Ravenhill and Casement Park. (AQO 5278/11-15)

Ms Ni Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I thought that we were doing topical questions first. Sorry. I think that everyone else thought that as well.

I take this opportunity to wish everybody a happy new year. With the Principal Deputy Speaker's permission, I will take questions 1 and 2 together. The IFA integrated supply team tenders have been assessed, and the most economically advantageous tender has been identified. As no challenges were received during the Alcatel period, the funding agreement was issued to the IFA, and the successful contractor, O'Hare and McGovern, was appointed in December 2013. The design development by the contractor is currently under way, and it is anticipated that works will commence on site in the next few months. Provided that significant delays in any potential legal challenges are avoided, the Windsor development can remain on programme, with the completion of the construction works planned for September 2015

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that clarification. She indicated that the development was subject to any legal challenges being avoided. Does the Minister anticipate any legal challenges?

Ms Ni Chuilín: I certainly do not anticipate any legal challenges. I think that the Member and others will appreciate that we have come a fair distance with the work that is commencing on the three stadia. I think that it is good news for Windsor Park and Casement Park that not only were the funding agreements signed in December but full planning for Casement was given. So, I do not anticipate any legal challenges at this stage.

Miss M McIlveen: Is the Minister satisfied that, with the quite recent change in personnel in the Department and the departure of Noel Molloy as stadium project director, sufficient expertise remains in the Department to ensure that the three projects are delivered on time and within budget?

Ms Ni Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. Noel Molloy came in to the Department with a huge reputation after delivering Titanic and other significant projects.

That expertise will continue. We are certainly looking at whatever gaps there are, but, at this stage, I am more than content that the three programmes will be delivered on time. I am not really aware of other changes in the Department other than that involving the permanent secretary, but there have been seamless links, and I hope to continue that throughout these programmes.

Mr Humphrey: The Minister will be aware that, obviously, Windsor Park is the home of Northern Ireland. It is also the home of Linfield Football Club. Have officials from the Minister's Department met Linfield, and does she have any plans to meet the Linfield management committee?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not aware of any officials having met Linfield, but that is not to say that they will not have done so. I anticipate that, starting from this year, the number of requests from Irish League football clubs to meet not only me but my officials will increase to find out what is happening on subregional stadiums. I will meet any club. However, I am not aware of having received any invitation from Linfield for a meeting.

Mr McCarthy: I wish the Minister of Culture a happy new year. Can she advise the House whether she is satisfied that Casement Park will progress, despite the enormous opposition that there was from residents? One can understand why residents would be concerned. Is the Minister satisfied that those concerns have been looked after?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his good wishes, and, as we say in Irish: gurb amhlaidh duit — same to yourself, Kieran.

The concerns that residents raised were considered fully as part of the application for planning permission, which was awarded on 18 December. I anticipate that with regard to not only Casement Park but Windsor and Ravenhill we will have more meetings with other stakeholders, particularly around benefits. I have no doubt that residents with concerns will be part of those meetings should they be requested.

I have to say — and it will come as no surprise to the Member — that I am also receiving more requests to meet groups that deal with the long-term unemployed and children and young people who are leaving school and looking for apprenticeships, local businesses, and other groups that are looking at some of the social benefits. All of their views will be taken into consideration.

South Antrim: DCAL Capital Projects

3. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the major capital projects funded by her Department in the South Antrim constituency since 2012. (AQO 5279/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I understand that he helpfully clarified what he means by "major capital investment". In this context, it means investment in excess of £250,000. I can report that, at this stage, no capital investment of £250,000 was funded in the South Antrim constituency since 2012. I am able to draw the Member's attention to smaller capital investments in his constituency that fall just below that threshold. He will be aware that, in 2011-12, Sport NI invested £245,000 in the Burnside Ulster-Scots Society and £233,000 in Crumlin United Football Club. More generally, I am sure that the Member will acknowledge that decisions on the

location of capital investment are not made on the basis of constituency but rather reflect a number of factors.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Ms Michaela Boyle; I am sorry, I call Trevor for his supplementary question.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for her answer. I welcome the fact that both clubs got a considerable amount of investment for their projects. I accept that there are factors. However, the Minister will appreciate that need is one factor. I am sure that she will agree — as, I believe, she has told me previously — that there is great need for sports facilities, particularly for football, in South Antrim. What can her Department do to take a more proactive approach to encourage clubs to come forward and make applications for her Department to disperse that money.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I assume that the Member is not referring solely to sports needs but to sports and other needs in his constituency. I am more than happy to meet the local council, for example. I have met other local government representatives, be they council officials and councillors, and MLAs with regard to potential or future investment in the constituency. If the Member so wishes, I am happy to have a meeting to that end. I will certainly give advice. If it is about sport and other opportunities, I am happy to bring officials from some of the arm's-length bodies and facilitate a meeting.

I do not think for one minute that this has anything to do with an election in May, as Members raised the issue before; but, like many Members, I have received an increased number of requests in the new year to meet local representatives about potential investment in their communities. I am happy to do that.

City of Culture 2013: Legacy

4. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline how Strabane will benefit from the legacy of the City of Culture 2013. (AQO 5280/11-15)

7. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given her recent announcement of legacy plans as part of the City of Culture 2013, for an update on the departmental office in the Foyle area. (AQO 5283/11-15)

8. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her plans to maintain the legacy of the City of Culture 2013. (AQO 5284/11-15)

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle; ceist uimhir a trí. Question 3. I am sorry; ceist uimhir a ceathair. Question 4.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am just seeing if you are paying attention.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Good stuff, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. You have them all on their toes. With your permission, I will answer questions 4, 7 and 8 together.

Recently, I announced my strategic vision for the City of Culture legacy, not just for the city of Derry but, indeed, the north-west. I have secured over £2 million for the period from January to March 2014 to support a continuation of key projects from the city's culture programme and to prevent the loss of key benefits and partnerships. That will also stimulate new collaborations between creative industries and businesses and provide strategic investment to sports facility development in the north-west.

I will also, as I have stated, make a further bid to the Executive for funding for the 2014 and 2015 financial years and beyond to support ongoing and new interventions which maximise City of Culture benefits across the north-west. That will also support the Executive's priorities in growing the economy and tackling poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

I am therefore keen to ensure that a DCAL office will be set up in Derry to further enhance focus in the north-west. That will have responsibility for coordination and oversight of culture, arts and leisure activity in the area, which will include Derry, Strabane, Limavady and Coleraine. My officials are preparing detailed arrangements and costs, and it is my intention to have the new departmental office in place for the start of the 2014-15 financial year.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. I suppose that she has gone some way to answering my supplementary question. Further to that, it is important that Strabane benefits from the legacy of the City of Culture. Given that both councils will amalgamate into a regional council, will the Minister inform the House of the benefits of that in respect of generating new projects? What further assistance can her Department give to those councils?

I take this opportunity — I am sure that the Minister will join me in doing so — to wish Strabane Athletic all the very best. They drew with Ballinamallard, and there will now be a replay. I am sure that the Minister will agree about their success.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am happy, even though Tom Elliott is not, to wish Strabane FC and, indeed, Ballinamallard all the best.

I want to assure the Member that when we talk about looking at how we can expand the legacy of the City of Culture across the north-west — I mentioned Strabane, Limavady, Coleraine and other areas — we are doing just that. We are having meetings with key stakeholders in the community. We are also looking at opportunities for roadshows and information and consultation events. I have asked that Strabane in particular be one of the first areas visited in order to make links with the people there and to ascertain their opinions.

It is important to recognise that the legacy of the City of Culture — people in Derry city will say this — has been tremendous. However, we need to make sure that that is not just located in one geographical area. My experience of the city is that the people are very generous and are happy to spread all that love across the north-west.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí sin.

I thank the Minister for her lead answer in particular. I think that she is right: most people in Derry want to see the legacy spread beyond the city boundaries. She alluded to the fact that there will be premises in the city. Will she give us an update on that and perhaps outline how appointments to the new delivery mechanism will be made?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. He and others will be aware, given what I said just minutes ago and when we launched the legacy for the City of the Culture, that we want a DCAL office in the north-west. At the minute, we are scoping out where the office will be. We are looking at a couple of options and the costings.

My ambition — I have no reason to believe that this will not happen — is that the office will be open by the end of March or the beginning of April. Indeed, it is not just the physical office that will be in place around that time; I also hope to have the new cultural partners, the board and the staff in place by April or June. So, certainly by the end of this session — we are only back, and yet we are already talking about the summer — I hope to have that well in place.

Mr P Ramsey: The Minister clearly acknowledged the importance of the legacy to the north-west and to the wider region of Northern Ireland. Given the experience and capacity of staff in the Culture Company, will any of them be used to maximise the importance of the legacy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member is aware and, I am sure, can appreciate that this is not a transfer of undertakings and protection of employment (TUPE) arrangement; it is not just about transferring staff from one body to another. We are two separate bodies, and they are employed by Derry City Council. I will say that — I am sure that Members and the staff know this — when the posts are advertised publicly, which they will be, anyone, regardless of their current employment status, will be entitled to apply. I am sure that the Member shares my aspiration of wanting the best possible people in post to make sure that the legacy of 2013 endures in 2014 and beyond.

2.15 pm

Mr Campbell: I see the Minister and the questioners overlook the fact that it was the UK City of Culture. She will be aware that "inclusivity" was the key word throughout the UK City of Culture year. What steps is she going to take to ensure that, as it spreads out from Londonderry, Limavady, Strabane and Coleraine, that key word is implemented in practice; that communities across the board can see it as a system and set of programmes that they can take part in; and there does not have to be the arguments, fights and disputes, as there was at the early part of the UK City of Culture, in order to get there?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. To be fair, the Member is the only person I know who is arguing and fighting about this whole thing. I am sure that he will support Derry's bid for Irish City of Culture in 2016. I look forward to his support in that.

The Walled City Tattoo and many other cultural events that happened in 2013 were inclusive. I know that people across the city, wherever they come from, have a sense of themselves, and they had a sense of what they were celebrating in 2013 and what they, collectively, hope to celebrate, beyond, in an inclusive way. The only people who I find have issues around inclusivity, really, are probably — well, probably you have the privilege of having that sole title. So, I look forward to your support for the bid for Irish City of Culture for 2016 and to you demonstrating full inclusivity.

First World War: Centenary

5. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline what her Department is planning to do to commemorate the centenary of the Great War. (AQO 5281/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. The creative and cultural infrastructure and programmes already funded and supported by my Department will play

a key role in telling the stories and different interpretations of the First World War and other important events in this decade of centenaries. For example, libraries are developing a programme of exhibitions, talks and book launches to commemorate the start of the First World War. Museums are also planning to outline access to collections and an exhibition and programming at the Ulster Museum and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. That will also involve cooperation with the National Museum of Ireland and the Imperial War Museum and National Portrait Gallery in London.

Mr Moutray: Thank you. Recently, the Government at Westminster allocated some £50 million for historical commemorations of the centenary of the Great War. Given that many young men went from all communities across Ulster to fight and to die in the cause of freedom, can the Minister tell us what discussions she has had with her UK counterpart, Maria Miller, to see what more can be done in relation to Northern Ireland and the Great War commemorations?

Ms Ní Chuilín: First, I have not had any discussions with Maria Miller in relation to that. I have had discussions with Ed Vaizey on other aspects of cultural heritage, and I intend to continue those. I also intend to work with the Member's colleague and my Executive colleague Arlene Foster in relation to taking forward not only the First World War but other very, very significant aspects that will arise for people here during the decade of centenaries.

The Member will be aware not only of what I have outlined, but certainly that PRONI and the Somme Heritage Centre, which we are also supporting, are also planning to mark this most significant centenary and to do it in a very respectful way.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answers. I think that she has answered part of my question. The Executive's statement of March 2012 specified that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure would bring forward a programme for the decade. Has that been agreed?

Ms Ní Chuilín: In short, yes, that has been agreed. As I have said, and as Minister Foster has said, the principles underlying the Executive's approach have been agreed on the basis of mutual respect. A multitude of organisations across the island, not just here in the North, are marking this and other anniversaries. My officials, alongside officials from DETI, are looking at an online promotional platform to raise awareness of a broader range of activities about how we provide inclusivity and remember the past.

That work was to take on board recent policy developments linked to building a shared future and a united community and was to be informed by discussions before and certainly in the future. It is important that we do that. It is not about what we commemorate; it is about how we commemorate it in a respectful way.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. It is good to hear about the actions that she is putting in place for the decade of centenaries. Although she has hinted at this, bearing in mind the suffering and sacrifice of soldiers from both parts of the island in the First World War, does she not think that the best way of showing everyone our shared history and a shared future is by

talking to Westminster? Working with them as well would be a great help.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I assure him that I have no reason not to speak to anybody. We need collaborative approaches to make sure that we make them respectful events, regardless of how we feel about those periods of history. Even though none of us was born then, we seem to have an awfully long memory. It is really important that we, as Governments and representatives of many people across this island and other islands, try to work collectively. I have no issue with that at all. I have additional meetings coming up with Ed Vaizey and other British Ministers. I am happy to raise, as I was intending to do, how we can work collectively and collaboratively around centenaries, broadcasting, languages, sport and many other interests where we could probably do better if we maximised the opportunities that arise. We may not know what one another is doing. I assure the Member that I will talk to anyone, regardless of who they are, about learning lessons from the past. I am happy to do anything I can to provide better opportunities around inclusivity and respect.

Mrs D Kelly: Speaking as someone whose great-grandfather died at the battle of the Somme, I think that it is important that we recognise the contribution from many people right across the community, particularly the Catholic community. Will you join me in commending the good work of the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Jimmy Deenihan, in recognising the contribution? Of course, the history books will show that many people joined because they believed in home rule and Redmond's army, if you like. Do you have any plans to meet or have you met the Minister to coordinate an all-Ireland response to the commemorations, particularly around 4 August, which was the date of entry into the war?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. It will come as no surprise that I have met Jimmy Deenihan about that, and I plan to have further meetings. The Member might not be aware that the public records offices of both jurisdictions are looking at ways in which we can use archives to add to centenaries or even learning and education. We are also looking at libraries. We have had conferences on those. We have had and will continue to have discussions around how we celebrate and work together, where possible, in celebrating, remembering and commemorating significant events throughout the decade of centenaries. I am sure that the Member has met Minister Deenihan, and she will also be aware of his enthusiasm to take that approach.

Mr McNarry: I always appreciate the Minister's upfront-ery, not her effrontery. Following the Minister's answers so far, is it possible that I am correct in surmising that we could be financing the commemoration of rebels and terrorists?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Given the context of the questions so far, which have been based on the First World War, that is a bit churlish of the Member. You are the only person today who has been affronted — apart from Gregory Campbell, but that is a given. *[Laughter.]* In the spirit of the Member's question, I will be upfront about being inclusive as much as I can. If I can add to, assist and complement better learning, better respect and more inclusivity, using the decade of centenaries to do that, I will. That is a genuine response. I know that the Member is keen to make sure

that that will be the case for not just this year but the years ahead throughout the decade.

Libraries: Usage

6. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action she has taken to increase the usage of libraries and their facilities. (AQO 5282/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. Libraries strategy for increasing library usage is set out in its 2013-14 business plan. That plan addresses barriers to library usage through targeted outreach work, partnership and working with local community organisations, charities and Departments. In keeping with my priorities, it also has a strong focus on increasing participation in libraries that serve those in the most deprived areas. However, our libraries are community hubs, and, to ensure that they have a good environment, an investment programme is under way to refurbish or replace a number of library buildings and vehicles. In addition, the £28 million e2 replacement IT system will provide faster broadband and Wi-Fi in every library for its users. The ongoing development of partnerships along with investment in staff, stock and facilities and increased community engagement is helping to realise the vision of providing a flexible and responsive library service that assists people to fulfil their full potential.

Mrs Dobson: Can the Minister give an assurance that, where libraries have been inappropriately closed, she is actively seeking resources and support to provide library services to those communities?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not sure what the Member means by "inappropriately closed". We went through some detailed explanations and tried to engage more people in becoming members of the library, particularly in rural areas, to make sure that libraries and their future-proofing was sustained. That was not the case. We can only put public money into a service where there has been an identified need. Through previous correspondence from the Member about a particular library, I am conscious of the fact that we need to make sure that libraries and other community facilities, particularly in rural areas, are maintained and sustained throughout the future.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. What exactly is being done to improve library services for users in rural areas?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. I suppose that it follows on from part of the answer that I gave to Jo-Anne Dobson. In September last year — I was unable to make it — the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development was part of the opening of a library in a rural area of mid-Ulster. That was one of the libraries under threat of closure. What it did and what other libraries have done in the Member's constituency, which is a city but certainly has outlying areas, and in counties including Fermanagh and across the North is to look at where they can join up with other service providers to provide a community hub. For example, Libraries has 28 branches located in rural areas, which also provide mobile library services and even home call services for people. As I mentioned previously, it is also about better access to broadband and that. I am acutely aware that we cannot have and I will not tolerate access to services by postcode

in DCAL. I need to make sure of that and will fight to sustain services in rural areas, and that includes libraries.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We are almost out of time, but I will call Karen McKeivitt, who may require a written answer.

Mrs McKeivitt: Thanks very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. In the past, during answers at Question Time, the Minister has encouraged communities, MLAs and so on to respond to the mobile library service strategy. Given that the consultation closed on 14 December, will she give us an update on where we are and what the responses were like?

Ms Ni Chuilín: To be totally honest, I have not had any discussion with the libraries branch in DCAL, but one of the actions that I need to take over the next fortnight is to get an update on what the responses were and what the intentions are and then to talk to Libraries to see what we do with that. I am happy to write to the Member individually, although she is a member of the CAL Committee, on those responses and what the propositions are.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. That brings the period for oral answers to listed questions to an end. I know that the Minister is anxious to get on to topical questions.

Fish Stocks

1. **Mr Hazzard** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the contingency plans the relevant branch in her Department implemented to preserve fish stocks during the recent adverse weather. (AQT 541/11-15)

Ms Ni Chuilín: Like many others, DCAL had an operation in place, as in previous years, to look at preserving fish stocks. We ascertained at a very early stage that, because the fish farms were not in coastal areas, the threat was diminished. We had an action plan and other plans in place in the event of the weather taking a further turn for the worse and impacting on our stocks.

2.30 pm

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her reply. It is reassuring to know that appropriate measures were taken. Can she say whether anybody from the angling community offered assistance and whether any engagement took place with the community during the crisis?

Ms Ni Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I am not aware of any specific discussions with the angling community, which is very active and has a very good working relationship with our fisheries branch. I will ascertain what, if any, discussions or requests were made and write to the Member.

Sports Facilities: Capital Funding

2. **Ms Fearon** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to confirm whether new capital funding for sports facilities will be made available through applications to Sport NI this month. (AQT 542/11-15)

Ms Ni Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. My understanding is that, as of yesterday, Sport NI is looking at new capital funding. At one stage, I believed that that would be in place by the end of January. It is looking at a possible cocktail of funding or a funding package with

access on three levels for smaller, medium and larger projects. That will be brought to the Sport NI board in March for agreement, along with departmental agreement, and should be available for applications by April.

Ms Fearon: Will the Minister provide assurances that the opportunity will be evenly spread throughout the North so that there is better provision in rural areas and equal access?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can assure the Member that we continue to look at need and inclusion, particularly social inclusion. I am aware that, in the Member's constituency, there has been ongoing criticism about a lot of money for the arts going to Belfast and, more so, Derry. I assure Members that we are looking at projects, particularly capital investment projects, that are based on need. That is a lengthy process, but I am happy to give the Member that assurance.

Child Obesity

3. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given recent media coverage on rising child obesity levels, to advise what action her Department is taking, in conjunction with the Department of Education, to address this matter. (AQT 543/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. This might be a result of better promotion, but there have been more newspaper articles written about the concerns around childhood obesity, particularly type 2 diabetes. Yesterday, at St Louise's College in west Belfast, in conjunction with the Minister of Education, I launched 'Your School, Your Club', which deals with sports and activities that are shared between schools and neighbouring clubs, such as GAA clubs, soccer clubs, rugby clubs and youth clubs. That will not only make sure that services are accessible after school hours but, as there is a lack of land and support in certain places, allow us to do all that we can to join everything up. It is about not just children and young people but our older generation, who also want to keep fit and active.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Members about the House rules in respect of mobile telephones. There is quite a bit of interference.

Mr Dallat: Will the Minister confirm whether she is considering any business cases relating to this matter? If so, can we expect formal approval to be granted in the near future?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not aware of any specific projects. That is not to say that schools, clubs or others have not come in, and I know that some have received Sport NI funding in the past. I am happy to bring the Member's request back to the Department, find out whether there are any projects and, if so, where they are. I will then update the Member in writing.

Boxing: Funding

4. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has reviewed the grants allocated to local boxing clubs and authorities to include those that did not previously receive funding packages. (AQT 544/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. The position on the funding for boxing remains the same. I am not aware of any club not being included. The situation has

always been that clubs that are affiliated upon application are in the pool like everyone else.

The minor capital support was made from August to this month, and I believe that 83 clubs requested technical assistance for greater support and that 76 clubs had returned applications. Neither Sport NI nor I have made any decisions on those yet, but I am not aware thus far of any club requesting support and not receiving it.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that. Will she confirm that, following the independent working group's finding that Sandy Row Boxing Club had been discriminated against, that club will get funding?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The boxing club welcomed aspects of the report. I am not aware of Sandy Row applying for funding and funding being refused on that basis. I welcomed applications from everywhere, including Sandy Row. I am not too sure that the full report concluded what the Member is stating. I believe that the club, in conjunction with the independent panel, the Irish Amateur Boxing Association and the Ulster Boxing Council, is taking a can-do attitude for the future. I ask the Member and other Members to get behind the clubs and to give them support.

Casement Park: Social Clauses

5. **Ms McCorley** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the social benefits relating to Casement Park will be announced. (AQT 545/11-15)

Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answers up to now. I am happy to hear that planning permission has been granted for Casement Park.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The social benefits and social clauses should be announced at the beginning of February, and that will include the details. I have given a flavour in the past of what some of those social clauses may look like. We are looking to February for the launch of social clauses and from March and beyond for actions and an employment plan from the construction team.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. Will the community and voluntary sector be invited to briefings on the social clauses when they are available?

Ms Ní Chuilín: In short, yes, the community and voluntary sector will be involved. In fact, I received a request from the community, through the MP for West Belfast, to meet a section of the community and voluntary sector and the partnership boards to look at the social clauses, when they would be launched and what the relationship through the construction phase of Casement Park would look like for the entire West Belfast constituency.

Poetry: DCAL Funding

6. **Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what initiatives or funding her Department provides to encourage the uptake of poetry by young people. (AQT 546/11-15)

I am sure that the Minister will support me in taking this opportunity to congratulate Dr Sinéad Morrissey on the wonderful achievement of winning the prestigious T S Eliot prize this week for her poem 'A Matter of Life and Death'.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. The Arts Council in particular has dedicated members of staff for poetry and literature. I am not aware of any specific measure for poetry for children and young people, but I will find out.

I am sure that other Members will join us in congratulating Sinéad Morrissey on her prestigious title. I think that she is the first-ever Belfast poet laureate. I am glad that she is a woman. It was good news when I heard on the radio very late last night that she had won the award.

Mrs McKeivitt: Does the Minister have any plans to collaborate with her colleagues the Minister of Education and the Minister for Employment and Learning to ensure that opportunities are available to the general public, young and old, to take part in poetry readings and poetry classes?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I did not have any plans, but she has put an idea in my head. I am happy, as I said to other Members, to have further discussions, because maybe the Member has specific ideas about what this would look like. The Minister of Education has just walked in. Yesterday, he put me on the spot by offering me the opportunity to demonstrate trampoline skills to children and young people, so I will do the same with him, literally. We are happy to look at any scheme, event or initiative that includes the better use of and participation in literature, be it through poetry, storytelling or whatever, particularly for children and young people. We will certainly look at it positively. I know that Belfast City Council, through the mayor, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, has spearheaded a campaign of having city laureates which, I think, is the best way of doing it.

Davagh Forest: Mountain Bike Trail

7. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the funding her Department has made available to the mountain bike trail at Davagh forest in my constituency of Mid Ulster. (AQT 547/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not have details at hand, and I am not aware of them. We have made a significant investment in County Down, but I am not aware of the situation in Mid Ulster, which is the Member's constituency. As I have said to other Members, I am happy to find out the details and forward them to her. In conjunction with my colleague the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, I have taken presentations and attended meetings with stakeholders on this sport and others, particularly in rural areas. There is a growing trend in this. However, I am not sure of the figures; I will get them and write to the Member.

Mrs Overend: I appreciate the Minister's response. Considering the upcoming Giro d'Italia and the surrounding excitement, activities and opportunities that we have in Northern Ireland, does the Minister feel that there are opportunities in all constituencies across Northern Ireland? I wonder what her Department would like to do in support of that event to enhance cycling across Northern Ireland.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member is right: interest in the Giro has been expressed in all constituencies across the North. In fact, you would be hard-pressed to throw a stone and find a constituency that is not involved in cycling. Her colleagues and mine from Armagh city have been very proactive in raising the opportunities and skills that they have, the interest in the Giro and cycling and the

legacy of the Giro. Through Sport NI, I have received representations from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) subgroups on this. Again, I am happy to get the details for the Member and write to her. I thank her for her interest in cycling. We should learn what lessons we can to nurture, develop and sustain the legacy of the Giro, particularly with regard to cycling. It is very important, particularly in rural areas, that we have a good legacy and a good investment in sport and physical activity.

Giro d'Italia 2014

8. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether any funding requests for the Giro d'Italia have been made, either to her Department or to Sport NI. (AQT 548/11-15)

Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I also welcome the Minister's response on this question.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I know that many people have asked about the potential. As I said to Mrs Overend, I think that Armagh City and District Council is one of the groups represented on DETI subgroups with Sport NI to look at the potential. I am not aware that any funding requests have been made thus far, but that is not to say that they will not come.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she ensure that any investment in this significant event will not be focused just in and around Belfast? I certainly welcome the fact that the Giro is coming to Armagh city and district.

Ms Ní Chuilín: God, you are awful hard on Belfast people, I have to say. I will ensure that. As with all funding opportunities, I have a statutory obligation under section 75 to make sure that funding and investment meets need. If need is demonstrated in the Member's constituency, he will be in the pot along with everyone else. We are looking at the provision of services and investment on the basis of demonstrated need, and I am sure the Member and other Members can assure me that people have done an awful lot of work to ensure that they are up there for any potential opportunity.

2.45 pm

Education

South Belfast: Youth Services

1. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Education for an update on youth services provision in the South Belfast constituency. (AQO 5292/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Youth provision in the South Belfast constituency is a matter for the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) and the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB). The boards have advised that there are 64 registered youth providers in the area, of which 56 are voluntary and eight are statutory.

During November 2013, I announced that 53 schemes were successful in their applications for grant-aid funding as part of my youth capital funding scheme for voluntary organisations. Five fall within the South Belfast

constituency, totalling £852,000 out of overall funding of £12 million. The successful bids came from the Boys' Brigade's Belvoir project; the Catholic Guides of Ireland Northern Region, Belfast; the Forthspring Inter Community Group; Rosario Youth Centre and St Peter's Immaculata Youth Centre.

Recently, I cut the first sod on a £1.4 million development of a new youth club for the Belvoir area, which is a major capital scheme in the controlled youth sector.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for those details, but does he recognise — as he has recognised in the Boys' Brigade etc — the valuable work offered by other organisations such as the churches and the various community groups throughout? Will his Department encourage community groups to fully participate in youth service provision from here on in?

Mr O'Dowd: I agree with the Member about all the bodies that he referred to regarding the provision of youth services. The document on youth provision, 'Priorities for Youth', which was launched late last year, recognises the role played by uniform organisations and, indeed, church groups in the provision of youth services. I encourage them to continue to provide, under their auspices and through the use of their facilities, what are often in many areas the only youth services available. They encourage the education of young people in an informal setting. So, I congratulate them on the work conducted thus far and encourage them to continue to engage with the education boards on the provision of youth services.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister recently attended the official opening of the excellent facility of the St Malachy's youth centre in the Markets area of Belfast. What does he expect the benefits of that centre to be?

Mr O'Dowd: The St Malachy's centre was a jointly funded project between my Department and DSD. It is an impressive building, from the outside and inside. It is a statement to the community that government and Departments are prepared to invest in their well-being. The drive and enthusiasm that keeps youth provision going, as I said to Mr Spratt, comes from the hard work often of volunteers in the community. The church was involved in that project.

I would not presume to be able to tell St Malachy's and other organisations what work they should be doing other than what is outlined in 'Priorities for Youth'. The action plan in 'Priorities for Youth' allows communities and organisers to adapt their facilities and work programmes to meet the needs of their communities. Given the wide range of participation of young people on the night of the opening, there is clearly a wide programme of work being undertaken in that youth centre.

Mr McGimpsey: In reference to youth provision and discussions that we had, Annadale and Haywood youth club in south Belfast has no premises. During discussions with the BELB, it was said that it was to provide mobile premises. Where does the money come from? The city council has promised to provide £150,000 to erect it, the Housing Executive will provide the site and planners will provide planning permission, but still we await action from the education authorities. Bearing in mind the actions that we have seen at Rosario and St Malachy's, which I welcome, we have young people in this community with nowhere to go.

Mr O'Dowd: We clearly want to improve youth facilities across all sectors. The statutory obligation for the provision of youth facilities is a matter for the Belfast Education and Library Board in these circumstances. If the Member wishes to write to me, I will be happy to raise the matter with the board and ensure that all proper policies and protocols have been followed. At the end of the day, from what I take from what the Member has said to me in this conversation, the decision will be a matter for the Belfast Education and Library Board. I have secured several million pounds worth of additional funding for youth services. I recently announced considerable investment in a capital programme for youth services, and I will continue to try to secure funds for resource and capital functions in youth services, because I believe them to be an integral part of our education system.

Ms Lo: Mr McGimpsey's question is similar to mine, but I want to further add to his comments about the difficulties with the Annadale youth project getting capital funding. I facilitated a meeting with the Belfast Education and Library Board, and it seems to be coming up against brick walls all the time. It is a good project, Minister. It is a cross-community project —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind the Member that this is Question Time.

Ms Lo: I just wonder what the Minister can do to help this group.

Mr O'Dowd: As your question is similar to Mr McGimpsey's, my answer is similar to the answer that I gave to him. If the Member writes to me with regard to the matter, I will be happy to raise it with the Belfast Education and Library Board and will familiarise myself further with the details around it, but it is a decision for the Belfast Education and Library Board.

Shared Education: Lisanelly

2. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Education for an update on discussions regarding the shared education flagship project at Lisanelly. (AQO 5293/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The programme director and design team for the Lisanelly shared education campus have ongoing discussions and engagement with various stakeholders involved with the programme. Work on phase 1 of the programme has commenced on site. That includes the provision of a newbuild for Arvalee school and resource centre. The work also includes site-wide demolition and enabling works to allow for further phased developments on the campus. Construction work on Arvalee school is scheduled to commence in the autumn. I recently met representatives from Omagh High School who made clear their need for new facilities, which Lisanelly will provide.

Further phases of development are advancing through appropriate stages, and associated business cases have already been approved by government.

Mr I McCrea: Given that work has begun on the first school, which the Minister referred to, can the Minister give the House details about the current governance and accountability mechanisms that he has put in place to oversee the implementation of the project? What arrangements does he intend to put in place to ensure that governance, accountability, ownership and management of the site issues are properly dealt with?

Mr O'Dowd: I am in the process of establishing a programme board. I am awaiting confirmation of a number of names of people who I would like to sit on that board, who have skills that I think would greatly enhance the delivery of the project. I also wish to establish a stakeholder consultation group drawn from key stakeholders who will support the programme board and help to shape the final outcome of the Lisanelly campus.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I suggest to the Minister that he might consider organising a public seminar, perhaps in Omagh, to explain things in a spirit of openness to companies, including local companies, who would be interested in tendering for works associated with the Lisanelly campus. There is an appetite for it in the community, and people are asking questions. I think that an open-ended seminar explaining the procedures and protocols for everybody interested would be a good thing. I have mentioned it informally to the project director Hazel Jones, but I would like the Minister's endorsement for it.

Mr O'Dowd: The suggestion is good, and I have no difficulty with it. Community support in and around the Omagh area for the Lisanelly project has proven vital throughout the course of its delivery, and at times when there were doubts and concerns about it, it was the community support that kept the project going. So, I think that it is only right and proper that we keep the local community fully informed of developments and how the project will proceed going into the future. So, we will make arrangements for such a seminar to take place.

Mr Kinahan: Will the Minister tell us what reassurances his Department gave to every participating school involved in the Lisanelly project that their individual ethos will be protected? Can he also give a commitment that the same assurances will be given to any new schools entering other shared campuses?

Mr O'Dowd: Shared education campuses are about bringing together schools of different character and ethos to work with each other. I will not give any individual reassurances to schools in the sense that one school gets this reassurance and another gets that one. A collective reassurance was given to participants in the Lisanelly project that their ethos and identity would be protected on the site. However, shared education has to be about breaking down barriers and working with each other as well as challenging yourself and others.

Shared Education: Update

3. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the shared education campuses. (AQO 5294/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Last Friday, I announced the launch of the shared education campuses programme, which will contribute towards OFMDFM's Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) strategy by delivering on the commitment to create 10 shared campuses. The programme will complement the work already under way within DE on shared education and area planning, and it will be targeted at infrastructure projects aimed at improving or facilitating sharing initiatives within local schools. It has the potential to bring together a range of schools and aid the sharing of classes, subjects, sports and extra-curricular activities.

The programme will consider project proposals that demonstrate that they meet the following essential criteria: number and management type of School; educational and societal benefits; endorsement from respective managing authorities; evidence of parental, pupil and community support; and context of area planning. Priority will be given to project proposals that demonstrate that they meet the desirable criteria of location and evidence of existing sharing. Shared education proposals that meet the criteria for the programme should be submitted to the Department before the end of March 2014, and those selected to proceed in planning will be announced by the summer.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his response. Will he outline how much money is available to his Department to progress with such shared education initiatives?

Mr O'Dowd: The T:BUC funding programme has yet to be confirmed. Executive parties are working together across a wide range of policy areas announced under Together: Building a United Community. I and my Department will no doubt have to make our own contribution towards that from our capital budget, but it will require Executive support into the future. We must wait to see which and how many projects come forward and their costings before we can confirm the budget required. However, it is an Executive commitment that my Department has signed up to, and I want to ensure that it is delivered.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur air i dtaobh an laithreáin roinnte oideachais in Ard Mhacha. An raibh aon chruinniú aige leis na daoine atá ag iarraidh an laithreán sin a chur chun cinn?

I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Has he had any discussions with those promoting the shared education facility in Armagh? If not, is he open to discussions with them?

Mr O'Dowd: I met the proposers of the Armagh project several months ago. Indeed, I visited the proposed site for the campus in Armagh city. We had a very good discussion. The project developers have work to do, and I said that I would keep abreast of developments in relation to the campus etc. I am reluctant to go into the detail of my views on it, because it may be one of the projects to come forward under this scheme, and, at the end of the day, I will be one of the decision-makers about suitable applications, and I want to be able to keep an open mind on all the applications that come to my office.

Mr Beggs: I welcome the announcement and the call for applications for funding. However, some schools feel deeply frustrated that they have only two and a half months to put an application together, particularly as so much time has passed since the initial announcement. Does the Minister think that that is sufficient time for real engagements to occur in schools and local communities and to make an appropriate application?

3.00 pm

Mr O'Dowd: What we are doing here is recognising shared education projects that have been taking place for a period of time. There are many examples of schools that are involved in shared education projects and would benefit from shared facilities to move them further forward. This project is not about schools coming together

to develop or begin a shared education project. This announcement is about facilitating projects that are either at an advanced stage having been running for a number of years and would benefit from a shared facility or from schools that have been engaging with each other over a number of years, understand each other's requirements and, therefore, can submit a bid within the time frame announced.

Mr McCarthy: Can the Minister assure us that shared schools will be a matter not just of a shared area but of shared classrooms and shared learning experiences, with different classes working together rather than separately?

Mr O'Dowd: That is an important point. It is not about facility A being used by school B for an hour, and, when they move out, school C moving in. Shared education has to be about young people engaging with each other, sharing facilities together, learning together and learning about each other together.

EU Funding: DE

4. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education to outline how much EU funding his Department has secured over the past five years. (AQO 5295/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department's ability to access EU funding is directly linked to the applicability of EU funding streams to the core business of the Department. In the period in question, our main focus has been on maximising the support available from the EU's Comenius and Youth in Action programmes. The British Council is an agency for those two programmes. The education service here has been able to benefit from a total of £4.2 million drawn down by the British Council during the 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13 financial years.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Following on from that answer, will the Minister detail how often his officials engage with European colleagues to explore the potential for EU investment in local education projects and ensure that we maximise the potential of that funding stream?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not have the exact details in front of me about the number of meetings that have taken place. However, I can assure the Member that engagement has been stepped up in recent years. My Department has been proactively exploring the possibility of attracting EU structural funds in respect of the 2014-2020 funding round to build capacity in our pupil enhancement and enrichment intervention activities in relation to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and business education. Exploratory work concluded that the objectives of the European social fund's investment for growth and jobs programme provided the best fit for the Department's STEM and business evaluation programmes. We are also exploring which other programmes, under the potential Peace IV, my Department could benefit from.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhúiochas leis an Aire as na freagraí go nuige seo. With reference to the EU work programme for 2014, what discussions have the Minister or his Department had with the Minister for Employment and Learning or his officials to ensure that our young people get the right education and skill set to avail themselves of opportunities that exist in the green economy?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not have the exact details of meetings etc before me. However, I can assure the Member that discussions have been taking place with DFP, the Executive office in Brussels, DEL as the managing authority for the European social fund and DETI as a managing authority for the European regional development fund. I will forward more specific information on the green economy to the Member.

Mr Elliott: Has the Minister explored any EU funding opportunities that may assist with current, or even new, shared education projects?

Mr O'Dowd: We are exploring how my Department could fit in under any Peace IV funding. We have had discussions on that matter with a range of bodies. I am also looking at funding from other quarters for shared education projects and hope to be in a position to make an announcement in the near future.

School Principals: Re-advertisement of Posts

5. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Education what further steps are being taken by his Department to address the significant re-advertisement of principals' posts. (AQO 5296/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not recruit or employ teachers, including principals, and therefore does not hold information on the re-advertisement of posts. My officials have, however, sought the information from the relevant employing authorities.

Education and library boards have advised that, over the past three years, they have, on average, re-advertised approximately 10% of principal posts in the controlled primary sector and approximately 39% in the post-primary sector. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) has advised that, in the same period, it has re-advertised approximately 4% of principal posts in the Catholic maintained primary sector and approximately 11% in the post-primary sector. Although the figures do not indicate that there has been a significant re-advertisement of principals' posts in the primary sector, there appears to be an issue regarding the re-advertisement of principal posts, particularly across the controlled sector at post-primary level.

It is important to note that small numbers of principal posts have been re-advertised at post-primary level, which distorts the figures somewhat. Nevertheless, I have asked management side of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee, which is made up of employer representatives, to consider the issue. I recognise that the information relates only to the controlled and Catholic maintained sectors. The other sectors — voluntary grammar, grant-maintained integrated and Irish-medium — do not have employing authorities. It will take considerable time to collect and collate that information. However, I am content to do so and provide the Member with the information in written format in due course.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he accept that it is often quite difficult to get people to take up the onerous job of principal in a primary school? What remedial action can be taken to try to make the post more attractive, particularly for male principals of primary schools?

Mr O'Dowd: As I said, I have asked management side of the Teachers' Negotiating Committee to look at the matter to ensure that applicants come forward for posts once they are advertised. We are also reviewing how we develop and support new leaders into the future, and, at an earlier stage, how we identify those new leaders. That is quite a complex issue.

Being a principal is an onerous task, but it is also very rewarding. The responsibility of ensuring the educational well-being of our young people is a task that many of our principals relish. Of course it is difficult, given the responsibilities involved. My responsibility is to ensure that we have in place the resources and the capability to identify and encourage new leaders and to promote and ensure that there is continuous professional development. I have those matters under review and want to enhance them as we move forward.

Common Funding Scheme: Update

6. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the revision of the common funding formula. (AQO 5297/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My proposals on the reform of the common funding scheme have been the subject of a widespread consultation, with around 15,000 consultation responses being received. I have previously stated that I will not make any final decisions until a full analysis of all those consultation responses and the equality impact assessment (EQIA) has been carried out. I will give careful consideration to the views of all those who responded. The changes to the common funding scheme for schools remain on track for delivery for the new financial year, and I intend to make my final decision and advise schools of their actual allocations as soon as possible.

I want to ensure that there is no unnecessary delay in reforming the common funding scheme and in directing additional support to the schools with the highest numbers of pupils from socially deprived backgrounds. It is unacceptable that children from socially deprived backgrounds, as shown by free school meal indicators, are only half as likely to obtain five GCSEs at A* to C, including English and maths, as their more affluent counterparts. I am sure that Members will agree that the situation cannot and should not be allowed to continue.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his answer. Widespread concerns have been expressed about the proposals on the common funding formula by organisations such as the Children's Law Centre and many others. Will he give assurances to the House that the process will be set aside for this year and that the discussions can continue, in order to ensure that we get a properly structured process of funding for our schools that is based on educational disadvantage rather than very blunt social criteria?

Mr O'Dowd: Referring to and taking selected quotes from one consultation response is not the practice that I have been taking part in. We have had a very substantial review of the consultation responses, and a very detailed report on the way forward will be published for Members and the public to peruse. I am not setting aside changes to the common funding scheme. I am moving ahead, having taken into account the consultation responses, the debates in the Chamber and comments from Members and other bodies on the common funding scheme.

I believe that we can come forward with a scheme that meets the needs of our society through eradicating educational underachievement, given its association with poverty. I believe that the measures that we have in place for free school meals are robust. If others come forward in the time ahead with an equally robust or better system, I think that that should be taken into consideration moving forward. However, we have to move forward and we have to tackle the issue head on. I intend to do that in the time ahead.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. In light of our post-primary children's recently publicised year 12 and year 14 examination results, does he remain committed, in any revised common funding scheme, to tackling the effects of poverty?

Mr O'Dowd: I do remain committed to doing so. Indeed, it is worth remembering that the Public Accounts Committee, which, as I have stated previously at Question Time is one of the most respected Committees of the Assembly, challenged my Department to tackle head-on the common funding scheme and the association of poverty with educational underachievement. The formula is the greatest single indicator of educational outcomes that we have. A child who is in receipt of free school meals has a 50% less chance of achieving an education than a child who is not. No Member who is opposed to me using that formula has come up with an alternative version or vision of it. I accept that the Committee for Education is planning or is involved in some work on that.

The common funding scheme can be changed year-on-year; the mechanism is there. If the Committee or other bodies come forward with a reliable measure of poverty, I will not be found wanting in using it. No one yet has dismissed the ability of the free school meals mechanism to identify a child's individual needs. Therefore, I will use that mechanism, and if others come forward with a better system, I will use that.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. At this stage, all schools will have agreed three-year financial plans with their education and library boards. What reassurance can you give small schools in particular that the level of small-school support will be safeguarded beyond 2014?

Mr O'Dowd: I made my views on small-school support known when I responded to Sir Bob Salisbury's common funding scheme. It is worth noting that Sir Bob wanted to remove it. It is also worth noting that tens of millions of pounds are involved in small-school support. I think that Members should refresh themselves about this: it is worth noting that it does not do exactly what it says on the tin.

When Members hear that there is small-school support, you imagine a small rural or small urban school with significantly low numbers of pupils. However, a school can be funded until it has 350 pupils at post-primary level and maybe beyond, and the numbers that are involved in primary schools are quite significant as well. However, I have committed to maintaining it. I believe that the matter needs further debate and discussion, but if Members seriously want to support small schools, there is a duty on us all to ask whether there is a better way of doing it. What is your definition of a small school? What is your understanding of a small school going into the future? I

have committed to doing nothing until further work is done on the matter.

Mr Allister: In light of recent High Court decisions, will the Minister be referring any revision of the common funding formula, given that it is undoubtedly controversial, to the Executive?

Mr O'Dowd: I believe that I have conducted myself within my ministerial obligations and according to the ministerial code, and I will continue to do so.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends questions for oral answer. We will now move on to topical questions. The first name listed has been withdrawn, so I call Mr Jim Wells.

3.15 pm

Dickson Plan

2. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Education what possible confidence the community of Upper Bann can have in him given the way he has behaved in his treatment of the Dickson plan, and although I do not represent the Upper Bann constituency, I have a deep personal interest in the Dickson plan and I note that, in the minutes of the Southern Education and Library Board on 26 June, it is apparent that the board took its decision about the Dickson plan while under duress and when the chief executive position became available on that board, the Minister parachuted in one of his officials to push through the decision. (AQT 552/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I suspect that the Member, like other members of his party, is not interested in the Dickson plan but in two schools in the Dickson plan: namely, Lurgan College and Portadown College. Your local representatives have no interest in the rest of the schools, so why should I suspect that you have an interest in them? Let us be honest with each other. Your concern is with the needs of two schools in the Craigavon area that serve a section of the Protestant community in that area.

The less well off in Upper Bann, those from Protestant working-class communities, are voiceless in this debate. No one from the DUP will speak up for them; no one from the Ulster Unionist Party will speak up for them. They are all concentrated on the needs of two schools that have a close relationship with a good friend of the DUP. That is another matter that I think deserves exploration.

You say that it is clear from the minutes of the Southern Education and Library Board meeting that it acted under duress. You did not want to clarify what the duress was or how it was clear in the minutes, but I am aware, as, no doubt, are your party colleagues, that there have been acts of intimidation, harassment and threats made against people who have stood up and said that they do not agree with the DUP or the UUP's vision on this and believe that there is another way of doing it. They have been subjected to threats and intimidation. The DUP and the Ulster Unionist Party have remained silent on that matter. So, if you want to look for duress and intimidation, you are looking the wrong way. You need to be honest about your intentions in that area. Your interests are in two schools. My interest is in the education of all young people in the controlled sector moving forward.

On your point that I jettisoned in one of my officials, I did not. The Southern Education and Library Board has been

provided with support in the absence of a chief executive or a suitable applicant for the job. The board is perfectly entitled to advertise that post at any time.

Mr Wells: I can assure the Member that my interest is simply not in the two grammar schools. The vast majority of my family were educated in the two junior high schools. That was their commitment to all of the Dickson scheme. The Minister keeps commenting and making scurrilous remarks about the DUP and the Ulster Unionists, but those two parties represent the vast majority of people and families with children attending those schools. I also throw back in his face the view that they are so-called Protestant schools. Any child in the Craigavon area is entitled to attend either Lurgan Junior High or Lurgan College. There is no discrimination, unlike the other sector in Craigavon, which is purely for Roman Catholics. What confidence can the people of Upper Bann have in him, particularly as he represents the area, when he is trying to railroad this through against the wishes of the vast majority of parents in Upper Bann?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member states that he and his party represent the vast majority of the unionist community in Upper Bann, and he is absolutely right. Then start representing the vast majority of the people in Upper Bann on this matter, because your voices have remained silent on the poor educational outcomes afforded to the Protestant working class in that community. You need to stand up, make your voices heard and say that the current status quo is totally unacceptable.

I note that the Member avoided the points I made to him about the intimidation and the threats being made against those who are prepared to stand up and say something different from what his party and the Ulster Unionist Party are saying. He chose to ignore that fact. You have serious questions to ask yourselves about where you want to see education going in the future. Can the people of Upper Bann have faith in me? I have no proposal in front of me to make a decision on. The Southern Education and Library Board needs to publish a proposal on the future direction of education in the controlled sector. There is no published proposal.

If and when a proposal is published, I will allow that proposal to be fully debated. I will receive representations from all who wish to speak to me and make my decision based on the educational well-being of all young people in the controlled sector, not just the few.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that no one should be pointing at other Members and remarks should be passed through the Chair.

Education: OECD Report

3. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Education to outline the key findings of the recent OECD report into the education system here. (AQT 553/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I welcome the fact that the OECD has now reported. On Friday, we are bringing together educationalists for the OECD to come and make a presentation on the report and open it up to a debate on the way forward. I think that that will be a very useful engagement. The OECD report contains a wide range of findings across a range of areas, including 41 strengths inherent in our current evaluation and assessment

arrangements, as well as 30 specific challenges. The report suggests 33 policy options, which include 15 recommendations. I tasked my officials to reflect on the report as part of the ongoing development of my policies here. I will not make a formal response to the report until after Friday's discussions with educationalists and further consideration of the report. However, I think that the OECD intervention and report will prove beneficial for our education system for many years to come.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does the Minister have any plans to follow up with the OECD on this piece of work?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not think that such programmes of work should be a one-off. As I said, the OECD is coming back to engage with our educationalists and further with my Department. I would like to see a rolling programme of work with organisations such as the OECD. We subject our schools and a variety of areas in our society to inspection. I think it is useful to bring that out. At times, our debate on education can be very insular and sometimes focused on the needs of the few. It fails to break out of the narrow barriers of the North and learn from other experiences. The OECD allows us to examine our education system, and its strengths and weaknesses, on an international perspective rather than the sometimes narrow debate that we have in our society.

North Down: School Enrolments

4. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Education, given his earlier announcement of an increase in the enrolment at Priory Integrated College, which I thank him for, whether he has any plans to increase the enrolment at other continually oversubscribed schools in North Down. (AQT 554/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have no authority to increase the numbers of a school on a long-term basis. It is a matter for the board to publish a development proposal if it believes that a school's numbers should be increased in the long term. I can make increases in-year; if there is a specific demand on a school, I can make increases then. However, I believe that, if there is a recognition that a school is facing continuing demand higher than it can deliver, the best way forward is for a development proposal to be published and that mechanism to be gone through.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his response. I thought that he would have taken a much more active interest in that because it has been going on for many, many years.

The schools in Bangor east are very popular and achieve good results. Bearing in mind the RPA situation, where we will have a different hinterland altogether, does that not encourage the Minister to try to take some action to resolve those problems?

Mr O'Dowd: It is not a case of the Minister not having taken an interest in the matter. I established area planning. I tasked the boards, as the managing authorities, and indeed CCMS, to come forward with area plans for post-primary and primary school provision. That is how we should map out our sustainable schools going into the future. If the Member has specific issues in relation to schools in the area, I would advise him first to raise them with the board and ask the board whether the

demand continues to meet what it has outlined in its area plan. I have not avoided the issue. I am putting in place mechanisms to deal with that in the long term. If there is a short-term issue, there is a mechanism to deal with that as well.

Educational Underattainment: Shankill

5. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made on the manifesto for education that my colleague Nigel Dodds MP presented to him, given that he will be aware of the educational underattainment in the greater Shankill area and across working-class areas of Belfast. (AQT 555/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I had a meeting with Mr Dodds just before Christmas, and we had further discussions on the Shankill manifesto and on its appeal for an education action zone to be declared in that area. I have tasked my officials to investigate the matter further. Only yesterday, I had discussions with my officials on this matter. I am exploring it further to see what educational benefits there would be in me declaring such a zone and what actual real impact it would have in the area, or whether there are other ways of achieving the same goal that the manifesto sets out.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his answer. I assure the Minister that, having met the principals of post-primary and primary schools before Christmas, I know that the view among that group of people is that something needs to be done. That is the view of the community, of the governors — I speak as a governor of two schools — and of parents. Something has to be done to address this issue, not only across the greater Shankill but across the city of Belfast in working-class areas. Can the Minister put a timescale on, and some resource into, delivering for those communities and tackling and addressing this issue, which has been running for many, many years?

Mr O'Dowd: It is worth noting that the common funding scheme that I am proposing would put significant amounts of additional money into the very schools that you are talking about, but, yet and all, you oppose it. You cannot have it both ways. You cannot seek additional resources and then, when I put in a mechanism for additional resources, say, "No, we do not want you to do that". I have identified how we can achieve additional resources for the very schools that you talk about, but declaring an education action zone does not in any way mean that there is no longer responsibility in the schools or in the boards of governors or in the principal's office.

Mr Humphrey: I did not say that.

Mr O'Dowd: I am not suggesting that you are saying that. I am telling you what my views on the matter are, as you requested.

There is a responsibility —

Mr Humphrey: I did not.

Mr O'Dowd: You asked me a question, so you must be seeking some view from me.

Mr Humphrey: Well, then, answer the question I asked you.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: No speaking from a sedentary position.

Mr O'Dowd: The way that this process works is that I do not get to decide what questions you ask me, and you

do not decide how I answer them. It is a very democratic process.

Mr Humphrey: You are not supposed to not answer the question.

Mr O'Dowd: When you stand behind one of these Boxes, you will decide how to answer questions, if you ever stand behind one of these Boxes.

The responsibility rests with the schools and the boards of governors, and, as was recently found out from the inspection reports in the area, there are challenges in the schools. The formal intervention process will have to be followed through, whether we declare an education action zone or not. The work that is being done by the Greater Shankill Partnership is, in effect, an action zone, because it is dealing with the socio-economic issues in the community and trying to improve people's lives that way. If you improve the socio-economic background of someone, you will also improve their educational outcomes. The West Belfast Partnership Board is also drawing down funding in relation to education matters, and I have encouraged the Shankill partnership to further engage with the West Belfast Partnership Board on that. In short, I will not make a decision simply to make a decision. I will call for an education action zone if I believe that it will have benefits for the young people it will serve. I will not call for it for the sake of calling it.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Speaking from a sedentary position, having presented your question, really only victimises other Members who are waiting to get asking questions.

Newtownbreda High School

6. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Education to please explain why, in his statement this morning, in which he talked about schools being at the heart of a community, he announced his decision to close such a school, Newtownbreda High School, which has the full support of families, pupils and staff, is looking to go forward, is ahead of the enrolment numbers and is successful. (AQT 556/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have decided to close it under a technicality. It is reopening under a new guise. It is a school that will reopen as a new school in partnership with and serving the entire community of that area. Our education system cannot be built on the needs of institutions. It has to be built on the needs of pupils. I believe that the decision that I announced this morning is the correct decision. The amalgamation of Newtownbreda and Knockbreda is the right way forward for serving that community, now and into the future.

If I had not taken action now, we might have seen the loss of Knockbreda completely. No one knows how sustainable Newtownbreda would have been into the future. We now have a sustainable school going forward with high hopes for the future.

3.30 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes Question Time.

Mr Allister: On a point of order —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Let me finish. Time is up. We will now return to the Consideration Stage of the Public Service Pensions Bill. What is your point of order?

Mr Allister: During his answer to Mr Wells, Minister O'Dowd claimed to have knowledge of instances of threat and intimidation. Of course, threats and intimidation involve criminality. Is it in order to ask whether, with that knowledge, the Minister has reported such matters to the PSNI, as he might be expected to do in his public role and obligation to uphold the rule of law and not to withhold information?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: In addressing the circumstances of this session of the Assembly, the Member has strayed well off the point. I do not accept that as a valid point of order. However, I will refer the matter to the Speaker's Office because an allegation of coercion was also made from this side of the House, and that was not substantiated. I think that it should be examined.

Mr Storey: Further to that point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, with regard to the comments that were made by the Education Minister, will you refer this matter to the Speaker? The Minister's comments were inaccurate in his representation of my party's interest in all schools in the Craigavon area. It was totally unfactual and untrue. I also want the issue to be referred so that the references that were made to intimidation can be investigated by the police, the Minister is questioned on what he knows and the issue is resolved, so that we know the truth, rather than what, I have to say, are very regrettable comments that were made by the Minister in the House today.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: My view is that that is not a valid point of order. It is not for the Speaker to decide what is the Minister's opinion on any set of circumstances. However, I have already indicated that I will ask the Speaker's Office to refer to the Hansard report of the session and to decide whether there are any issues that need a response.

Mr Humphrey: On a point of order. To be fair, having listened to what the Minister said, I think that he did not express his opinion; he made an allegation, which is somewhat stronger than simply stating an opinion across the Chamber. He made an allegation of intimidation.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the Member does not wish to challenge the Chair's authority to decide on this. My view is that it is not for the Speaker's Office to determine what the Minister's opinion should be.

The House may take its ease while we change the top Table.

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

Executive Committee Business

Public Service Pensions Bill: Consideration Stage

Clause 5 (Pension board)

Debate resumed on amendment Nos 1 to 7 and 16, which amendments were:

No 1: In page 3, line 2, leave out from beginning to “workers),” in line 3 and insert

“(1) Subject to subsection (2), scheme regulations for a scheme under section 1”.— [Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

No 2: In page 3, line 6, leave out “must provide” and insert

“may make the provision required under subsection (1) above by providing”.— [Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

No 3: In page 3, line 30, leave out “member representatives” and insert “trade union representatives”.— [Mr D Bradley.]

No 4: In page 4, line 4, at end insert

“(10) In this Act a ‘trade union’ has the meaning set out in Section 1 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.”.— [Mr D Bradley.]

No 5: In clause 8, page 5, leave out lines 9 and 10.— [Mr D Bradley.]

No 6: In clause 8, page 5, line 26, leave out “negative resolution” and insert “the affirmative procedure (see section 34(1))”.— [Mr D Bradley.]

No 7: In clause 9, page 6, line 11, leave out “5” and insert “10”.— [Mr D Bradley.]

No 16: In clause 13, page 9, line 20, after “qualified” insert

“and must not be

(a) an employee of the responsible authority;

(b) the scheme manager;

(c) a scheme member; or

(d) an employee of the Department of Finance and Personnel”.— [Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel).]

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá áthas orm páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht seo ar an Bhille um phinsin phoiblí. I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the debate on the first group of amendments on pension boards, types of scheme and valuations. I begin by declaring an interest as a member of the Northern Ireland teachers’ pension scheme, albeit that I will not be affected by these measures because of the transition arrangements. Nonetheless, I feel for those affected by the Bill. The SDLP has put down five amendments in this group, and I would like to take some time to discuss the rationale for each of them in turn.

We recognise the need for pension boards that are responsible for assisting the scheme managers with governance and administration. However, we believe that it

is essential that there is strong trade union representation on the new boards. I think that the Minister accused me of being in cahoots with the trade unions. I do not know whether that is the actual term that he used, but I think —

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): It was worse than that.

Mr D Bradley: Worse than that. Well, I can tell the Minister that I make no apology for that. We have consulted widely with a range of stakeholders, including the trade unions, and taken cognisance of their views, quite rightly, in my view.

NICICTU’s public service pensions group has stated that it has grave concerns over fairness and transparency due to the fact that scheme information is controlled by the Department and, ultimately, the Treasury. Therefore, we have tabled amendment Nos 3 and 4 to ensure clarity and best practice by guaranteeing that representatives are actually representative of scheme members by virtue of referencing trade unions. We have referred to the definition of a trade union in the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1992. The Minister made the point that some pensioners were not included in that definition, but I take issue with that, because many trade unions continue to represent pensioners’ groups after their members have retired. It is my belief that the definition included in the Act is wide enough to encompass a wide range of representative bodies, not just trade unions.

Mr Weir: Does the Member accept that some retired members will often have differing views on the trade unions that supposedly represent them? Some pensioners and former employees often feel, not unnaturally, that the trade union — this can vary from trade union to trade union — is representing existing employees and members sometimes to the detriment of retired members. There are mixed views out there. It is not one size fits all. That is the problem with the amendment: it is effectively a straitjacket, and some of those people may effectively feel unrepresented.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for his intervention, but I take issue with his point. Many members of representative bodies are not content with the representation they get; that is another issue. I believe that the definition in the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1992 is, as I said, wide enough to encompass a wide range of representative bodies. I draw the Member’s attention to the fact that, in England, the case has already arisen where Ministers have hand-picked chosen individuals to sit as employee representatives on boards. Unfortunately, that has often involved the selection of individuals who are not representative of the interests of employees and, indeed, pensioners. Currently, the people who negotiate on behalf of public servants with the Department on matters of pay, conditions of service etc are the trade unions. There is no provision in the Bill to negotiate in the normal way, so strengthening the presence of trade unions is an important element that we should consider.

Earlier, we heard from the Committee Chair that the Bill would affect 210,000 public service employees. That is around 30% of the workforce in Northern Ireland. That is a huge number of people, and we need to ensure that their interests are best protected in the provisions that we make. The amendments that we have put down are aimed at providing that best protection. The unions do not believe that there has been sufficient engagement and

consultation from the Department, so it is essential that their voice is well represented on the boards.

I move now to amendment No 5. It is our intention to prevent the change from defined benefit schemes to defined contribution schemes. That is important. Defined benefit schemes allow people to know what they will get at the end of their working life. That is not the case with defined contribution schemes. The London coalition Government are often quoted as providing a 25-year guarantee to public sector workers on pensions, but, sadly, they have already begun to renege on that promise. The unions fear that clause 8 provides further potential for broken promises by providing for other types of scheme. Hence our amendment restricts the potential for the development of such schemes, other than defined benefit schemes.

In the light of the already broken promises, amendment No 6 provides further protection from changes to pension schemes by way of ministerial regulation. We believe that it is necessary to legislate that the affirmative resolution procedure be applied when changes are made to the defined benefit schemes in the future. Several Members, including Mr Weir, made the point that the affirmative resolution procedure would clog up the system here. We all know too well that the main complaint from people in the Assembly and, indeed, outside the Assembly is that there is not enough legislation going through the House, not that there is too much of it. There is ample time to deal with matters that come under the affirmative procedure. That, of course, means that any future Minister would be required to bring changes by regulation to the House, allowing for democratic debate of all proposed changes. Using the affirmative procedure is an important element in holding the Department to account. We are here, and it is our role to hold the Minister and the Department to account. Amendment No 6 is one way in which we can do it on a very important issue, which, as I said, affects 210,000 public servants.

I do not know whether the Minister would call the British Medical Association (BMA) a trade union — a representative body, perhaps. The BMA put the argument for this approach most succinctly in its briefing on the Bill by stating that stronger amendments to the Bill are necessary to:

“curtail sweeping new powers that would allow successive Executives to make unilateral and retrospective changes to accrued benefits in public sector pension schemes”

and utterly undermine the settlement for a generation, as proposed by the UK Government.

Amendment No 7 is our final amendment in the group. It relates to gaps in public pensionable service. The motivation behind the amendment is equality. Although we recognise that there are few individuals who have gaps in service that are greater than five years, given that the current maximum career break in the public sector is five years, those who do are more likely to be female employees who have taken longer career breaks to raise their children. We believe that such people should be catered for in the Bill. The amendment that we have tabled to allow 10 years helps to do that. We believe that no individual should be discriminated against in that regard.

Therefore, we have tabled an amendment to allow the gap in pensionable service to be up to 10 years.

I will leave it at that. I urge the House to support our amendments, which we believe strengthen the Bill and the future of 210,000 public service employees here in Northern Ireland.

3.45 pm

Mr Cree: I am pleased to speak on the Consideration Stage of the Bill today.

The Committee has undertaken considerable work in scrutinising the Bill's provisions since its Second Stage in June 2013. At the outset, I pay tribute to the Committee staff and, indeed, to the Assembly Research and Information Service for all their hard work. The report on the Bill was published in November, and it considered all 37 clauses and nine schedules. Much evidence has been gathered on all the key issues. The Committee was broadly content with the provisions, with a few exceptions. I am pleased that the Minister has been able to agree to amend some of the clauses accordingly. The main contention was in clauses 5, 10 and 13, and parties have drafted amendments to them for debate today.

Amendment No 1, to clause 5, which the Minister proposed, is acceptable and, indeed, improves the Bill. Similarly, amendment No 2, which also relates to clause 5, is acceptable and will be supported by the Ulster Unionist Party. Amendment No 3, however, is trivial or maybe a bit more than trivial. It certainly has potentially contentious content. It would change “member representatives” to “trade union representatives”. I do not intend to go into an academic debate about whether that is the case, but I remind Members that we are still seeing the fallout from the equal pay situation, which the unions were working on. A great proportion of their members were most dissatisfied with what happened with that.

Amendment No 5, to clause 8, would restrict scheme regulations. We cannot support that. Amendment No 6, to clause 8, would change negative resolution to affirmative. Again, that has been discussed here at some length. I am happy enough to oppose that as well. Amendment No 7, to clause 9, seeks to change the provision of a pensions gap in pensionable service from a maximum of five years to 10. The reality is that that is likely to be very costly, but we do not have any figures at this point in time. It would certainly be most unusual in pension circles to have such a gap admissible. The Chair has tabled amendment No 16, to clause 13, on behalf of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, and it has my party's support, given that it clarifies a very important part of the clause.

Mrs Cochrane: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak on this stage of the Bill. I should also declare an interest, as I am a member of the Civil Service pension scheme, so I will be affected by the changes that come along.

As I said at an earlier stage of the Bill, it is not perhaps legislation that we would enact if it were entirely up to us. However, parity with Westminster raises its head once again. My colleague Naomi Long MP voted against the changes at Westminster. The decisions that we face today are very focused on the direct financial impact that we will face if we fail to implement these reforms.

I turn to the amendments relating to pensions boards, types of scheme and valuations. Amendments Nos 1 and 2 relating to clause 5, which the Minister tabled, allow flexibility for the body appointed to play a role in scheme governance for the local government pension scheme. We will be happy to support that. As for amendment Nos 3 and 4 to clause 5, it would be inappropriate to restrict employee representation to trade unions, as not all scheme members are members of a union. In the past, I have seen that that has been for very good reasons.

We will also oppose amendment Nos 5 and 6 to clause 8 because removing a defined contributions scheme or a scheme of other description could limit the options available to public sector workers in the future. We also think that the negative resolution procedure would allow for appropriate Assembly scrutiny in this situation.

As for amendment No 7 to clause 9, five years is in line with the typical maximum career break and is a fair provision for those who have had a break in pensionable service. I am not sure exactly what the financial implications would be if we were to break parity on that. Maybe the Minister could answer that later.

The Minister said that it is not necessarily very important to have amendment No 16 to clause 13, but, to ensure explicit independence, I support it for the reasons already outlined by the Chair of the Committee.

Mr I McCrea: Like others, I will be brief. To some extent, there is not a lot of controversy in this group of amendments. The Minister has dealt with amendment Nos 1 and 2. They are his amendments, and it is no surprise that I support them. I think that he explained his reasons for them better than I would and, therefore, I will not spend any time dealing with them.

It is important to deal with amendment Nos 3 and 4, which have been tabled by the SDLP. As the Chair and others said, the Committee did not have the opportunity to look at the amendments and therefore has not made a decision on where it stands on them. I find that the amendments standing in the names of Dominic Bradley and Sean Rogers are ill thought-out and, if you really look at the detail, somewhat discriminatory towards member representatives. The current wording in the Bill adequately covers membership eligibility for appointment to the pension board, which can include trade union representatives as the Minister said and as referred to by my colleague Peter Weir. These two amendments, if agreed, would exclude the right to membership of the pension board of anyone who is not a member of a union. Therefore, as others said, I do not believe that the amendments are necessary.

Amendment No 5 has been dealt with by the Minister. One comment he made about it was that it provides:

“another example of a short-sighted and restrictive approach”

to these reforms.

I do not believe that there is any need for amendment No 6. Negative resolution often adequately allows the Assembly to scrutinise legislation. The Minister outlined some examples of where SDLP Ministers introduced legislation that included negative resolution, but, again, I suppose it is OK if it is an SDLP Minister.

Amendment No 7 makes me wonder whether people give much thought to their amendments or just pluck a figure out of the air and put it in for a change, just so they can say that they have suggested an amendment. They are suggesting a 10-year career break in a career of 40 years, which is nonsensical. As it states clearly in the explanatory notes, five years is adequate, and I did not hear any good reasons for making it 10 years. I will not support that either.

The Committee considered amendment No 16, and, as other Members said, we will not oppose that amendment.

As others said, we will support amendment Nos 1, 2 and 16. I hope that we reject the others.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I did not expect to be called to speak on this group of amendments. In any event, the position was set out by Members who spoke previously.

The SDLP amendments are an attempt to appropriately amend the Bill on its way through the Assembly. However, my sense of the issue is that the Department and the Minister have responded to the arguments that were presented in the Committee's report, and I am content to support those amendments.

Mr Hamilton: I begin by thanking Members for their contributions to the debate on this group of amendments. I also thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to conclude the debate on the first group of amendments. It was perhaps remiss of me not to do so earlier, but I take the opportunity now to acknowledge and thank the Committee for Finance and Personnel for its work to ensure that the Bill was dealt with in a timely manner and for adhering to the quite tight legislative timetable that we had to stick to.

The Bill is complex, and, as I address as many of the contributions to the various amendments as I can, I will briefly remind Members of the purpose of each clause. Indeed, doing that will be helpful in addressing some of the contributions. I will also do that to aid understanding of the policy intent as we work our way through each clause.

As was outlined during the debate, clause 5 deals with the composition of pension boards and is intended to provide for efficient and effective governance and administration of the pension scheme. I again commend amendment Nos 1 and 2 to the House. I tabled those for the reasons that I have articulated, and they were welcomed by everybody in the House. This will give the necessary flexibility to the local government pension scheme in Northern Ireland, as was requested by the Department of the Environment, which, of course, has responsibility for the scheme. The amendments were also sought by the Committee for Finance and Personnel. I note that, in their contributions, the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, Mr Weir, Mr Cree and Mrs Cochrane spoke in support of the amendments, and I am grateful for the support that has been demonstrated on all sides, I think, for the points that have been made.

I do not accept the arguments made by Mr Bradley on amendment Nos 3 and 4 to clause 5. I concur completely with the points made in opposing the amendments. Various Members, including Mr Weir, Mr Cree, Mrs Cochrane and others, spoke against the amendments and stated that they do not support giving additional powers to the trade unions in that respect. It is my view that there is simply no need for amendment Nos 3 and 4.

As I have stated, the thrust of the Bill and clause 5 is to enhance good governance for public service pension schemes. That certainly does not mean promoting the role of the trade unions, which is what amendment Nos 3 and 4 would result in. I entirely take on board the point that Mr Weir made about the tensions that sometimes exist between members of trade unions, including ex-members, and their former trade unions. I think that Mr Cree referred to another situation that we will all have very vivid memories and recollections of; indeed, it is not even a recollection for me but is very current. That was in an entirely different area of policy, but there is a tension between current members of trade unions and the representation that they receive from their trade unions. There is also tension between former members of that trade union — pensioners in fact — and that union because of the representation they received. That was a fair point for Mr Weir and Mr Cree to make.

I reiterate my previous point that not all areas of work in the public sector are unionised or as unionised as others. In effect, amendments Nos 3 and 4 say that the proposer of the amendments does not care about those areas of work or the people in those areas of work and that, whether they like it or not, they should have trade union representation on the pension board for their pension scheme. That is wrong.

4.00 pm

If the intention of Mr Bradley and his colleagues is to be representative, they need to be representative of everybody as best they can. As not all people in the public sector are members of trade unions — in fact, a substantial number are not — it is not representative to have solely trade union representatives on pension boards. To restrict membership of pension boards to only trade union representatives could be deemed as being discriminatory against the greater volume of people in our public sector who are affected by all these various schemes and are not members of trade unions. I am sure that the Member would not in any way want to be seen as being discriminating against one section of workers in favour of another.

I noticed the comments he made about Ministers across the water hand-picking representatives of their pension boards in the schemes that they were responsible for. A process of appointment will be established in the scheme regulations at the secondary legislation stage, and it is for individual Ministers, including his party colleague, to decide how representation on pension boards is ultimately decided. That could be done in a variety of ways, but there is sufficient flexibility for Ministers to do that. The Member's proposal would severely restrict the flexibility available to the Ministers who are responsible for schemes.

I also noticed a comment he made when explaining why he tabled his amendments. He said that there was a perception amongst some unions that there was "insufficient consultation" between my Department and the trade unions. I assure the Member and the House that there has been beyond sufficient consultation, and I am sure that some of my officials would be staggered by the idea that they have not engaged in sufficient consultation with the trade unions. There have been umpteen engagements, and just because the trade unions have not got the outcome that they wanted from those engagements, that does not mean that there has not been

sufficient engagement. So, I do not accept the arguments that have been put forward.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: Yes, I will give way.

Mr D Bradley: During the various evidence sessions at Committee Stage, I got the distinct impression that engagements between officials and the trade unions were in fact not umpteen, but few and far between.

Mr Hamilton: We can trade, "Yes, there was"/"No, there wasn't", but it will not get us any further. Whether the Member or members of trade unions think that there was sufficient engagement is not something I can decide — it is a matter for them — but I can assure everyone that there was serious ongoing engagement, and there will continue to be engagement, particularly at scheme level, between various Departments and trade unions to make sure that the schemes that we have to develop are developed in the not-too-distant future. So, we can discuss whether there was or there was not, but it will not get us any further: it would not even close the gap between me and the Member.

The point that I made remains and has not been answered by the Member, in his contribution or his intervention, and I am happy to give way if he wishes to provide clarification.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: Let me make the point that I would like the Member to address, if possible.

Restricting pension board membership to trade union representatives discriminates against a sizeable proportion, and probably the majority in many cases, of the members of that pension scheme. I am sure that that is not what the Member wants to do, but perhaps he could explain how the amendments that he has put forward do not discriminate against the greater volume of pensioners.

Mr D Bradley: In my initial contribution, I explained that, under the definition in the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, there is sufficient scope for a wide range of representative bodies. I also made the point, in response to what the Minister said, that most trade unions have organisations that represent pensioners who were previous members of their schemes. The equal pay issue came about, not as a result of trade union representation or a lack of representation, but as a result of the regulations laid down by his Department.

Mr Hamilton: In my view and, I am sure, that of many Members, the Member has still not adequately addressed the issue that was put to him. I am sure he would accept that not every member of the public sector is a member of a trade union. I hope that he would accept that very basic, fundamental point.

Mr D Bradley: They should be.

Mr Hamilton: Whether they should be or not is a matter of conscience for the particular member of the public sector. Many people, for very valid and good reasons, choose not to join public sector unions. They are entitled not to join, not to pay their money and not to have that representation. What the Member is trying to do with his amendments is restrict representation on the pension board to only those who choose to join a trade union, only those who are members of various bodies. Even though he made a right flippant remark that they should be, I am sure that the

Member would accept that not everyone is, and, therefore, to restrict membership of the pension board only to those who are members of trade unions is discriminatory and excludes the greater number of members of the pension scheme.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: I will, one more time. I will give you one more chance to answer.

Mr D Bradley: Certainly, it is not my intention to exclude anyone. Our intention here is to give the best possible voice to the 210,000 public servants. In our view, the best way to do that is to strengthen the union role in these boards.

Mr Hamilton: I disagree with that point. However, at least the Member is nudging towards accepting that, even if it is not his intention, the effect of amendment Nos 3 and 4 is that they would exclude a sizeable number of members of the public sector, in whatever guise they work, who are not members of trade unions, for whatever reason they choose. They would not be represented. Their views may well be represented, but they would not always have the guarantee that they would have their views accurately reflected on a pension board, if they were represented only by trade unions. We have talked about some other examples that highlight that there can often be, even between members of trade unions and their trade union, a dichotomy of views on whether the quality of the representation that they get is good enough. Therefore, I do not think that there is a need to have amendment Nos 3 and 4, and I think that, whatever the intention of the Member, they would have a very detrimental effect and would be very exclusive and discriminatory in how they would treat certain public sector workers.

Clause 8 deals with types of schemes. Again, we have debated amendment Nos 5 and 6, which were proposed in the names of Mr Bradley and Mr Rogers. You will not be surprised to hear that I do not accept the arguments that were put forward by Mr Bradley. It is apparent to me from the debate on amendment No 5 that SDLP Members simply do not understand, comprehend or appreciate what this Bill seeks to do. The Public Service Pensions Bill is enabling framework legislation that provides flexibilities, where necessary, for the subsequent secondary legislation that will be brought forward by each scheme. The SDLP Members appear to want to constrict and constrain the provisions. It is important that the Ministers who are responsible for each of the pension schemes have such flexibilities.

Again, no attempt was made to address the point that I made, that, at this minute — whatever the Member's personal or party view on defined contribution schemes — there are members of the public sector who have joined a Civil Service partnership scheme that is a defined contributions scheme. They have done that through choice. I am not sure whether this was the intention of the amendments, but their effect would be that that choice would be withdrawn from those members who have freely chosen to join that scheme. It does not take into account that that is what those members wanted to be a part of when they joined the Civil Service. My question to Mr Bradley and his colleagues is: what would you do with those pensioners who are already within those schemes, which they have chosen to be members of?

There was also a comment in which — I cannot recall now who was being quoted; I think it was the BMA, in fact — there was talk of unilateral action being taken to move people who are on a defined benefits scheme onto a defined contributions scheme. I refer the Member, once again, without labouring the point, to the provisions that are in clause 22 of the Bill, which I outlined in depth in my contribution earlier, which ensures that there cannot be — to use his term — unilateral action taken to move people from one scheme to another. People have chosen in some cases to be a member of a defined contribution scheme, but the Member seems to want to withdraw that option for those individuals.

Amendment No 6 seeks to change the process for secondary legislation from negative to affirmative resolution. The SDLP Members are being rather inconsistent on this matter as it is clear from the examples that I gave in my earlier contribution that they have been content to use negative resolution for legislation that their Ministers brought forward. The Member of the House to his left, when he was Minister of the Environment, had clauses in the Marine Bill, which is now the Marine Act, that were subject to negative resolution at Second Stage. I made the point, and will reiterate it for effect, about the inconsistency — there has been no answer from the Member to the charge of inconsistency — of why, when his party colleague Margaret Ritchie was Minister for Social Development, the Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 had several clauses with aspects to be affirmed by negative resolution on state pensions. Yet here we have another piece of pensions regulation where suddenly there has been some conversion to affirmative resolution and everything must be done by affirmative resolution when, in the past, his own colleagues sitting beside him and those who are no longer in this place were happy to bring forward legislation supported by the Member and his colleague, indeed supported by the whole House, that were full of negative resolutions. So, there has been no response to that charge of inconsistency. I am happy to give way if there is a response now. Oh, yes, there is.

Mr D Bradley: Simply because negative resolution is contained in one Bill does not necessarily entail that it should be used in every subsequent Bill.

Mr Hamilton: Of course that is the case. Of course that is right, but that does not answer why another piece of pensions legislation in 2008, brought forward by a Member of his party when they were in ministerial office, was full of negative resolutions. Why in one piece of pensions legislation but not in another? I see somebody is coming from the Bench to assist the Member, so I will give way out of charity.

Mr Attwood: First of all, I welcome the fact that the Minister is engaging so much in debate across the Chamber. I remember in the month of June, when the Member was a Back-Bencher rather than a Minister, sat and sat and sat and sat and did not engage at all when it came to the Planning Bill and matters that I challenged him and his colleagues on. So, I now welcome the fact that the Minister has found his voice. He now wants to speak up and tell the world what he thinks about various pieces of legislation. I welcome that he now recognises that he is inconsistent — inconsistent in June being silent and now having found his voice, so I welcome that.

Let me explain why it is entirely appropriate that this piece of legislation should have affirmative resolution. Why? Because this piece of legislation rewrites in a fundamental way the law on pensions. When there are members of pension schemes in this part of the world and in Britain who have grave suspicions about what might next come in pensions legislation, it is entirely appropriate that when it comes to the powers of a Minister in relation to future pension provisions that they come to this House by way of affirmative resolution for what they are proposing. The level of suspicion and concern requires domestic legislatures here and, in my view, in Britain also to proceed by way of affirmative resolution. That is why the scale of what is being proposed now is so much greater than we have seen before, and with a Tory Government with ambitions that we have not seen before, it is entirely appropriate to proceed in this way.

Mr Hamilton: There you go, Mr Deputy Speaker. That is a bit more like it. That is a better answer. Look, the Member will not be surprised that I am not convinced, even by his flourish of rhetoric. It still does not answer the fundamental point. I accept the point that pensions legislation at the time was not proposing changes as broad or as wide-ranging as this Bill proposes, but they were none the less significant. They had umpteen clauses that in secondary legislation were to be affirmed by negative resolution. All of a sudden there has been a conversion to being against the negative resolution procedure, yet it is something that the Member's party has put forward before. Given his previous experience as Minister, the Member will be mindful of the fact that there are options in the House if a party, a Committee or a series of parties is unhappy with the secondary legislation. It can be prayed against, and the legislation then comes to the House. Having something decided simply by negative resolution as opposed to affirmative resolution does not restrict debate in the House. If the Member and his party colleagues are so annoyed at anything that comes forward in secondary legislation, those options are available to them, as they are available to everybody in the House. I am not satisfied that moving towards having every scheme regulation brought to the House is the efficient way in which to deal with the issue. I am not convinced by the argument that has been put forward —

4.15 pm

Mr Attwood: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hamilton: No. Hold on.

I am not convinced by the argument that has been put forward as to why, after the Member and his party have put forward piece of legislation after piece of legislation that has included the negative resolution procedure, we should suddenly back down now.

Mr Attwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: I will give way one more time on clause 8.

Mr Attwood: I now think that the Minister is being inconsistent, because Hansard will confirm that the Minister has just accepted that the scale of what he is proposing in this Bill is bigger and greater than what happened in 2008. What happened in 2008 was under a so-called Labour Government; this is definitely a right-wing Tory Government. Therefore, given that he has accepted that the scale of this is much greater than what went

heretofore, I put it to the Minister that, in order to build reassurance with members of trade unions and members of pension schemes who are not members of trade unions, he should now go that wee bit further and give a greater degree of confidence by accepting the amendment from my colleague Mr Bradley. Given that you have accepted the point of principle that this is bigger, bolder and, in my view, more threatening than anything that we have seen before, will you not now concede the point?

Mr Hamilton: I do not accept the point. There are sufficient protections in the legislation before the House today. I mentioned clause 22 and fundamental changes that might be made. It is not a case of any Minister who is responsible for a scheme, including the Member's party colleague, bringing forward scheme regulations that can make fundamental changes willy-nilly, which is perhaps what he and others might fear. I reiterate the fact that there is a process here that allows Members, parties and Committees, if they are dissatisfied with a particular scheme regulation, to bring it to the House, where it can be properly debated and voted on by Members.

I will move on to clause 9, which deals with revaluation. We have had a debate on the clause as a result of amendment No 7, which was tabled by Mr Bradley and Mr Rogers. Again, I do not accept the arguments put forward by Mr Bradley. I welcome the points made by Mr Weir, Mrs Cochrane and Mr McCrea, among others, against amendment No 7.

Pension schemes need to be operated on a basis that is fair to all members — those who have no breaks from service and those who, for whatever reason, have breaks from service. Costs must be controlled, and, indeed, the costs will influence and determine the benefits that can be paid to all members. Mrs Cochrane asked how much it would cost. It is hard to determine exactly how much, but there would be a cost involved. There is the principle of fairness across the board. Why should some members of a pension scheme who do not take a career break or take a shorter career break subsidise those who take, as is suggested in the amendment, a 10-year career break, which, as Mr McCrea pointed out, might be upwards of a quarter of somebody's entire working career? It is untenable that anyone would even consider it, as it is eminently and apparently utterly unfair to change from five to 10 years the period for which a gap in pensionable service will be regarded as pensionable.

Finally, we debated amendment No 16, which was tabled by the Committee. It relates to clause 13, which deals with employer contributions in a funded scheme. When I was speaking to this group of amendments, I said that I did not believe that amendment No 16 was entirely necessary, but, in the grand scheme of things, it is a minor issue, and there is broad support for it across the House, so I am content to see it pass.

In supporting this amendment, Members commented on the requirement to make explicit what the term "qualified" means in regard to the person who is appointed to consider a valuation. I am unconvinced by the arguments that the person appointed would not be, and I consider that the term "qualified" already encapsulates all the points that the amendment seeks to make. However, as I said, I would be content to see it passed, given that it is a minor issue and that there is broad support for it.

In conclusion, I ask Members to support amendment Nos 1 and 2 in this group, which refer to clause 5, and to oppose amendments Nos 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 80; Noes 13.

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

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

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs McKeivitt and Mr McKinney.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment No 2 made: In page 3, line 6, leave out "must provide" and insert

"may make the provision required under subsection (1) above by providing".— [Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Amendment No 3 proposed: In page 3, line 30, leave out "member representatives" and insert "trade union representatives".— *[Mr D Bradley.]*

Question put, That amendment No 3 be made.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I have been advised by the party Whips that, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b), there is agreement that we can dispense with the three minutes and move straight to a Division.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 39; Noes 50.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness,

Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs McKeivitt and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

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

The following Member voted in both Lobbies and is therefore not counted in the result: Mr Ford

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will not call amendment No 4, as it consequential to amendment No 3, which was not made.

Clause 5, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to clauses 6 and 7. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group the clauses for the Question on stand part.

Clauses 6 and 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8 (Types of scheme)

Amendment No 5 proposed: In page 5, leave out lines 9 and 10.— *[Mr D Bradley.]*

Question put, That amendment No 5 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 38; Noes 48.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs McKeivitt and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots,

Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment No 6 proposed: In page 5, line 26, leave out “negative resolution” and insert “the affirmative procedure (see section 34(1))”.— [*Mr D Bradley.*]

Question put, That amendment No 6 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 38; Noes 48.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs McKevitt and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 9 (Revaluation)

Amendment No 7 proposed: In page 6, line 11, leave out “5” and insert “10”.— [*Mr D Bradley.*]

Question put, That amendment No 7 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 38; Noes 49.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs McKevitt and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to take their ease for a minute while we change the top Table.

Mr P Robinson: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I wonder if you could help us. We lost 20 minutes of our lives with the vote on amendment No 1, which was an amendment moved by my colleague the Finance Minister at the request of the Department of the Environment. Yet the Minister of the Environment, who was in the Chamber, did not support his Department’s amendment and his party voted against his Department’s amendment. Can you give us some help in understanding the thinking that went into the Minister and his party’s decisions?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am very happy to tell the First Minister that that is not a role for the Chair. [*Laughter.*]

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Clause 10 (Pension age)

Mr Speaker: We now come to the second group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 8, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 9 to 12. Members will note that amendment Nos 10 and 11 are mutually exclusive. I call Mr Dominic Bradley to move amendment No 8 and to address the other amendments in the group.

Mr D Bradley: I beg to move amendment No 8: In page 6, leave out lines 15 and 16 and insert “65.”.

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 9: In page 6, line 16, at end insert

“(1A) Subsection (1) does not apply in relation to a person under a scheme under section 1 whose normal pension age is specified by scheme regulations for the scheme.

The normal pension age for such a person must be the age specified by the scheme regulations; and such regulations may specify any age less than state pension age, but not less than 65.”— [Mr McKay.]

No 10: In page 6, line 17, leave out subsection (2) and insert

“(2) Subsection (1) does not apply in relation to fire and rescue workers who are firefighters.

The normal pension age for such persons under a scheme under section 1 must be the age specified by the scheme regulations for the scheme; and such

regulations may specify any age not exceeding 60, but not less than 55.

(2A) Subsection (1) does not apply in relation to members of the police service.

The normal pension age for such persons under a scheme under section 1 must be 60.— [Mr McKay.]

No 11: In page 6, line 21, at end insert

“for members of the police service and no more than 60 for fire and rescue workers who are firefighters.”— [Mr D Bradley.]

No 12: In page 6, leave out lines 24 to 33 and insert “65.”— [Mr D Bradley.]

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am pleased to contribute to this second group of amendments on pension age. I listened carefully to the Minister outline the purpose of the Bill when he was summing up on the previous group. I understand the Minister's position: this is not a Bill of his making but one that has been foisted on him by the coalition Government, and I have some sympathy for him having to advance legislation that he is not fully committed to. When he talked about the purpose of the Bill, what came to my mind was the effect of the Bill. Largely, the effect of the Bill for public servants will be to pay more, work longer and get less at the end. Retirement may become a thing of the past.

In any case, I will move on to the amendments in the group. It is to be welcomed that we are at least able to debate the legislation. The original intention was that we would adopt the Westminster legislation by means of a legislative consent motion. It is largely due to the insistence of my colleague Mr Attwood, when he was a Minister, that the Executive decided to have a local Bill. That is a good thing, because it increases accountability and adds to the democratic process. All that is left for us to do is shape the Bill into the best possible instrument for those who are affected by it. Therefore, I welcome the fact that we have the opportunity to discuss a Bill here and can attempt to modify it.

The Bill as it stands ties the age at which public sector workers receive their pension in full — the normal pension age — to the state pension age. As we know, the state pension age, as a result of previous legislation on pensions, will increase to 68 in the coming years. Amendment Nos 8 and 12 would ensure that a link is not made for either the normal pension age or the deferred pension age. That will prevent adverse effects for all public sector workers aged 34 or below and will prevent the potential for further adverse increases in the future.

The impact of increasing the pension age on the Northern Ireland economy will be significant, but sadly no proper assessment has been done of that. We hear the constant refrain about the impact on the block grant of not sticking rigidly to the Westminster proposals. However, as with many matters, that fails to take account of the distinctly different circumstances in Northern Ireland.

Let us face it: the Department of Finance and Personnel has not really provided us with any proper costings to assist our decision-making on the Bill. In fact, it referred the matter to the Government Actuary's Department (GAD), which came back with a variation in cost of £100

million. On that basis, it is difficult to come to correct figures about the cost of the measures in the Bill.

On a base level, the proposals will lead to less money circulating in the Northern Ireland economy, as the financial power of retiring public servants, sometimes described as the “grey pound”, will be reduced. That is all happening in the context of the cost of public sector pensions being driven down from 1.9% to 1.4% of GDP by 2060. Therefore, increased numbers of public servants working longer can only mean a reduction in job opportunities for young people.

5.30 pm

We can look at the number of fully qualified teachers who, at the moment, have never been in full-time employment. The Minister of Education assesses that number to be around 6,000. We can only imagine what that figure will be in the future. Current circumstances will define the problems of youth unemployment, and these measures will do little to ease that situation. For the period from August to October last year the unemployment rate for 18- to 24-year-olds was estimated at 23.8%. Currently, we risk the development of a lost generation. Large numbers of young people are again being forced to leave these shores to find work. Why should we seek to perpetuate this problem? I do not believe that we should.

As we discuss these potential increases, it is important to remember that pension is simply deferred pay. Changes of this nature leave a bitter taste in the mouth of public servants, especially given that the London Government are reneging, as I said, on the promise of a 25-year guarantee on pensions. Public sector pensions are not gold-plated in the way that is often unfairly portrayed. Over half of public service pensions are less than £5,600 per annum, and for civil servants the average yearly pension is less again — £5,400, with a quarter getting less than £2,000 annually. Notably, when considering the impact of the proposed pension changes, we see that the average NILGOSC pension for women is less than £3,000 a year.

Through amendment No 11 we have sought to make the case on behalf of firefighters and police officers. Many public servants — nurses, teachers, doctors and paramedics, to name a few groups — face demands during their employment that could be described as particularly physically, mentally and emotionally demanding. We can comfortably predict that increasing the pension age for over 45,000 public servants will result in increasing numbers of ill-health retirements and more people being forced out of work on capability grounds. Nowhere is that more obvious than in the case of the firefighters and police officers. Working beyond 55 is not attainable by most current firefighters, and working beyond 60 is a serious ask for police officers. Between half and two thirds of current firefighters would not be fit enough to work beyond 55, and, because of the small size of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, redeployment to back office jobs is not possible for that number of individuals. Additionally, because of equality legislation, it would simply not be possible to present older firefighters with such jobs, and, sadly, substantial numbers of firefighters could end up being dismissed through capability procedures. The change to the normal pension age will discriminate against women firefighters. It risks driving out most women firefighters and undermining decades of equality work that

is only now beginning to come to fruition. There is no doubt that such an imposition will upset industrial relations and affect morale.

I welcome the fact that Sinn Féin has also acknowledged this problem by tabling amendment No 10, which we cannot support alongside our own amendment. However, I encourage Sinn Féin and others to support the SDLP amendments. As I said, I ask the House to think seriously about the important points that I made during this contribution, and I ask Members to support the amendments that we have tabled.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Because of the timing of the debate, the Committee has not considered the amendments in this group, similar to the case with the previous debate. These amendments relate, in different ways, to the evidence presented to the Committee and to its related findings and recommendations.

It is clear that one of the most contentious impacts of the reforms arises from clause 10, which establishes an automatic linkage between normal pension age and state pension age for public servants generally and would set the normal pension age at 60 for firefighters and the police. Members need to be aware of two key implications of clause 10 as drafted. First, subsection (1) pre-empts any future decisions by the Executive and the Assembly on whether the linkage with state pension age should be maintained for public servants generally when the Westminster Government increase it to 68 or even beyond, for that matter. Secondly, Members need to be mindful of the inflexibility of clause 10 in failing to address circumstances in which public servants do not wish or cannot afford to take early retirement but find the completion of their duties impossible because of age-related decline. Evidence to the Committee highlighted that, under clause 10, such individuals are likely to face actuarially reduced pensions or capability dismissals.

The Committee noted from the research and evidence that, aside from firefighters and police officers, certain other physically or emotionally demanding public service roles — for example, prison officers, teachers, paramedics and mental health nurses — have been identified as being potentially problematical with respect to the consequences of an automatic linkage between normal pension age for their respective roles and future increases in the state pension age.

When taking evidence from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), the Committee noted that a key finding of the Williams review indicated that up to 85% of firefighters aged between 55 and 60 would not be able to maintain the fitness standards required to conduct their duties effectively. Moreover, in responding to Committee queries on the scope for such firefighters to move to back office roles or community fire safety, the FBU pointed out that it had written confirmation from its employers on at least two occasions stating:

“there simply are not those redeployment opportunities in the ... Fire and Rescue Service”.

Hence the risk of capability dismissals. Effectively, even if firefighters want to go into a back office role, as police would have a greater opportunity to do, the option is simply

not there. Although the Committee acknowledges that the Bill does not require firefighters to work to age 60, clause 10 means that, if a firefighter retires before 60 years of age, that could result in an actuarial reduction in the overall pension entitlement of approximately 4% for each year.

To understand the potential impact on public safety, the Committee agreed to write to the Health Minister for information on the options for firefighters to retire early with actuarial reduction and whether scope exists to redeploy into other roles in the wider public sector firefighters who are unable to meet the fitness standards. In response, the Health Minister advised the Committee that the position in the North was unclear regarding the potential number of firefighters affected and that the available information was incomplete. He also advised that, as regards scope for redeployment into the wider public sector, employment legislation meant that retired firefighters could not be provided with a more advantageous position that allowed them to compete for employment in the wider public sector regardless of their individual circumstances. Faced with such barriers, affected firefighters will have little option but to retire with a financial penalty or face dismissal on the grounds of capability.

In light of the concerns raised, the Committee was unable to agree to clause 10 as drafted. The Committee believes that there is a need for sufficient flexibility to enable evidence-based decisions to be taken at a scheme level on whether certain public service roles, especially that of firefighters, should have a lower normal pension age than is set in clause 10. That being the case, the Committee called on the Finance Minister to table the necessary amendment to clause 10 to provide that flexibility on the basis that any costs arising from future decisions to vary from parity in this area at a scheme level will be met by the responsible Departments in the Executive. In respect of the latter condition, it was noted that clause 3(5) provided the necessary safeguard, whereby scheme regulations will require the Department of Finance and Personnel's consent before being made.

Given the weight of evidence presented, it is disappointing that the Minister has not seen fit to table an amendment as recommended by the Committee. Instead, in his response to the Committee report, the Minister states that this is an enabling Bill designed to offer flexibilities at scheme level. He is of the view that the secondary legislation stage is the most appropriate time to finalise the scheme design for specific workforces, following consultation with staff and trade unions. If that is so, why is it necessary to stipulate pension age in the primary legislation in such a rigid way? That is the view of the Committee.

In the case of firefighters, the Minister states that the Williams review did not recommend a change to the current pension age of 60, but it recommended that a review of the pension age should take place once fitness standards had been determined and sufficient data collected to assess the impact of such standards. The Minister also cites the fact that the current pension age for firefighters recruited since 2006 is already 60 and that an amendment to provide for an earlier normal pension age would introduce a conflicting provision to the current requirement. Yet, surely that can be addressed with new scheme arrangements if, following the review and on the basis of evidence, it is established that a normal pension age of less than 60 is appropriate for firefighters.

I will move on to other areas. There may also be a need for flexibility on pension age for certain other public servants. In evidence to the Committee, the BMA highlighted the ongoing Working Longer Review being undertaken by a tripartite partnership review group comprising NHS trade unions, NHS employers and representatives of the Department of Health, who will consider, among other things, the evidence of the impact of working beyond 60 years of age.

In that regard and in the context of the second group of amendments, the Committee position is that clause 10 should be amended to enable a more flexible approach, which will enable the responsible Departments to take account of emerging evidence on specific roles and to adjust pension age accordingly in necessary cases going forward. That is the Committee view.

From a party perspective, I echo the Committee's position on a lot of the issues that have emerged around clause 10. The Fire Brigades Union impressed on the Committee that the cart was very much being put before the horse in regard to the consideration of evidence and the making of a decision in regard to the firefighter NPA. It is clearly the case that there is a need for more evidence to be taken and more issues to be considered before a final decision is made in regard to that case.

In a recent independent report, information was gathered from four fire and rescue services across the water, and it found that two thirds of those aged between 55 and 60 were below the recommended fitness standards. We need to be cognisant of that kind of information, and, if we go ahead with the decision in respect of pension age for firefighters to be raised to 60, if it is the case here that two thirds of firefighters do not meet fitness standards, how does that impact on the valued public service that firefighters provide, and how does that impact ultimately on people's lives?

5.45 pm

It also warns that a substantially larger proportion of women will find it hard to maintain fitness at the required level, which will lead to a disproportionate number becoming unfit for firefighting before age 60. On the basis of that finding, we should also be concerned about the impact that this will have on the number of female firefighters in the local Fire and Rescue Service, an issue of representation that needs to be addressed anyway. We need to encourage more women to apply for those jobs. Obviously, the implementation of such a decision on pension age could put off more females from applying to the service.

In pension terms, we are living longer, but life expectancy is an entirely different thing from fitness levels, which must be considered in this case, especially in life-and-death situations that firefighters and others face daily. The consequences of getting this wrong could be highly significant, and that is why we should take a longer-term view of all of this.

What we propose in our amendments relating to the firefighters is broadly similar to the SDLP proposal: it is to take a commonsensical approach to this issue, and, in our case, ensure that there is flexibility through regulations so that the Department can consider fully the case of firefighters. The problem is that, if we introduce

this in primary legislation, it will become a lot harder to undo, should we encounter any future implementation problems. So, when this comes into play, if we find that there are difficulties in the provision of public services, we should not have to return to primary legislation; it should be something that is easily amended through regulations. Given the importance of the public service that the fire service provides, we should be in a position to change it quickly to ensure that that public service is held up to the highest standard.

I will speak briefly on Sinn Féin's second amendment, which would provide an option for a normal pension age for those under clause 1 of the Bill to be specified through regulations. At Committee Stage, there was much discussion about flexibility and the need to create wriggle room by putting this into regulations. So, there are similarities between this and the firefighters' issue as well. My party colleague will speak to those issues later in the debate. At this stage, I certainly favour amendment Nos 8, 9, 10 and 11.

Mr Girvan: Really, we are all here as a result of legislation that has gone through Westminster and could have been dealt with as a legislative consent motion. However, it was worthwhile having a Committee Stage and getting the evidence from the trade unions and those affected. Trade unions were not the only people who presented; other stakeholder groups felt that it was important to give evidence. In doing so, we identified that some of the information that we were working to from actuaries indicated that there could be a cost of up to £262 million of delivering any variances that we would have if we did not implement the legislation as presented. At the request of the unions, we went back to ask for more information on that matter, and the increased estimate that came back was that it could cost Northern Ireland up to £300 million of its block grant if we did not make changes. The evidence was helpful in showing how some accommodation could be made. I appreciate that, as has been said, certain flexibility exists for Departments and funders to make adjustments in their own schemes.

However, they would have to meet that cost and adjustment from their own departmental budget as opposed to asking for money from the centre.

I come back to the amendments. One of the groups that presented to us and was met with widespread support is the Fire Service. A unique set of tests are put forward in the Fire Service in that you have to achieve a certain fitness level. Unlike other jobs in which you do not necessarily need to be 100% fit to carry out the function, you have to be fit to be a fireman. The Fire Service also identified the lack of back-office opportunity for men who reach the age of 55 and perhaps cannot attain the required fitness standard. There is lack of opportunity for, and accommodation of, those people in the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. As a consequence, it is suggested that this should apply to a 55-60 age range. We will support amendment No 10 because we believe that it addresses the issue and allows for flexibility to exist in the fire service. The Police Service will have the same opportunity.

I want to go back to amendment No 8, which states that we should leave out two lines and just insert "65". Some people might think that I am being somewhat cynical in the way that I say that. However, that removes the flexibility

either to decrease or increase the retirement age. We all know the way that that will probably go. It is more likely to increase than decrease. Making that amendment would mean having to do that.

We will oppose amendment Nos 8, 9, 11 and 12 and support amendment No 10; that is the stance that we will take. In a lot of ways, amendment No 12 really is very similar to amendment No 8. Therefore, we feel that that accommodation has been made. However, I think that it was worthwhile going through the process of getting the evidence. Unfortunately, meeting the time frame and getting this through the House within the required window before penalties are incurred could be a difficulty.

We have had to move it forward to this stage, and I think that it was helpful. It has also given us an opportunity to see what flexibility could be worked into the scheme. There are probably those on the other side of the Irish Sea at Westminster who feel that some accommodation and further negotiation would have helped them at the initial stage of bringing forward the Bill there. We have a very difficult case on which to work and move forward. I am sure that we have all been lobbied heavily. I am sure that every civil servant in the country has been in contact with one of us at some stage, whether through petitions or a series of letters that were circulated. We have had to take all that into consideration.

It is not an easy step to take. It has been alluded to that people will work longer, pay more and get less. In many areas, that is probably true. We are dealing with a difficult financial future for not just our country of Northern Ireland but Great Britain as a whole. As a consequence, adjustments have had to be made. The accommodations that have been put forward in some of the amendments will help to address a number of the concerns that were raised at Committee.

Mr Cree: Sometimes the more I sit here and listen, the more firmly I am convinced that a legislative consent motion would have been the way to go. However, we are where we are. Although it is a great idea to have flexibility, I have not seen much flexibility here today.

Amendment No 8 addresses pension age and seeks to make it 65 years only. We cannot support that change in the current economic situation and, indeed, in the knowledge that most people are living a lot longer and because of the existing public service scheme costs. I do not think that it has been mentioned, but one of the big issues in all pension provision is the cost of providing same. Indeed, I know from my experience that there are very few final salary or equally attractive schemes in the private sector any more, simply because they cannot be afforded.

Amendment No 9 is similar to amendment No 8, and the Member who spoke previously covered that.

Amendment No 10 also attempts to change normal pension age but restricts the age for firefighters and police. We have sympathy for those changes and have supported the principles in discussions at Committee. The difficulty is that amendment No 11 from the SDLP addresses the same clause 10 issue, probably, to be fair, in a much neater way. So, we have a contrast between those amendments, and we have to decide, after hearing what else is said, which of them is the more suitable.

The final one, amendment No 12, seeks to make 65 the deferred pension age under clause 1. Again, I have difficulties with that.

Mrs Cochrane: The amendments tabled for clause 10 are significant and require careful consideration, and I am sure that all Members have been lobbied strongly by the various unions and the employees who will be affected by the proposed changes. It is important that we establish the impact that the Bill will have on those affected. However, we need to balance that by also considering the context in which the changes are proposed. As Mr Cree said, statistics show that life expectancy is going up and people are living longer. In the 1970s, if a person retired at 60, they might have been expected to have lived a further 18 years. By 2010, life expectancy post-retirement had increased to 28 years. That means that the cost of public service pensions is increasing. Indeed, it has increased by a third in the past 10 years to £32 billion, and, without reform, that is unsustainable. We have to be realistic.

Clause 10 sets the normal pension scheme ages at the same level as they are for other public service workers in the UK. If life expectancy continues to rise, we will need to continue to monitor the proportion of adult life spent in retirement, and, therefore, amendment Nos 8 and 12, which remove the link to state pension age, would be very unwise. Amendment No 9 may initially seem appropriate, but it also allows the option in secondary legislation to stray away from state pension age, and we must ask ourselves whether that would simply bump the issue down the road where it will still have to be dealt with.

We should recognise that, even with the reform, those enrolled in public sector pension schemes are receiving a significant employers contribution and still have confidence that it will actually pay out. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for many private sector employees, the vast majority of whom already must work to state pension age, and many will have to work long beyond that due to the collapse of many private pension schemes through no fault of their own.

Amendment No 10 seeks to ensure that the pension age for the firefighter scheme is specified in secondary legislation, and that may be unnecessary given that the current pension age for firefighters recruited since April 2006 is 60 and that clause 10, as drafted, includes provisions to retain that position. However, as those emergency public service workers are already afforded exemptions, it would be appropriate to support that amendment.

Mr Weir: I will try to keep my remarks reasonably brief. The amendments in group 2 fall into two categories: amendment Nos 8, 9 and 12 and the separate issues with the firefighters' position. I will look at each of those. I have listened to the proposers, particularly on amendment No 8, which follows through to amendment No 12, and the same tone goes in many ways with amendment No 9. It has a slightly more nuanced position and is maybe a bit better dressed up, but, from a practical point of view, it will effectively mean the same thing. The reality is twofold. First, as indicated by Mrs Cochrane and others, given the position in the wider sphere of state pensions, those amendments would have the impact of detaching from the issue of state pension age and normal pension age and decoupling the two. The simple reality is that, however much we may dislike this, and considering its broad

affordability as we move ahead, all the demographics in society that relate to people living longer and being able to enjoy retirement for a longer period, and the financial implications of that, are further becoming unsustainable. That is why the Hutton commission was set up in the first place.

6.00 pm

Whether we like it or not, we are inevitably moving into a situation in which retirement age is something that cannot be fixed across the board at 65, because it is something that is moving. From that point of view, there is a degree of common sense at work, and, with the best will in the world, we are creating a false picture for people if we simply believe that that is something that can be set in stone.

Similarly, whatever is said about spending powers, the reality is that, although people can disagree with the Government Actuary's Department about the exact amount of money, mention has been made of £262 million or £300 million. That will be the impact on the block grant. There is no point in simply saying that, if such-and-such happens, it will mean that there will be a reduction in spending power in Northern Ireland. We cannot simply conjure that money out of thin air. If we are talking about that level of reduction and effectively going out on our own, that money will have to be found from within the block grant. That is a simple reality and something that, with the best will in the world, is simply unaffordable.

Consequently, amendment Nos 8, 9 and 12 would all have a very similar effect. They undermine the central premise of the legislation in the first place, but they also put us into cloud cuckoo land when it comes to the realities. That, ultimately, if they are being honest with the public, is something that Members have to face up to.

I will now turn to the amendments relating to the firefighters' situation. Of all the witnesses among the various lobby groups that came to the Committee, the firefighters were impressive and put forward a very cogent case. There are particular special circumstances for the firefighters that have been outlined by others, including the needs for levels of fitness. Looking around the Benches on all sides, I suspect that very few of us could pass the required fitness tests at 35 or 45. I note that the Chairperson of the Committee, who is a very keen cyclist, may well be able to pass the firefighters' fitness test, but I suspect that he might be on his own in the Chamber, with the obvious exception of the Speaker, who, I am sure, would be more than capable.

There are specific circumstances for firefighters. Rightly, society needs them to have a particular level of fitness and physical ability. That is a clear issue that goes to the heart of health and safety concerns and saving people's lives. It is undoubtedly the case that that means that, when it comes to standards, there is a requirement on firefighters that is simply not there in most other public sector realms. Consequently, theirs is a unique case.

Additionally, the clear-cut point that the firefighters made is that, unlike in many other parts of the public sector, if they are not able to perform their firefighting duties, it is not as easy as it would be in other parts of the public sector simply to transfer them somewhere else. There is very little in the way of back-room jobs that could be made available for those who are physically not in a

position to pass the fitness test. A unique, cogent and impressive case has been made for the firefighters, and we should take cognisance of that across the House. I suspect that it will be an issue that will be raised when discussing amendment No 10. The House can largely unite behind that amendment, and I believe that it can be accepted across the board without rancour. I would like the Assembly to unite behind our vote of support for the particular position of firefighters in amendment No 10 and not divide the House on the issue. That is the position that the DUP will take on it.

So, from that point of view, I think that there are clear problems with amendment Nos 8, 9 and 12. I think that a more unified approach could be adopted on amendment No 10, which the Chair and others tabled.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I note that the tenor of the discussion on this group reflects what I thought was a very focused discussion at the Committee, which carried out some substantial work. I do not think that any ideological positions were adopted at the Committee. People recognise that reform can be a necessary process to go through if it addresses issues such as value for money, cost benefits and giving better protection. That is also the case if reform has not only good governance but transparency and responsiveness or flexibility in the individual cases that can be made. I think that the firefighters and the police are two very obvious examples, as are paramedics. Those categories are not best served by embedding an approach in primary legislation that then, de facto, changes the thresholds.

Also, the body of the Bill does not provide any future-proofing for how different Administrations, such as a different Administration at Westminster or a different Executive formulation with different Ministers, would approach those issues. I think that that informed our approach, and I should say that I am speaking in favour of and formally moving amendment Nos 9 and 10 on behalf of Sinn Féin.

Given what I said about what reforms are intended to do, it could not be the case that people were either willy-nilly or even deliberately creating that type of invidious pressure on people who are regarded as public servants. They are members of the public sector, and the departmental witnesses accepted that. They may not have the categorisation or job description that specifies that they are civil servants or that they are this, that and the other, but, to take firefighters as an example of the point that I want to make, they are highly skilled people who do a very dangerous job. They are recognised right across the spectrum of our community — there are many things on which our community divides and disagrees — for the incredible work that they do.

Why should they be faced with a Hobson's choice of retiring before the state pension age and their normal pension age on the basis of their ability to meet the job's physical requirements? We do not give them any safety net through reallocation to back office work or whatever. We actually confront them with a very invidious choice between retiring early on a reduced pension or facing dismissal on capability grounds.

I do not see or hear any party adopting the position of saying, "Tough; that is life. That is the way that it goes, and we cannot extend that to every other member of the public

sector". We are talking about very specific exceptions, for which very specific exceptions have to be made. There is no one size fits all in this. That is why I was disappointed that the Minister did not opt for the secondary legislation route, because that is how we could have addressed those individual circumstances.

Taken as a category, none of that is going to create the type of doomsday scenario that the Government Actuary's Department presented. The first time that we asked, it said that the figure was £260 million, so we went back and said, "We are not satisfied with guesstimating. Could you do it again?" It came back with another estimate but bumped it up by £40 million. It became £300 million the second time that we asked, and I think that it cost the Department. I should give credit to the Department, because at least it obliged or responded to the Department by agreeing to finance that second and wider assessment of the various schemes that we have in the public sector.

The point I am making is not that we should just disregard the fact that there is an impact on the block grant, or even have an argument that there will be an impact, because there will be. However, nobody, but nobody, is operating on the basis of an evidence-based figure. We are given guesstimates. They are very significant guesstimates, which can have the effect of people saying that we cannot afford this. However, for a start, we do not actually know how much it is going to cost us. That is no way to run a business.

It is unsatisfactory that we are presented with guesstimates when we ask for evidence. We are then being asked to consider the best way to take the issue forward. We have to take into account the issues that will affect the public sector here. Other Members have addressed in their contributions the fact that we are talking about almost a quarter of a million workers. We are also talking about their families. These issues are very, very significant.

We cannot guarantee that the Executive, given their resources, can actually afford to break parity. Sinn Féin does not have the same allegiance to parity with Westminster as some other parties — that goes without saying — but, in this case, we are not arguing that we forget parity and dig into our own pockets. It cannot be done. We know and recognise that. For that reason, we have, maybe through gritted teeth, gone along with many of the arguments presented for sustaining the Bill.

We made a constructive contribution to the Committee report. I was very proud of the way in which the cross-party group went about its task. We did not agree on everything, but we had a fundamental problem with clause 10. We asked the Department to explore the issue. We asked the Health Department whether it could offer comfort regarding options after operational fitness reports perhaps rule firefighters out of front line activity. We were told that there was insufficient capacity to give that assurance.

We asked that the wider public sector here be consulted. We were told that, for reasons that were not made clear, employment legislation would not allow that to happen and that it would infer some kind of advantage. It is not an advantage; it is recognition of years of dangerous work on the front line of public services on behalf of the Executive and our society. We should not be confronting people with Hobson's choice in these circumstances: early retirement

on a reduced pension or being dismissed because of lack of physical capability. I ask again that the Minister give some assurance that this is something that merits some thought. It would not incur penalties; it would allow us to lay down the principles on which we are going to proceed, and it would allow us sufficient time to reflect on what we can do.

If there is common commitment, I think that we can overcome the issues about whether we can reallocate functions and roles in the Fire Service. If that is not possible, and if there is insufficient capacity — and I am prepared to listen to the evidence — let us consider other options in the wider public sector. These are obviously very capable, experienced individuals. Whether it is giving lectures on fire safety in our schools or working for local authorities on fire prevention measures and so on and so forth, I think that we could offer firefighters the opportunity to enjoy the full span of their career.

We want to reflect the reforms in the public sector that are already law. In her contribution, Judith Cochrane referred to the changes already in place. There are sensitivities. Some people joined the Fire Service long before the reforms were introduced. They are working on a different set of conditions. However, the logic of diminishing returns is that, over a period of time, it will level itself out. We are not looking to rewrite the legislation; we are asking that we retain as much flexibility as possible in our primary legislation to allow our Minister, on our behalf, to introduce innovative, imaginative responses to the approach that is being adopted in Westminster. I do not know what will happen with that system. I do not have enough information, but I think that we can take responsibility for exploring what we can do more than is represented in this Bill as is presented. On that basis, I very strongly ask Members to look again at amendment No 9, because it is an enabling change that then makes our amendment No 10 effective. We would not have introduced that had we been able to deal with this matter by secondary legislation, but that choice is not before us today.

6.15 pm

Mr Agnew: The problem for me with this Bill is that it is an accountant's Bill. The numbers may work, but the real question is this: at age 68, potentially, will the people be able to work? Of course, the numbers have to add up. That is a major component of the Bill, and we cannot ignore that. Equally, we have to ensure that it makes sense in reality. Balance sheets are all fine and well, but, if the reality on the ground with workers does not match what the numbers want it to, we cannot expect the workers to be slaves to accountancy. Life expectancy is rising, and, of course, that puts pressure on the pension pot, but it is not rising equally across all areas. In Belfast, someone born today will have a life expectancy of 73 compared with that of 85 in Kensington. Of course, Kensington is a much more affluent area than Belfast, and, essentially, as things stand with this legislation, we will be asking the people who have lower incomes and who are likely to live shorter lives to subsidise the pensions of the people in Kensington. Although none of the amendments in this group can completely mitigate that, I believe that the amendments put forward by the SDLP and Sinn Féin can help us to move towards a much more equitable pensions Bill.

We talk about numbers, and they are given weight because you can see them on a paper, you can add them up, you can total them, you can match them off and it seems real, but we have to look at some of the numbers that affect real people's lives and working conditions. There has been so much talk of life expectancy, but we have not looked at health expectancy. That has to be absolutely key. There is no point in requiring someone to work until they are 68 or whatever the Government may decide the state pension age should be because we cannot expect them to work if they are unfit and unable and not well enough to work. Currently, half the people who are within three years of the state pension age do not work. There will be myriad reasons for that, but there is no doubt that a significant proportion of it will be due to ill health and unfitness to carry out the profession that they were engaged in. That is a key issue. We cannot ignore the reality of people's lives in all this. Anybody who has studied maths, accountancy or economics, as I have, will know that there are many different ways and many different formulae that can get you to the same conclusions. We have been passed the line that it is the only way that it could have been done at Westminster and it is the only way that we can do it. I do not accept that. I think that different options can be considered, and I think that we can, if we accept these amendments, make it work.

That issue is particularly significant when we come to consider physically arduous jobs such as those in the Fire and Rescue Service. I welcome the fact that there seems to be a degree of consensus on that. Indeed, the amendments include those working in the Police Service.

I worry that other groups have been left out, such as paramedics. I remember during one of the pension protests I was at the Ulster Hospital, and a paramedic asked whether you would want a 65-plus-year-old paramedic to lift your relative who weighs 20-plus stone down the stairs if they took a heart attack. Those are the realities that the numbers, sometimes, cannot illustrate. As it looks as though the particular conditions of firefighters and police are will be taken into consideration at this stage, I hope that, at Further Consideration Stage, having accepted the rationale for certain jobs that require physical strength and fitness, we will look at others that may face the same challenges and ensure that they are included and there is equity and fairness in the Bill.

The particular effect of the Bill on women has to be looked at. When we looked at the Fire Service, there was a sense that the proposals would impact on women considerably more. I ask the Minister what equality impact assessment has been done and what conclusions it made about the impact of the Bill as a whole on women. Again, to ensure that there is fairness and that the Bill works for the common good, we have to look at the various groups that may be affected by the proposals.

Physical health has been mentioned. With regard to the ageing process, I wonder what evidence has been looked at on mental well-being and fitness for particular roles as age kicks in. I want to be clear: that is not to say that every older worker's physical health or mental well-being will deteriorate beyond the point of their being able to perform their job. Everyone will have a different experience. Again, even when we talk about firefighters, sometimes the term "fitness" can be misleading. People think that it is maybe just the case that somebody has

not been doing the proper training. It is about the wear and tear and the physical injuries that people can suffer over their career and how they can affect their fitness to do the job, rather than the basic understanding that we may have of the term "fitness". Therefore, I would like to see more research. I am aware that NHS research on the Longer Working Review, I think it is, has not concluded. I will wait to see that research. There needs to be scope in secondary legislation that gives us flexibility to respond to the evidence as it comes forward.

I said that there are other ways to add up the numbers. That is where I am concerned that the Bill has perhaps not done enough to look at other options, particularly the macroeconomics of some discussions. We have the figures that were presented by the Government and the Department here on these proposals. However, we do not have figures on the alternatives, which makes it hard to consider and make decisions that take into account all possibilities. So, whilst much has been made of the cost that the increase in life expectancy has added to pensions, little has been made of the cost of the potential increase in youth unemployment through people working longer and to an older age. Undoubtedly, there will be a knock-on effect. It is not quite as simple as one person works longer and another person does not get employed; I accept that. However, there is no doubt that, if more people work later in life, it will have an effect on youth employment. There will, of course, be an associated cost if there is a resultant increase in youth unemployment.

Other figures have not been factored into the calculations and have not been presented, such as the increases that we gain in productivity through improved innovation in technology. We never hear about the benefits of that, such as working less and increased output. There is no doubt that there have been and are year-on-year productivity increases. Over the past number of decades, the workforce has been increasing not just through population growth, which, of course, means an increased requirement for pensions, but through a change in culture, whereby we have shifted from a scenario where the norm was that one adult per household worked to the expectation now that two adults per household will work. Nobody says, "Because of the increased numbers joining the labour force, let us factor in the increased contribution to the pension pot and see what savings we are making". Those figures do not fit the agenda of either the Westminster Government or the Executive here, so they are less talked about and less transparent.

As I say, I welcome the amendments in this group. I am not wedded to the SDLP or Sinn Féin proposals, although others discussed their merits. However, I believe that the principle of keeping the retirement age at 65 and 60 for firefighters and police officers is correct. Again, other imaginative solutions could have been looked at in the Bill, such as moving away from the cut-off point of a set retirement age. Tapering retirement, reducing working hours and staging the introduction of pension payments are more creative ways of allowing those who wish to and can stay on at work to do so while allowing those who may be unfit to retire at a reasonable age and live out a reasonable retirement. Again, I come back to the issue of health inequality between the regions. If the pension age is increased to 68 and your life expectancy is 73, that is not what I consider to be a full and fulfilling retirement deserved by someone who has worked all their life. As

I see it, some people can, will and should work longer because that is what they wish to do, but I do not believe that we should punish those who cannot do so for reasons of ill health or unfitness to work.

We need a pensions Bill that is realistic, affordable and serves the common good. I believe that the unamended Bill ticks only one of those boxes. The amendments in this group bring us closer to ticking all three boxes and will make a significant improvement to the Bill, though they will certainly not right all its wrongs.

Mr Attwood: I am not inclined to look to the Bible for guidance about what I should say on many matters, but I have to say to those on the Benches opposite that they have now had their road to Damascus conversion moment. It was not very long ago that Ministers from the party opposite were, as has been conceded today by a number of Members, arguing for a legislative consent motion when it came to pension legislation. Yet, we hear this afternoon — I welcome these comments, which were genuinely made by Mr Girvan — that the fact that we did not go by a legislative consent motion but, rather, through the full Committee process has been, to use his word, worthwhile.

6.30 pm

My question is to the current Minister of Finance. Given that his previous boss, as Minister of Finance, was the person who argued for an LCM when it came to pensions legislation, was that the advice that he gave to the then Minister of Finance, given that he was Assembly Private Secretary at the time? Was the advice of the current Minister, if he gave any advice to the then Minister on this legislation, to proceed by way of an LCM? I am prepared to give way to the Minister of Finance if he wants to answer that question, once he has finished his conversation with his current Assembly Private Secretary. It is a question that deserves a bit of an answer. We will wait to hear if one is forthcoming.

The point I make is this: in this year of all years, when there will be a vote on independence in Scotland in the autumn and a conversation at that time around “devo max” as a way forward for enhancing the powers of the devolved arrangements, in Northern Ireland, in Britain, it seems to me — it was revealed, in my view, by the attitude of the former Minister of Finance — that there is not a “devo max” approach in this part of these islands. There is actually a “devo minus” approach. When it comes to fundamental issues of public policy and the needs of citizens and communities, the attitude of some, displayed by the previous Minister of Finance around this legislation, is not “devo max” but “devo less”. That is why I welcome the Damascus conversion that we have heard this afternoon from the DUP Benches, where legislation that was fundamental to the interests of our citizens and our workers was not treated by way of an LCM but was subject to the full interrogation of the Assembly processes. That is why it is an important question to ask the Minister of Finance. What was his view, previously, in relation to this legislation? Was it to proceed by the LCM model or by way of full scrutiny?

That point is also confirmed by the considered comments made by Mr McLaughlin, who essentially asked whether some flexibility should be built into primary legislation that deals with and touches on fundamental issues of public policy, when it comes to the future approach being

taken by this devolved Administration. That was the essential question that he put to the Minister of Finance. He expressed disappointment that we were not going to build into the body of this primary legislation the flexibility to deal with future events that might require that flexibility. If we are taking this legislation — it appears from what the DUP has said that it is prepared to build into the primary legislation flexibility when it comes to the interests of firefighters — why are we not taking the opportunity, as argued by Mr McLaughlin, to build into it the option of flexibility when it comes to future categories of workers? Is it not the case that there are probably a lot of Ministers and MPs in Westminster, at the moment, who regret that they did not build that flexibility into the primary legislation in the Public Service Pensions Act 2013? Is that not why the Fire Brigades Union is now on strike? It does not agree with the primary legislation that has seen its workers disadvantaged in Britain, just as we are going to advantage them here in this legislation, if the amendment that has been proposed is accepted.

In Britain, they have closed the doors on flexibility. We are arguing — it seems to have been accepted on the Floor — that there will be flexibility when it comes to at least one or two categories of workers. Why are we not building future flexibility into the legislation? Is it not common sense? Would it not show some loyalty to categories of workers who might need that in the future? If we accept the point of principle about flexibility now, why do we not give ourselves a general power of flexibility in future? We are closing the door on categories of workers who might need our support in the future. In that way, we pass legislation that is in one way anti-worker, because it does not legislate for future circumstances. The point from Mr McLaughlin was well made in that regard.

I do not know whether this point is unparliamentary. If it is unparliamentary, I withdraw it in advance. There was an intervention from the First Minister earlier. I do not want to second-guess the man, but he was probably one of those who argued for a legislative consent motion previously on this legislation. He intervened and made a pretty typical sneering remark — if that is unparliamentary, I withdraw it — about the position of the SDLP on amendment Nos 1 and 2. When I was a Minister, I advised my group to vote in ways contrary to the way in which I was voting when it came to legislation, because, although I had a departmental responsibility that I was prepared to honour, the party, from a position of integrity, would take a different position. Perhaps those principles of some honour and integrity are foreign to one or two Members on the opposite Benches, and, if that is unparliamentary, I withdraw that remark as well. *[Laughter.]* You can, as a party, have a position of integrity that means that you do not slavishly follow the view of your Minister, and too right. If we end up in a situation in the Chamber and in our society in which we do not encourage the right to dissent when there is much to dissent from, we are not in a very good or healthy place when it comes to our parliamentary democracy. In any case, put that all aside. I do not take it from the First Minister when he gets to his feet to make sneering comments, given his approach to certain issues. The point is relevant, Mr Speaker. I will come back to the Bill, because I know that I am probably testing your patience again.

I remember reporting to the Executive about the efforts being made to protect the jobs up in Coleraine. I remember

the First Minister, in a sneering way, looking at me and saying, "Well, won't that be a bit of a waste of time?" That was two and a half years ago, and we are still fighting to save the jobs in the DVA. God knows, perhaps this month we will win that battle — we will know very soon — because of the good work done by the current Minister. When somebody gets up on his hind feet, makes remarks and does not recognise the value of dissent —

Mr Speaker: As the Member and other Members will know, when it comes to Bills, I give Members quite a bit of latitude. I am trying to help the Member, but he should come back to the amendments under discussion.

Mr Attwood: To conclude on that matter, perhaps Mr Hamilton, as Finance Minister, might want to be a bit more cautious about tipping off the First Minister about what is happening in the Chamber. Sometimes things come back in your face.

I have said in the Chamber before that the Finance Minister is more thoughtful than his predecessor. He demonstrated that in some of the funding decisions that he has made — not what he did on pillar 1 and pillar 2, but what he did with heritage-led development moneys, for example. Why do we not build into the legislation a bit of flexibility so that in future we can protect workers who need protection? I want to know whether he has crossed the Rubicon, the Rubicon in this case being that legislative consent motions should be an option used in only a very restricted way. They should certainly not be an option for significant issues of public policy, never mind a pensions Bill.

Mr Hamilton: I will do my best to address some of the specifics of the amendments, and my comments will be in stark contrast to those of the Member who spoke previously. However, before I do, I want to pick up on a point that I think will be useful. I will reiterate some of the points that other Members made about the context. I think that Mrs Cochrane was the first person to elaborate on the context in which we find not just this group of amendments but the entirety of the Bill. There are two contexts: one is that people are, thankfully, living longer lives, which is a good thing, but related to that is affordability.

In moving the amendment, Mr Bradley spoke about the Bill being foisted on me. Whether it has been foisted on me or is everything that I would want it to be, I am sure that the Member will understand that many pieces of legislation come before the House that have their roots in or owe their origins to parity. One way or another, they may not always be everything that we would want them to be. However, we are where we are, and, whether the Bill has been foisted on me, on the House or on Northern Ireland and its public sector workers, we have to recognise the context that people are living longer lives. That then has a knock-on impact on affordability and on the economic situation that our nation finds itself in. The intention of this legislation, whether one likes it or not, is in part to make pensions affordable for everyone in the longer term and not to take a short-term view on affordability, which is, of course, a critical matter.

Many Members raised costings. Mr McLaughlin, who is unfortunately not here at the minute, raised that matter, as did Mr Bradley, along with some other Members. At some cost to itself, which Mr McLaughlin acknowledged, the Department of Finance and Personnel commissioned two actuarial studies of the recurring annual costs of delay

or failure to make the required reforms. It is worth noting that the latest study showed a total cost of £300 million, of which £110 million was attributed to the health and social care scheme, £60 million to the teachers' scheme, £60 million to the principal civil service scheme, £10 million to the fire and rescue scheme and £60 million to the PSNI scheme. The fact is that there would be a penalty. We could have some debate about the quantum of that penalty, although it would not get us very far. However, when he spoke on behalf of the Committee, the Chair acknowledged that these were costs that:

"Treasury has confirmed it will apply".

Although we do not have —

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for giving way. For clarity, when you say "penalty", you are referring to money that would come out of our block grant. However, am I right in saying that it would go to the people in Northern Ireland who would receive those pensions, so it would be offset to some extent? Perhaps I have got that wrong, but I am happy to receive clarification.

Mr Hamilton: It would not be offset, because it would, as the Member rightly identified, come off our block grant. If we were to continue to pay pensions at the same rate, we would have to find that money, whether it is £262 million, £300 million or whatever it may be, from elsewhere in the block grant. The consequence of that would have an effect on public services. That point has been somewhat missed. We can talk about it, and it can get quite emotional; indeed, some people spoke quite emotionally about some members of public services and the work that they do. One recognises that, of course, but, in some ways, this is a moot debate, given that there is general acceptance that penalties would apply. Had we not proceeded, the impact of those penalties would be seriously detrimental to public services in Northern Ireland, with very little additional benefit.

Finally on this point, the fact we do not have absolute ironclad certainty about what the cost would be does not mean that we should dismiss the cost issue. Whether the figure is £262 million or £300 million, it seems quite a lot to me. In that sense, it is an important point to remember, although perhaps it is in an immaterial debate.

It will be no surprise that I oppose all the amendments to clause 10 that have been tabled. I note that we have had a wide-ranging debate on this important clause. The clause has two main elements: the linking of normal or scheme pension age to state pension age; and the pension age for the parts of the public sector that are exceptions to that provision, namely, the police pension scheme. It is worth noting that the police were always separate, and the amendment does not give any additional or new provision for them than the Bill already provides. There is, of course, the much-mentioned fire and rescue pension scheme. I welcome the fact that many Members have spoken against the amendments. Members are clearly more sympathetic to firefighters — I understand that sympathy — and they have taken a stance on the issue through their support of amendment Nos 10 and/or 11.

6.45 pm

I will deal with the issue of linking normal scheme pension age to state pension age first. This relates to amendment Nos 8, 9 and 12. I want to be clear on the purpose of the

Bill and on the provisions in clause 10 for scheme pension age specifically. I hope that these points will concentrate Members' minds on how unreasonable it would be for them to consider supporting amendment Nos 8, 9 and 12.

The purpose of clause 10 is to safeguard good, sustainable pension schemes so that, as I mentioned, they can continue to provide decent retirement income for public service workers in the longer term and do so in ways that are fair for all public service workers and are affordable to the taxpayer. To achieve that there is a compelling requirement for a number of actions to be taken now. We need to adapt scheme pension ages to take account of trends for increased life expectancy and manage rising public service pension costs. Why do we need to do that now? The actions must be taken to ensure the continuing viability and existence of public service pension schemes. As I and others have noted, people are living longer, which means that public service pensions are being paid for much longer than was expected when the schemes were designed. The evidence was examined in detail by the Independent Public Service Pensions Commission in its extensive review of UK public service pensions, which was carried out between June 2010 and March 2012.

Many of the current public service pension design features, including pension ages, date back nearly 200 years. In 1841, someone who reached the age of 60 might expect to live a further 14 years on average, but most did not. By the early 1970s, when some elements of pension scheme design were reformed, the life expectancy of a 60-year-old had increased to an extra 18 years. At the time of the Hutton interim review of public service pension provisions in 2010, it had risen again to around 28 years more. As you would expect, the cost of providing pension benefits has also been increasing. Figures highlighted by Lord Hutton in his review show that, by 2010, the cost of public service pensions in the UK had risen by more than a third over the previous 10 years to £32 billion a year. I think that that was a point that Mrs Cochrane made. The bulk of the extra cost has fallen directly to the taxpayer.

The case for increasing longevity and the need for change in the normal pension age has been recognised in the state pension system. The state pension age is due to reach 65 for men and women in 2018 and rise to 66 by 2020 and 67 by 2028. Some of us are wondering whether we will ever get to state retirement age. The state pension age is being increased beyond 65 across the European Union. For example, in the Republic of Ireland the state pension was standardised at 66 from 1 January and is being increased to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028. In France, the retirement age will increase from 65 to 67 between 2006 and 2018, and the retirement age in Germany is continually increasing and will reach 67 by 2029. Italy and Spain are increasing in a similar vein and will reach a pension age of 67 by 2021 and 2027 respectively.

It will not be sufficient to set scheme pension ages for the public service at 65. For most of the existing schemes, the pension age for new entrants was changed to 65 over five years ago. Past reviews and reform measures have not been sufficiently rigorous in meeting the requirements for sustainability in the future. The early reforms did not fully address all the underlying pressures of cost, including increased longevity, in providing public service pensions. Rather, the focus was on changing provisions for new

entrants and not existing members. That was clearly not going to provide for the fundamental reform that is now necessary.

This is not in any way a new issue. Members have been made fully aware that there would be inevitable and significant financial consequences of diverging from the policy to link scheme pension age with state pension age in line with the recommendations of the Hutton commission and the general policy that was announced by the coalition Government in Budget 2011.

The policy to link public service pension ages to the state pension age is already established in the remainder of the UK in the Public Service Pensions Act 2013 and has already been agreed in Northern Ireland by the Executive.

The Executive considered the issue and took a fully informed and binding decision on the overall reform policy to link scheme pension age with the normal pension age on 8 March 2012. The Executive also agreed to implement those reforms consistently with the equivalent schemes in Great Britain.

The provisions in clause 10 are also now a core requirement for each of the new public service pension schemes in Great Britain, which will take effect in April of this year and April 2015. Historically, the provisions in our equivalent public service schemes have always been virtually identical to those schemes. Any divergence from the policy in clause 10 would therefore be contrary to the Executive's agreed policy on pension reform of 8 March 2012.

Any amendment to clause 10 that means spending more on public service pensions in Northern Ireland in ways that are more generous than the public service provisions that apply in the rest of the UK will have direct and inevitable financial implications for the Northern Ireland funding made available from HM Treasury. There would be a consequential diversion of available funding from important public services, which I believe the Assembly will be unable to justify to the electorate in the long term.

We must take similarly responsible and forward-looking decisions for the Northern Ireland public service schemes in line with those already taken for public service schemes in the United Kingdom generally in order to manage the inevitable costs associated with increased longevity, safeguard decent and sustainable pension provision in the longer term and ensure that the cost of schemes cannot be made a drain on valuable resources that are required to fund the important services delivered through our public service.

Under this clause, normal scheme pension ages will only be set at the same levels that apply to other public service workers in the United Kingdom and to the vast majority of non-public service workers generally who must already work to the state pension age.

No one will be compelled to work to the state pension age under the legislation. Clause 10 sets the high-level requirement based on the published evidence for increasing longevity, the recognised need to manage costs and the recommendations of the independent commission on guaranteeing sustainable schemes.

The Bill makes important provision for scope at the secondary legislation stage for flexibilities in the design of each scheme to suit individual workforces. It will accommodate those who wish to retire earlier and provide

options for early departure with minimal disadvantage for those who are unable to work to normal pension age.

The Bill already makes adequate provision for flexibilities at scheme level — this is a point that was missed entirely by the last Member to speak — to allow evidence-based decisions to be taken on early departures in cases where employees may be unable to remain in service until the normal pension age specified in clause 10.

This is framework legislation, which contains the high-level requirement for the public service in general. That is an important point. The appropriate arenas for the consideration of scheme flexibilities to suit individual workforces, including the provision of options to accommodate existing staff who wish to retire earlier and for early departure with minimal disadvantages for those who are unable to work to normal pension age, are scheme level discussions with employee representatives at the secondary legislation stage.

Even with the unavoidable changes in pension age, the public sector defined benefit schemes will still be among the best available and will be significantly more valuable to workers than the defined contribution offerings that are generally the only choice available to private sector workers. The majority of private sector workers would jump at the chance to join a defined benefit career average employer funded pension scheme. Niki Cleal, the director of the Pensions Policy Institute, said in respect of the changes that are being proposed:

“even after the Coalition’s proposed reforms the benefit offered by all four of the largest public service pension schemes remains more valuable, on average, than the pension benefit offered by Defined Contribution (DC) schemes that are now most commonly offered to employees in the private sector”.

Not everyone in the public service will be affected by clause 10. The Bill contains important and valuable transitional protections, which will benefit those public servants in service who are closest to retirement. Under clause 18, those within 10 years of their current normal scheme pension age as of April 2012 will see no change. For those up to four years outside the 10-year limit, there is an additional sliding scale of protection, where staff can remain in their previous arrangements for an extended transitional period. It is undeniably a time of change for some, but the changes to scheme pension age are long-sighted, evidence-based and necessary to guarantee decent retirement incomes for a generation of public servants in schemes that are fair, affordable and sustainable.

The policy intent of the Bill is to put in place the steps needed to have sustainable public service pension schemes. By providing for career average rather than final salary schemes, the Bill will mean that some of the higher-paid, who traditionally benefited from having moved up the promotion ladder, may not be so well off in retirement. However, a career average scheme is beneficial to lower-paid staff who, in some sectors, tend not to benefit from promotion opportunities. In final salary schemes, those with rapid salary progression could benefit up to twice as much per £100 of pension contributions paid into the scheme than lower-paid staff with a flatter salary profile through their working life. This is relevant as it is an example of how the Bill, along with the move from final

salary to career average, also sets fairer and sustainable parameters for the payment of public service pensions. This is critical to the costs that we, as taxpayers, all fund for public service pension schemes.

There is no rationale — and certainly none that I have heard today — for treating public sector workers differently from those in the private sector, many of whom depend on their state pension and do not have an occupational pension. Those in the fishing industry, for example, will have to work until they get their state pension, along with many in other strenuous physical and demanding occupations, such as farmers.

On those important points, I ask the Assembly to strongly oppose amendment Nos 8, 9 and 12.

I turn to the issue of amendment Nos 10 and 11, which deal more specifically with firefighters. Clause 10 will not set a link with state pension age for all sectors. This is a point that has been missed entirely: for all firefighters recruited since 6 April 2006, the current pension age is already 60. Clause 10 includes provisions to retain that position. Amendment No 10 would mean that firefighters would have a normal pension age not exceeding 60 but not less than 55. Amendment No 11 seeks to amend the wording so that the normal pension age would be no more than 60; however, that amendment does not specify a requirement to set a lower limit. Although I have issues with both — and I want to come to some of those considerations and issues in a moment — I consider amendment No 11 to be poorly drafted because it sets no lower limit. That being the case, amendment No 10 is a better amendment.

However, I want to address some considerations and issues not taken into account so far in the debate. I want to highlight them not least because those issues will be part of the discussion that will take place at the stage of secondary legislation. Any proposed amendment to the Bill to provide for an earlier normal pension age for firefighters in primary legislation would introduce a conflicting and regressive provision to the current requirement. There would inevitably be a financial penalty in Northern Ireland funding from Her Majesty’s Treasury if the retirement age for firefighters is less than 60, as it will be 60 in England, Scotland and Wales, with effect from April 2015. Once again, I want to emphasise that, in 2006, the retirement age for firefighters joining the service in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland changed to 60.

We all acknowledge, as many Members have done already, that firefighters perform a vital role in the emergency services. There are obvious public safety issues that mean that standards of fitness for the role for those in the Fire and Rescue Service should be in place and should be met. Where there might be age-related factors or concerns about possible correlations between pension age and fitness, it is right that they should be investigated and subject to regular review. However, the available evidence does not support a change to the current pension age of 60 for firefighters. The latest review of firefighters’ pension age was published in a report by Dr Anthony Williams in January 2013. The Williams report made numerous recommendations concerning a future fitness regime in the fire services across the UK but, importantly and interestingly, it did not recommend a change to the current pension age of 60 for firefighters.

The main recommendations contained in that report included: the establishment of a common measure for fitness standards across all the United Kingdom fire services; regular fitness training and fitness assessments for all fire and rescue services to ensure that fitness for role is maintained; and that fire services should consider informing applicants at recruitment that those whose fitness is close to a predetermined threshold are unlikely to maintain fitness to normal pension age unless they are able to increase their level of physical activity and/or reduce their body mass index. The Williams report has quite rightly, therefore, identified that, for the future regime for firefighters, fitness assessment and maintenance must be the fundamental guiding principle, not age.

7.00 pm

The Williams report does recognise that there will be firefighters now in service who will have difficulty maintaining fitness to the current normal pension age of 60. It makes recommendations for terms for early payment of pension benefits to be incorporated in pension schemes at secondary legislation to accommodate scheme members who may leave service before the normal scheme pension age as a consequence of failure to meet the required fitness standards.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service introduced fitness testing in 2011. To date, one firefighter in the age range 55 to 60, and I understand that 34 firefighters are in that age range, initially failed the fitness test but subsequently met the standard having been provided with a personal fitness regime.

Mr Agnew said something along the lines — and I apologise if I am misquoting him — that we cannot have someone who is not fit to do the job doing a job. Of course, I agree with that, and nothing in this Bill will change the fact that people who are unfit to work can be medically retired. That is not affected at all, so it is not right to say that this legislation would mean that those who were unfit would be forced to work up to retirement age.

The intention of the Williams report is to introduce a standard capability test for firefighters across the UK. Under the Public Service Pensions Bill, a proportion of this group will benefit from transitional protections provided for at clause 18 and will, therefore, see no change in their expected pension age.

For existing employees who do not qualify for transitional protection, the approach taken in the Bill provides scope for the development of scheme designs for firefighters at the secondary legislation stage that are in line with the recommendations made in the Williams report to provide options for early retirement with minimal financial reduction to accommodate those now in service who may no longer meet the fitness requirement to the normal pension age. The appropriate stage for finalising this scheme design is through consultations with trade unions at the secondary legislation stage for the individual firefighters' scheme.

Discussions have already been taking place on this important issue between Department of Health officials and member representatives for the firefighters' scheme. I received an assurance in writing from Minister Poots. I am glad that Mr McLaughlin is back in the Chamber because he talked about seeking to finally engage with the firefighters' union to find innovative and imaginative

solutions to the problem. I can assure him and the House that correspondence that I received from Minister Poots confirms that officials and representatives of the firefighters' pension scheme have engaged in positive discussions. I would encourage those discussions to continue so that, at secondary stage, the flexibilities and imaginative and innovative solutions that he was talking about, so long as they are within the overall cost envelope of the scheme, can be arrived at. That is something that I want to see. However, I can confirm that Mr Poots is firmly committed to ensuring that the proposals for the 2015 firefighters' pension scheme provide the best possible outcome for local firefighters, and he has communicated this to the Fire Brigades Union. Consultation is continuing between officials and the FBU.

As I highlighted, secondary legislation stage will provide scope for my colleague Minister Poots to consider what variations might be possible and appropriate for the firefighters' schemes. At this stage, variances can be accounted for within the overall cost envelope for the firefighters' pension scheme. Members should note that normal pension age for firefighters will remain subject to regular reviews. The Williams report recommended that the next review of firefighters' pension age should be undertaken once fitness standards for fire services across the United Kingdom are determined and sufficient data collected to measure the effect of implementing those standards. The report states that it is unlikely that the next review will have sufficient data until at least 2016.

It would be premature to pre-empt the outcome of that review by introducing in primary legislation an unnecessary and prohibitively costly amendment to the current normal scheme pension age for firefighters, especially one that cannot be justified by the current expert opinion on this important matter. For those reasons, I ask the Assembly to consider those points and to oppose those amendments.

I reiterate the point that where there are compelling reasons or evidence to review scheme pension age at the primary legislation stage for any employment sector in the future, this should be fully considered. However, there is currently no evidence-based justification to depart from the agreed general policy that clause 10 gives effect to.

There is adequate flexibility in the Bill to allow evidence-based decisions to be taken at scheme level to accommodate current employees who, for whatever reasons, may be unwilling or unable to remain in service until the normal pension age specified at clause 10. For those reasons, the amendments to clause 10 should be opposed.

Mr Rogers: The SDLP welcomes today's opportunity to discuss the Public Service Pensions Bill. From the outset, we argued that it was not acceptable to simply apply legislative consent to a Westminster Bill. That has been acknowledged by Members across the Floor. The SDLP believes that the Northern Ireland Assembly was correct to take the opportunity to fully scrutinise the legislation, which proposes such major reform to public sector pensions. That said, if we fail to make any changes to the Bill as initially drafted, we might as well sing karaoke to Westminster legislation, to paraphrase what my colleague Mark Durkan said. This is something that we cannot support. Our three MPs in Westminster — Alasdair McDonnell, Mark Durkan and Margaret Ritchie — have all

fought against the damaging nature of the Bill as it passed through the Commons.

There has been a lot of debate here today, so I will now take us back to some of the points made by Mr Bradley earlier. The cost of the Bill to the people of Northern Ireland could be significant, both directly through the impact on public sector workers and indirectly on the rest of the population as a result of the damage to our economy. Unfortunately, the Minister has not seen fit to adequately scrutinise the impact on Northern Ireland. It is because of those failures and the likely negative impact that we seek, through amendment Nos 8 and 12, to retain the pension age and deferred pension age at 65.

I acknowledge that Sinn Féin, through amendment No 9, has also attempted to alleviate the impact of the Bill. However, its amendment ties the public sector pension age to the rising state pension age, unless a future Minister wants to decide otherwise. I declare an interest as a member of the teachers' pension scheme. This provides no recognition of the fact that many public sector workers, such as teachers and nurses, to name but two groups, work in particularly physically, mentally or emotionally demanding jobs, and so should have their normal pension age capped at a lower age.

A lot of people talked about the reality of the situation, but the reality of the situation for teachers is that they will have to work for 42 years to get a full pension. We must think of the consequences on teachers' health and the stress that it would cause if a 66- or 67-year-old teacher were in the classroom. Although many people would be quite capable at that age, we have to consider the quality of education for our children. We also have to empower our young teachers. Where are they going to get jobs?

Amendment Nos 10 and 11 deal with specific concerns regarding police and firefighters. Those are two groups that undoubtedly work in particularly physically, mentally and emotionally demanding jobs and so should have their normal pension age capped at a lower age. The Minister talked about fitness assessments. You can have all the fitness assessments you like, Minister, but when people reach the age of 60, they do not have the same limb capacity to go up and down ladders etc. I am glad to say that Sinn Féin's amendment supports the intention of the SDLP amendments, and we will be happy to support it. That said, it is astonishing that the Minister cannot see fit to acknowledge the particular arguments made around the Chamber for firefighters.

I congratulate all the contributors to the debate today. Many common themes came out. Flexibility was mentioned by many Members. The Minister did not rise to my colleague Alex Attwood's challenge, so I will ask him the same question again: why are we not building flexibility into this system? We need future flexibility.

Other comments were about life expectancy. I acknowledge the comment from Steven Agnew that the amendments that the SDLP and Sinn Féin have put have helped to move the Bill forward.

Question put, That amendment No 8 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 39; Noes 48.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Eastwood and Mrs D Kelly.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCreagh, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment No 9 proposed: In page 6, line 16, at end insert

"(1A) Subsection (1) does not apply in relation to a person under a scheme under section 1 whose normal pension age is specified by scheme regulations for the scheme.

The normal pension age for such a person must be the age specified by the scheme regulations; and such regulations may specify any age less than state pension age, but not less than 65."— [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin.]

Question put, That amendment No 9 be made.

Mr Speaker: I have been advised by the party Whips that, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b), there is agreement that we can dispense with the three minutes and move straight to the Division.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 38; Noes 48.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan and Ms Ruane.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland,

Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment No 10 made: In page 6, line 17, leave out subsection (2) and insert

“(2) Subsection (1) does not apply in relation to fire and rescue workers who are firefighters.

The normal pension age for such persons under a scheme under section 1 must be the age specified by the scheme regulations for the scheme; and such regulations may specify any age not exceeding 60, but not less than 55.

(2A) Subsection (1) does not apply in relation to members of the police service.

The normal pension age for such persons under a scheme under section 1 must be 60.”— [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin.]

Mr Speaker: I will not call amendment No 11 as it is mutually exclusive to amendment No 10, which was made.

Amendment No 12 proposed: In page 6, leave out lines 24 to 33 and insert “65.”— *[Mr D Bradley.]*

Question put, That amendment No 12 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 39; Noes 48.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Eastwood and Mrs D Kelly.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 10, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 11 (Valuations)

Mr Speaker: We now come to the third group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 13, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 14 and 15 and amendment Nos 17 to 21. Members should note that amendment No 14 is consequential to amendment No 13 and that amendment Nos 19 and 20 are consequential to amendment No 18. I call the Minister of Finance and Personnel to move amendment No 13 and to address all the other amendments in the group.

Mr Hamilton: I beg to move amendment No 13: In page 7, line 27, at end insert

“(4A) Before giving directions under this section the Department of Finance and Personnel must consult such persons (or representatives of such persons) as appear to the Department likely to be affected by the directions.”

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 14: In page 7, line 31, leave out “(4)” and insert “(4A)”.— *[Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]*

No 15: In clause 12, page 8, line 30, at end insert

“(10) Before giving directions or making regulations under this section the Department of Finance and Personnel must consult such persons (or representatives of such persons) as appear to the Department likely to be affected by the directions or regulations.”— [Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

No 17: In clause 14, page 9, line 24, after “is” insert “a”.— *[Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]*

No 18: In clause 18, page 11, line 26, at end insert

“(5A) Scheme regulations may also provide for exceptions to subsection (1) in the case of
(a) persons who were members of a public body pension scheme specified in the regulations, or who were eligible to be members of such a scheme, immediately before 1 April 2012, and
(b) such other persons as the regulations may specify, being persons who before that date had ceased to be members of a scheme referred to in paragraph (a) or to be eligible for membership of such a scheme.”— [Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

No 19: In clause 18, page 11, line 27, after “(5)” insert “or (5A)”.— *[Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]*

No 20: In clause 18, page 11, line 37, after “(5)” insert “, (5A)”.— *[Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]*

No 21: In clause 24, page 13, line 34, leave out from “if” to the end of line 3 on page 14.— *[Mr D Bradley.]*

Mr Hamilton: With amendment No 13, I will also speak to amendment Nos 14 — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. Leave the Chamber in an orderly fashion.

Mr Hamilton: With it, I will speak to amendment Nos 14 and 15 and amendment Nos 17 to 21. Amendment No 13, which relates to clause 11 on valuations, will introduce a requirement for consultation with members and/or member representatives on directions for valuations before being made. Amendment No 14 is a technical consequence to amendment No 13. This is a new provision. The Department of Finance and Personnel agreed this position to consult on the new directions during its engagements with stakeholders, including trade union representatives, on the collective consultation working group for the Bill. The DFP function in making these directions is equivalent to that carried out by Her Majesty's Treasury for the public service schemes in Great Britain made under the Public Service Pensions Act 2013. The directions deal with the technical processes for how and when valuations are carried out, the type of data used and relevant demographic assumptions used to inform them. The amendment has been welcomed by trade unions and the Committee for Finance and Personnel. It evidences the Department of Finance and Personnel's commitment to good practice in departmental consultation processes.

I move to amendment No 15, which is to clause 12. Similar to amendment No 13, amendment No 15 will introduce a requirement at clause 12 for consultation with members or member representatives on directions and cost cap regulations before being made. Again, these directions and regulations deal with the technical processes for cost controls in schemes equivalent to those that will be made by Her Majesty's Treasury for the schemes made under the Public Service Pensions Act 2013. The Department of Finance and Personnel agreed this position to consult on the new directions during its engagements with stakeholders, including trade unions, on the collective consultation working group for the Bill, and the change has been welcomed by the trade unions and the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

I move to amendment No 17, which is a wholly technical amendment to clause 14, and it deals with information about benefits and corrects a drafting error. The amendment inserts the letter "a" where it has been omitted at clause 14(1). Given that we have had some contentious debate, I trust that this one does not prove contentious.

I move to amendment Nos 18, 19 and 20, which are to clause 18 on the restriction of existing pension schemes. Amendment No 18 is technical and will ensure that appropriate transitional protections are given in the new Civil Service scheme where members transfer into that scheme from a public body scheme. Amendments Nos 19 and 20 are technical consequences of amendment No 18. Amendment No 18 and the consequential amendments Nos 19 and 20 correspond with equivalent amendments that will be made to the Westminster Public Service Pensions Act 2013. The policy, both in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, permits some of the pension schemes operated by smaller public bodies to access into the new Civil Service pension scheme. Where these smaller schemes are admitted to the new Civil Service pension scheme, this amendment will allow members to receive the appropriate transitional protections available to other scheme members.

The change is in line with the reform principle to make the Civil Service pension scheme more accessible generally and to remove the need for smaller public bodies to set

up and maintain their own pension schemes. Amendment Nos 18 to 20 ensure that new members that transfer into the scheme are not disadvantaged when it comes to transitional protections.

7.45 pm

Amendment No 21 was tabled to clause 24. The clause deals with the legislative procedure for making secondary legislation for public service pension schemes. We debated the issue earlier, so I do not intend to rehearse all the arguments at this stage in proceedings, suffice it to say that negative resolution is entirely appropriate to deal with the issue.

I ask the Assembly to support all seven DFP amendments in the group, which are amendment Nos 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19 and 20, and to oppose amendment No 21.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Given the concerns that were raised in evidence about the need for DFP's regulatory powers in the Bill to be tempered with robust consultation requirements, the Committee pressed the Department on making further enhancements in that regard. Officials subsequently notified the Committee of the Minister's intention to table amendment No 15 to clause 12, which would require the Department to consult with relevant stakeholders before exercising the direction and regulation-making powers under the clause. Although not sighted on the Minister's amendments to clause 11— amendment Nos 13 and 14 — the Committee would no doubt also welcome the duty to consult being applied to the direction-making powers of DFP on the valuation provisions in clause 11. Again, that addresses a concern that was raised by the Committee about why clause 11 as drafted requires DFP to consult only with the Government Actuary.

As it pointed out in its report on the Bill, the Committee will monitor the practical outworking of the duty to consult, with careful scrutiny, including at the SL1 stage of the secondary legislation process, of the extent and outcome of the consultation that is undertaken on proposed regulations arising from the Bill. There will be an expectation that the Department will follow the Gunning principles as a good-practice approach to consulting on proposed statutory rules and directions.

As to amendment No 17, following the conclusion of the Bill's Committee Stage, the Department wrote to the Committee to confirm that the Minister would table an amendment to correct a typographical error in clause 14 that had been identified by the Committee. The Department also indicated that it intended to table amendments to clause 18 and explained the rationale for that. I am, however, unable to convey an agreed Committee position on those amendments, because, owing to the timing, it did not have the opportunity to consider the Department's correspondence.

Finally, on amendment No 21 to clause 24, which was tabled by the SDLP, although the Committee has not considered it, I perhaps should provide some background on the Committee's deliberations on the clause. The Committee noted that clause 24 requires the affirmative resolution procedure only for scheme regulations that amend primary legislation; that make retrospective amendments that appear to the responsible authority to have significant adverse effects for scheme members; or

that relate to holders of judicial office. The clause therefore applies the negative resolution procedure in any other case.

Arising from its consideration of whether the Bill provides for sufficient checks and balances on departmental powers to make pension scheme changes under subordinate legislation, the Committee noted that there is a balance to be struck in requiring the higher level of Assembly scrutiny, in the form of affirmative procedure, for subordinate legislation to deal with more substantive and potentially controversial issues, while avoiding the inefficient use of plenary sitting time to debate minor or routine changes. DFP also emphasised that, under the negative resolution procedure, Committees or individual Members would have the option to table a motion for annulment to pray against scheme changes that have given rise to concerns. In that regard, however, for clause 24, the Committee recommends that stakeholders, including trade unions, that have concerns with any future scheme changes ensure that those are brought to the attention of the applicable Committee at the earliest opportunity.

The Committee called for further assurance from DFP that it will observe the 21-day rule for any proposals that it makes for negative resolution regulations that make scheme changes under the Bill. As such, the Committee is likely to welcome the Minister's recent assurances that it is the Department's intention to observe the rule, and, as is highlighted in the Committee's report, I advise other applicable Committees to seek similar assurances on the issue from their respective Department.

Mr McQuillan: I support the amendments in group 3, with the exception of amendment No 21. The Bill represents a significant change to public service pensions in the United Kingdom and ensures parity with the rest of the United Kingdom, which is something that I am very keen to maintain. I support the Minister in his endeavours to see that this legislation sees the light of day. I appreciate that some may take issue with some of what is in the Bill. However, I welcome the amendments that the Minister and, indeed, the Committee tabled. Although some in the House may not be happy with all aspects of the Bill, I believe that we, as a Committee, have struck the right balance and added our own perspective to the Bill.

I welcome that the Bill will allow for the existence of a single universal pension scheme in the Civil Service and the public service, because, at present, there is some variation across the service, with some organisations having their own schemes. I feel that it is important that we have a universal scheme for all public servants. That makes it fairer for all who are members of the scheme.

I acknowledge the work of public servants today who help to keep Northern Ireland moving, all of whom provide the general public with an excellent and fair service. I want to specifically mention staff at the DVLA office in Coleraine, based in my constituency, who work hard on behalf of the people of the United Kingdom, especially in ensuring fairness and efficiency in service provision.

Amendment No 13 will ensure that the relevant stakeholders are consulted on valuations. Amendment No 14 is a technical consequence of that. I think that that is positive and welcome.

Amendment No 15 similarly requires consultation with relevant stakeholders on the direction of cost cap regulations before being made. Amendment No 17 is a

mere technical change, correcting an error in the Bill, which I, of course, support.

Amendment No 18 will provide for the appropriate transitional protections that are given in the new Civil Service scheme, where members transfer into the new scheme from another public body scheme. Amendment Nos 19 and 20 are a technical consequence of that.

These amendments, which I support, will allow for universal access to a single scheme and ensure that no one is less well off as a result of the change.

I oppose amendment No 21 on the grounds that I do not feel that the measures that it proposes, which are the need for all changes to be subject to the voting procedures of the House, are necessary. Any major measures that are proposed in the scheme regulations will, in line with normal practice, be subject to the approval of the House regardless. The clause, as it stands, is normal practice and allows for operational efficiency.

Therefore, I am generally supportive of the amendments in the group, with the exception of amendment No 21. I am content to allow them to pass at this stage with my support.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

We have no objection to the other amendments in the group, namely amendment Nos 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19 and 20, and we are prepared to support them as well.

Amendment No 21 is an important amendment. We believe that it increases the accountability that is afforded to the Assembly on these issues. It is important, given that the changes affect the pensions of huge numbers of public servants, that we have the maximum possible accountability. We believe that the power lies fundamentally with the citizen, and it is important that our citizens have the power to change governments and to hold Ministers fully to account. We cannot simply provide the Department with the power through the Bill to make regulations forever more without direct recourse to the Assembly.

Legislating for the use of affirmative procedure only is an important action, and I believe that it brings greater transparency to the process. We discussed these arguments previously. I outlined the salutary experience of the London coalition Government already renegeing on the 25-year guarantee to public sector workers on pensions. That sounds a note of caution to us all.

That is why we are proposing that future regulations under the Bill, which will have a major impact on so many people, be subject to affirmative procedure, which we believe is the strongest possible measure in the Assembly in these circumstances to hold the Department to account.

Mr Cree: I will be brief. Amendment No 13, which relates to clause 11 was tabled by the Minister of Finance and Personnel and clarifies the position on the Department's requirement to consult with those who may be affected by directions, and is an improvement. Amendment Nos 14, 15, 17, 18, 19 and 20 have been submitted by the Minister to improve the Bill and should be supported. The purpose of the final amendment, amendment No 21 from the SDLP, as we have just heard, appears to limit scheme regulations that are subject to affirmative procedure. I cannot support that.

Mr Hamilton: He was, indeed, brief. He is a man of his word. Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to make

a winding-up speech on the debate on the amendments in group 3. In the interests of time and brevity, which others have stuck to, I will not speak in detail again on the amendments that I am bringing forward.

I note that there is general acceptance of these amendments, with one notable exception. I, therefore, ask Members to support amendment Nos 13 and 14, which relate to clause 11. They will have the effect of strengthening the requirement to consult on valuations. Likewise, amendment No 15 strengthens the requirement to consult on the provisions of clause 12, which deals with the employer cost cap. Amendment No 17 inserts the letter “a” to correct a minor drafting error in clause 14. Amendment Nos 18, 19 and 20 relate to clause 18 and provide for transitional protection to be extended to those who are eligible to join the Civil Service pension scheme.

I ask Members to oppose amendment No 21, which has been tabled in respect of clause 24. Clause 24 deals with the legislative procedure for making secondary legislation for public service pension schemes, as stated earlier at some length. We have already debated the issue, so suffice it to say that negative resolution is entirely appropriate to deal with making regulations in general and provides the opportunity for the Assembly to debate scheme changes where it determines that it is appropriate.

Amendment No 13 agreed to.

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 14 is consequential to amendment No 13.

Amendment No 14 made: In page 7, line 31, leave out “(4)” and insert “(4A)”.— *[Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]*

Clause 11, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 12 (Employer cost cap)

Amendment No 15 made: In page 8, line 30, at end insert

“(10) Before giving directions or making regulations under this section the Department of Finance and Personnel must consult such persons (or representatives of such persons) as appear to the Department likely to be affected by the directions or regulations.”.— [Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Clause 12, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 13 (Employer contributions in funded schemes)

Amendment No 16 made: In page 9, line 20, after “qualified” insert

“and must not be
(a) an employee of the responsible authority;
(b) the scheme manager;
(c) a scheme member; or
(d) an employee of the Department of Finance and Personnel”.— [Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel).]

Clause 13, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 14 (Information about benefits)

Amendment No 17 made: In page 9, line 24, after “is” insert “a”.— *[Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]*

Clause 14, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to clauses 15 to 17. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group these clauses for the Question on stand part.

Clauses 15 to 17 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 18 (Restriction of existing pension schemes)

Amendment No 18 made: In page 11, line 26, at end insert

“(5A) Scheme regulations may also provide for exceptions to subsection (1) in the case of
(a) persons who were members of a public body pension scheme specified in the regulations, or who were eligible to be members of such a scheme, immediately before 1 April 2012, and
(b) such other persons as the regulations may specify, being persons who before that date had ceased to be members of a scheme referred to in paragraph (a) or to be eligible for membership of such a scheme.”.— [Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 19 is consequential to amendment No 18.

Amendment No 19 made: In page 11, line 27, after “(5)” insert “or (5A)”.— *[Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]*

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 20 is consequential to amendment No 18.

Amendment No 20 made: In page 11, line 37, after “(5)” insert “, (5A)”.— *[Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]*

Clause 18, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to clauses 19 to 23. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group these clauses for the Question on stand part.

Clauses 19 to 23 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 24 (Other procedure)

Amendment No 21 proposed: In page 13, line 34, leave out from “if” to the end of line 3 on page 14.— *[Mr D Bradley.]*

Question put, That amendment No 21 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 26; Noes 44.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs McKeivitt and Mr Rogers.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 24 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to clauses 25 to 37. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group these clauses for the Question on stand part.

Clauses 25 to 37 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to schedules 1 to 9. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group these schedules for the Question on stand part.

Schedules 1 to 9 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Public Service Pensions Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

I ask the House to take its ease while we change the top Table.

8.15 pm

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

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Members leaving the Chamber should do so quietly.

Motion made:

*That the Assembly do now adjourn. —
[Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.]*

Adjournment

Downe Hospital: Emergency Department Weekend Provision

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, and all other Members who speak will have approximately five minutes.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Business Office for permitting me to table this topic for the Adjournment debate tonight. I welcome all those who have travelled here for this very important debate. Minister, I hope that you get a sense of how critical the restoration of 24/7 A&E provision at the Downe Hospital is to the people of south Down. I apologise for my colleague John McCallister, who cannot be here because of family commitments. He is fully supportive of the debate.

I praise the tireless work of the front line healthcare staff. Without their dedication and professionalism, this critical situation could be much worse. It was a true testimony to its staff that our hospital campaigner and former MP, Eddie McGrady, decided to spend the last days of his life in the care of the Downe. Eddie, I know you are with us in spirit tonight.

Patients deserve better, but the whole community in south Down deserves better from the trust.

I also share the concerns of many that services are being disrupted at Lagan Valley Hospital, even services beyond A&E such as radiology.

The people of Down and Mourne worked hard to secure a hospital. There has been a hospital in the area for the past 300 years. It is a major economic driver, attracting many families who have settled locally.

The community feels vulnerable, isolated and worried. Despite a new state-of-the-art building, we have wards that have not been commissioned. The Downe Hospital has borne its fair share of cuts. Each cut happens because of a situation that has arisen. This situation has been allowed to happen by the trust. The trust instigates the action, and the community feels the pain. It is a vicious circle, and the Downe Hospital does not have a chance.

If you remove services from a hospital, there is less need for skilled intervention. That results in the university reducing the hospital's status as a teaching hospital, which affects the ability to attract staff.

I commend the local GPs who, up until two weeks ago, manned the A&E at night. Why has that been pulled?

The pressure on ambulance cover is horrendous. The idea of an extra ambulance is very misleading: after its first trip

to Belfast, it is called into service to meet the needs of the wider Belfast area and is lost to Downpatrick and south Down. How long must the people of the Downpatrick area have to wait on a 999 ambulance? Whether it comes from Kilkeel, Newry or Bangor, it takes 45 minutes to arrive, and it takes another hour to get to an emergency unit. What about the golden hour? That is the window of opportunity in which medical intervention can save life or significantly increase the chance of a full recovery.

I will tell you the story of a colleague's father. He was playing golf in Ardglass in the summer and had a stroke. He called 999, was admitted to the Downe and got his care. He is as fit as a fiddle today with no after effects.

Where does this decision sit with Government policy? The promises of Transforming Your Care ring very hollow with the people of Downpatrick and the surrounding areas. The document talks about building:

"a system of health and social care which would place the individual, family and community that use it at the heart of how things are done."

It refers to:

"planned change ... that can ... improve care"

and states:

"the professionals providing health and social care services will be required to work together in a much more integrated way to plan and deliver consistently high quality care for patients".

Minister, you endorsed Transforming Your Care. When are you going to sort this out?

Where does this situation sit with the recommendations in DARD's rural White Paper, particularly with respect to access to services in rural areas? Research shows that the timeliness of an accident and emergency response is critical to the survival of the patient. Trauma patients in rural areas have a greater likelihood of needing advanced care and less likelihood of receiving it.

The unique geography and roads infrastructure of the area must be taken into consideration. You know it is not BT1. You cannot compare south Down to other areas. You cannot compare driving 35 miles on a rural road with 35 miles of motorway driving. It can take one hour to get from Ardglass to here, and, in weather like this, it can take even longer. There is not one mile of dual carriageway. Without an A&E unit in Downpatrick, if there is a major trauma incident in the district, it could take an ambulance over an hour to arrive at a Belfast hospital, even if it were to arrive promptly.

During the winter period, if a major incident happens in the Mourne or in Down district, Daisy Hill or Craigavon hospitals might not be options, and we do not have an air ambulance. Senior trust officials did not see the big issue about closing at the weekend, but the likelihood of needing accident and emergency cover increases at the weekend. For example, the increased number of visitors on the narrow country roads increases the likelihood of accidents. When you look at the occurrence of major road traffic accidents, the overwhelming majority are on rural roads. In sporting events, for example, there are over 1,000 young players involved in the Newcastle and Downpatrick league and a similar number are involved in GAA activities. There

are thousands on the mountains and hundreds involved in local running clubs, numerous cycling events and at Downpatrick race meetings. It is vital that people, locals and visitors, can rely on accessible local services at the point of delivery.

Any potential or partial closure, or watering down of A&E services at Downe Hospital will no doubt pressurise other A&E departments across the North. That was exemplified by the chaos that we witnessed at the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) in Belfast on the evening of Wednesday 8 January, where staff came under enormous pressure. The SDLP previously warned of such outcomes if A&E services were stripped. It also has an effect on other hospital services and that is exemplified by constituents' emails. Not only is A&E affected, but it has that knock-on effect. Let me quote from an email:

"I was recently scheduled for a tonsillectomy, in the RVH. Due to the closure of Downe & Lagan Valley a&e's, the RVH had no bed for me and the operation has to be rescheduled. Myself & my mother had both taken time off work, meaning we both have lost earnings."

And so on.

Then we come to consultation. There has been no consultation, either with staff, unions, the community, or politicians. We were all kept in the dark. In fact, it looks as though the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust was also kept in the dark. For example, take the agenda of the trust's board meeting of Wednesday 28 November 2013. We knew that problems were there long before that date, but there is no sign of any mention of the major crisis in getting staff for Downe Hospital. It is not in that. Was it buried in "Any Other Business"? Was it discussed? Minister, I would like to know, when you respond to the debate, when you knew about it.

With respect to staffing, we have been told that this is not a money issue. Minister, you reminded us of this yesterday. It is because middle-grade doctors cannot be secured. We are told that doctors do not want to travel to Downpatrick. What type of contracts does the trust give these doctors? I can only compare it to my background in education. It is like appointing a senior staff member to the Southern Regional College (SRC) in Lisburn, and then them telling you, "I do not want to go to SRC in Downpatrick". What type of leadership or planning allows this to happen? Yesterday, Minister, you told us that hospitals in England also have this problem. Minister, your job is to sort this out in Northern Ireland. Last year, you intervened in the residential home debacle. I ask you now to intervene to ensure that Downe's accident and emergency services are restored to 24/7 operation. Mr McCaughey avoided one of my questions at Down District Council before Christmas when he was asked how often those posts had been advertised in national and international medical journals. Between 2008 and 2010, they were advertised twice, once before one of my colleagues asked an FOI and once after.

When asked how many applicants answered the last ad, I was told that there were three, but that two were from outside the UK. If there is a will to appoint middle-grade doctors, there is a way to get them. If they are from outside the UK, I am sure that those applications need some level of upskilling, which I am sure that Queen's University medical school could facilitate. Have you, as Minister, as

well as the trust, sat down with Queen's medical school to discuss issues such as the upskilling of doctors who have not been trained under the NHS? Have you investigated how our young doctors can be encouraged to take up positions in A&E medicine? Many medics do not believe that doctors cannot be secured in post. In fact, many in the community believe that very few will turn down over £100,000 a year.

When one looks at how Downe has been treated over the years, the only conclusion that one can arrive at is that the decline of Downe is the only thing that the trust is strategically managing, rather than the provision of a state-of-the-art health service for the people of south Down.

I will look at some statistics from the 'Northern Ireland Hospital Statistics: Emergency Care (2012/13)' report. Minister, before I do that, I will say that I hope that you never need A&E services. I did. You talk about a time of 12 hours. However, that does not include the time from the incident occurring until you get to A&E. I will take just one or two statistics.

Table 5 in the statistics, entitled 'Waiting times of new and unplanned review attendances at emergency care departments', shows waiting times of over 12 hours by trust areas. At the Ulster Hospital, the figure was 2.5% of people, which resulted in 3,297 people having to wait for over 12 hours. At Downe, the figure was 0.8%, which equates to 165 people having to wait for more than 12 hours.

Table 9 of the same document looks at the number of people seen within four hours. Dundonald has 73% seen within three hours and Downe has 87%. It does not exactly give us confidence in an alternative when Downe is not open.

Mr McCaughey tells us that the Ulster is a South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust hospital, but 41% of his patients come from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. So, who pays for that? Is that Belfast or is it out of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust budget?

I ask you, Minister, to ensure that the trust meeting of 29 January is moved to Downpatrick to allow the trust to get a feel for the level of concern in the area. Minister, do you support that call?

I will refer to one or two of your comments from yesterday. In answer to a question from Mr McCallister, you said:

"I am very, very clear on the issue that the South Eastern Trust needs to ensure 24/7 access to the Lagan Valley and Downe hospitals because I believe that it is in the best interests of the public." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 90, p279, col 1].

Minister, we are not talking about the hospital door being open 24/7; we are talking about accident and emergency being available 24/7.

You must intervene and put in place an effective strategy that deals with the demand for A&E services. Hospital units cannot be stretched to breaking point. We need democracy returned to the health service and engagement with the public. We need services at the Downe extended, not reduced. You need to find a solution for medical understaffing to ensure high-quality and speedy services for rural communities and the people of Belfast.

The staff must be found to allow accident and emergency units to operate effectively in the best interest of patients

across this region. Minister, this is a matter of life and death.

Mr Wells: When I was first elected to this House in October 1982, I found that the first item of importance in my in tray was Downe Hospital. Here we are, 32 years later, and what is the most important item in the in tray? The Downe Hospital. It has been a long saga, and you could cover several football pitches with the headlines of crises appearing in that area. All of us welcomed the provision of an excellent new hospital facility for Downpatrick, but, even on the day the hospital opened, there was a crisis about services being provided, and, unfortunately, ever since, there have been further crises.

8.30 pm

I attended a special meeting of Down District Council, which had to be held on 23 December, and I cannot help but think of the phrase used at 9/11 that it was a good time to bury bad news, because it is quite apparent that the crisis was looming since at least June 2013, yet the announcement was made literally in the mouth of Christmas.

I congratulate Down council for having the initiative to call an emergency meeting at a terribly difficult time of the year. I used the analogy at that meeting, and I will repeat it again: this is an essential service in the same way as policing is an essential service. Can you imagine the situation where a sergeant, who is a middle-grade officer, in Bangor is told by the Chief Constable, "We need you in Downpatrick", and that sergeant says, "No, I am not going because I get a much wider breadth of criminal in north Down to hone my skills on than I get in Downpatrick. I get the full range. I get middle-class crime, I get upper-class crime and I get drugs. I would not get that full range of criminals in Downpatrick. Therefore, my skill level will be depressed". That would never be permitted. The sergeant would be told, "I am sorry; you are needed in Downpatrick, and you are going, full stop. No questions asked". Yet, we have the situation in Northern Ireland in which the British Medical Association (BMA) tail wags the national health dog. The BMA dictates and decides where its staff are going to go.

The outcome of that, unfortunately, is that middle-grade doctors and consultants gravitate towards the big hospitals in the greater Belfast area. That is inevitable, if we allow it to happen. The fundamental reason why we are in this particular predicament is simply that doctors who are needed in Downpatrick are refusing to go there. I believe that powers need to be given to the Department to say to doctors, "You are needed there, and you will go". The inevitable outcome of what is happening in Northern Ireland at the moment is that we could be left with four or five A&E hospitals simply because we cannot attract the staff that we need to man or "woman" — because it is becoming a very feminised workforce — hospitals.

I listened with great interest to Hugh McCaughey and Seamus McGoran at that meeting, and I have to say that I accepted their argument that they were having enormous difficulty in attracting the staff required to man the A&E in Downpatrick. Clearly, they had made efforts. Mr Rogers will say that they did not make enough effort, but it was quite clear that they were having real problems. Indeed, if they had not taken the decision, albeit in the mouth of Christmas, they may well have had to have the

emergency situation of closing down the A&E. Until they have the power and control to ensure that staff are moved to Downpatrick to carry out the essential service, we will continue to be in this situation.

The situation is not unique to Downpatrick; it is also very evident in Lagan Valley, where there has been a problem attracting middle-grade staff, and in all the hospitals in Northern Ireland outside the big four or five.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: I certainly will.

Mr Givan: I appreciate the Member mentioning Lagan Valley. I want to show my support to the people in South Down because we face the same issues. In Lagan Valley, the trust has been saying that it will deliver 24/7 front door access to an emergency department. Two years later, it has failed to do so, and local political confidence in the trust and in its management to achieve that is at an all-time low. While the Minister wants 24/7 access, local confidence in the trust to deliver that is at an all-time low. At what point will the Minister lose confidence in the trust's ability to do what he wants for the people of South Down and Lagan Valley, and what action will he take?

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

Mr Wells: When the Minister was made aware of this, he also indicated his great concerns about what was going on and is determined to try and address the issue. It is unfair to blame the Department or the Minister, because they are on the same side as the local community. We have a really difficult problem here. It intrigues me that if we cannot even get staff to go to Lisburn, which is literally 10 minutes down the motorway from the Royal or the City, we can see why we are having difficulties getting them to go to places such as Craigavon, Downpatrick or Enniskillen. We simply cannot allow that situation to continue. The Department needs to see what powers it can gain to take control of the situation and to ensure that the number of staff required are available to meet the need. Otherwise, we will be in the very undesirable situation of making these mad dashes late at night to the Ulster Hospital, Belfast City Hospital or the Royal.

What has made this problem more difficult is that, since the announcement was made, there have been real question marks over the capacity of the Belfast-based hospitals to take the extra demand imposed upon them by these decisions. We had the situation only the other day of the Minister again having to intervene quickly because the Royal was showing considerable stress, and we are aware of the 12-hour waiting situation in the Ulster Hospital. If those hospitals had large enough capacity to take the extra patients, I would feel more confident. However, all the evidence indicates that that cannot happen; therefore, we need to start moving staff to where they are needed.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Chris Hazzard, and I just point out that you should point your microphone towards yourself.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank my colleague Sean Rogers and extend a further word of thanks to all public, elected and trade union representatives and to the local community health committee members, who have remained unbowed and unbroken for decades in their campaign for local services

for local people. I especially thank the people of the wider south Down community, who, through no fault of their own, face yet another cut to their local hospital. This time, it is a severe and unwarranted cut to their 24-hour A&E services; a cut that is not dictated by finances, best clinical practice or a lack of local uptake of services but is the result of the failure of the South Eastern Trust and the Health Minister, Edwin Poots, to successfully secure the staff required for a 24-hour A&E facility.

A community health nurse put it quite succinctly to me this morning: the failings of the Minister and his officials to successfully implement appropriate workforce planning has resulted in severe consequences, not for the culprits but the community — the people of south Down. To repeat what I said to the media last week: if the Minister and his officials do not get a grip on this crisis, we are likely to see fatal consequences. I have no doubt that people's lives are being threatened by these cuts. Only two years ago, an elderly patient died while waiting for a trolley at an emergency department. That was followed, six months later, by the death of a patient waiting for a bed in a similar emergency department. This is not propaganda or political fiction; these are the facts of the matter. They are the severe consequences of a health crisis and a Minister who appears totally incapable of implementing the reform required to sustain vital health services for local rural communities such as that of south Down.

We are told that an unfortunate shortage of emergency doctors leaves the trust with no choice. We can choose to believe that, but the people of south Down do not. The question for the Minister and for the trust is this: why is there a shortage and what is being done? Mr Wells recognised that this is an obviously difficult situation, and, to a certain extent, it is. However, the last recruitment advertisement went out in June last year. If this is such a crisis, what happened between June and Christmas to remedy the situation? Also, recruitment experts in this field have contacted the campaign team to let it know that this problem can be sorted within two years and the supposed staffing shortage addressed far quicker than that.

I also want to know what negotiations or discussions the Minister has had with the Minister for Employment and Learning to talk about whether something can be put in place where, as these medical doctors are trained, they do a certain number of years in rural constituencies such as South Down. That happens in Canada, elsewhere in Europe and in Asia. Why can it not happen in the North of Ireland? One of the main reasons why it cannot happen is because there is a political leadership vacuum in the Health Department. Given the vacuum of effective leadership and strategic planning on the part of the Minister and the trust, we are witnessing the insidious whims of consultants and doctors who dictate the parameters of their employment at the expense of people in south Down. Doctors and consultants are instructing the trust where and when they will work. It is an absolute disgrace and a damning indictment of those who prefer not to stray too far from the leafy suburbs of Belfast and north Down.

As Jim Wells outlined, can you seriously imagine members of the PSNI, Fire Service or any other vital service dictating to their management where and when they will work? It is absolute and pure madness, and the Minister and his officials must find ways to smash the

cosy consensus that has developed with the BMA, again, at the expense of the south Down community, which is expected to suffer the consequences and travel to Belfast to access these vital services. There is also a question for the Minister here: why are the people of south Down expected to be mobile but the doctors and consultants are not? Unlike most other counties in the North, south Down does not have one inch of carriageway or a single stretch of motorway. Those who expect residents in rural areas of Lecale or east of the Mourne to travel to Belfast are simply not living in the real world. It is not plausible, and it is not fair. The notion of fairness is key. Where is the equality for rural communities in this decision? Who in the trust or the Department put themselves in the shoes of the elderly lady in south Down who, last week, sat through the night in her home with life-threatening chest pains so that she could attend her local A&E when the sun rose in the morning? Again, Minister, this is the clear and present danger of your failing to tackle this crisis. It is not propaganda or fiction but the harsh reality of ineffective leadership at the very top of the Department of Health.

Another aspect of this debacle is the ongoing shortage of ambulance cover. That was demonstrated at its very worst on Boxing night when an elderly woman was forced to wait four hours for an ambulance in Castlewellan: not good enough. So, not only faced with the closure of A&E facilities at the Downe —

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

Mr Hazzard: — local people are being asked to put up with abject ambulance cover. It is simply not good enough and something else that the Minister needs to address, and address quickly. If you are not able to do this, Minister, you need to seriously consider whether you are fit for the job. *[Interruption.]*

Mrs Dobson: I, too, thank Mr Rogers for bringing forward this Adjournment debate. As we know, the Downe Hospital is over 40 minutes from Belfast and serves a large rural population. The news just before Christmas that services are to be reduced will have come as a bitter blow to the area. Although not everyone can have a hospital on their doorstep, everyone should have confidence that, if they ever need emergency medical assistance, it will be there for them within a reasonable distance. That confidence has been severely damaged. The people of south Down are, therefore, justifiably angry at this decision. They are even more so given that the decision is centred around the availability of doctors and not the safety of the service.

From the very outset, let me say that I fully accept that A&E should only ever operate if they have enough staff and resources to do so in a safe and responsible manner. However, it is deeply regrettable that, once again, we have found ourselves in a position where the loss of a small number of critical staff, as was seen in November when two A&E doctors in the Downe left, virtually cripples the future delivery of these services. I ask the Minister to clarify what exactly happens when potential staff shortages are identified. Can he tell us whether he believes that absolutely everything that can be done in the intervening period is done and, in this case, was done? Does he believe that the management of the hospital and the trust did absolutely everything that they could to redress this staffing issue?

It just baffles me to see that so many hospitals, such as the Downe, Lagan Valley and Belfast City, are so often at the apparent will and instability of changing staffing patterns. I fully recognise that recruiting and retaining middle-grade doctors in A&E departments is difficult, but although we know the problem, I would ask the Minister to detail what specific action he has taken to address it since taking office. I just have an inherent suspicion about the reduction of services in the Downe, even if the Minister or the trust try to claim that it will only be temporary. We need to remember that that is what they said regarding Lagan Valley when it had its services reduced to daytime and weekends only in the summer of 2011. Of course we know that, instead of reinstating full service, the trust and the Minister have continued to reduce it. I fear that these staffing concerns and so-called temporary reductions are an attempt at creeping towards closure through stealth.

To give one example, on 20 July 2011, Edwin Poots said that he wanted major structural changes to the strategic delivery of A&E services within Belfast. Within months, it was announced that the A&E unit in the Belfast City Hospital was closing temporarily and, just like the Downe, staffing concerns were conveniently cited. Of course, it was later to close for good. So, Minister, I am asking you openly: what does the future hold for Downe in the short, medium and long term? Can you give a commitment that you will do everything in your power to seek the reinstatement of a full service? With Transforming Your Care slowly stumbling along and draining more and more resources wherever it can, not least in the monitoring rounds, the future of acute services provision is still under great uncertainty, but so-called staffing issues should not determine the future provision of A&Es.

8.45 pm

In conclusion, I call on the Minister to be honest about the future of the Downe Hospital. If, as he says, the decision was taken solely on staffing grounds, I would call on him to do everything in his power to find a resolution. But, if there are any other reasons behind these reduced services, I would call on him and the trust to stop hiding behind excuses and be honest about it. The people of south Down certainly deserve no less.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I commend Sean Rogers and all the Members who have spoken about this essential service for south Down. The removal of it places a huge strain on the community and creates risk to lives in Downpatrick and the surrounding areas.

People have talked about the poor road network and the long distances. It simply is not good enough that this Minister is trying to centralise services into an already busy Belfast A&E. That is what is happening here. No matter what way you try to look at it, that is what is happening here. The exact opposite should be happening. There should be strategic thinking in the way we place our hospitals network. Daisy Hill, the Downe, Craigavon and all the hospitals need to get the proper support that they deserve rather than this myopic thinking that you bring everything into cities and leave rural communities without the services that they need and deserve.

What we have got are excuses, and the excuses change all the time. Jim Wells talked about being involved in the campaign. We have all heard the excuses. The first

excuse is, "Oh, they are not getting enough people to it". Why were they not getting enough people? Where were ambulances being told to go? There was a deliberate attempt to downgrade the Downe Hospital. That is what happened here.

The next excuse we hear is, "Oh, we cannot get doctors". I am sorry, but that is simply not a good enough excuse. If the Minister is doing his job properly, he will get the doctors, he will take on the vested interests. We had meetings with the Minister months ago about the issue. We advised him to look at the contracts. Did he listen? Has anything been done? No. And if it has, I would love to hear what he has done about contracts, because the points made by Members who spoke previously about what you write into people's contracts are correct. You cannot have someone picking and choosing where they go and saying, "I will not go to Downpatrick; I will go to Belfast" or saying, "I will go to Lisburn, but I will not go to Ardglass". It is absolutely ridiculous. This is not the way to build a health service, an education service or any service. Can you imagine if John O'Dowd in the Department of Education said, "I cannot find the principals, so we will bus everyone into Belfast"? Or can you imagine if Michelle O'Neill in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development said, "Vets are busy people; bring all the animals by truck into Belfast"? Can you imagine? It is nonsense.

This is not the way to build our public services, and we need clear, strategic thinking without a fear of taking on the vested interests, and that is the problem here. The Minister is afraid to take them on. He is being led by the nose, and that should not be happening. That might have happened under direct rule, but it should not be happening under devolved government. We were brought here to bring about changes and take on vested interests. I was happy to take them on in education, and my colleague John O'Dowd is happy to take them on and take whatever flak there is about that because that is the job of work that needs to be done. We were proud to do that.

This Minister has big choices to make. We do not want excuses. How hard have we really tried to get doctors? I am sorry, but the people of the area do not believe that excuse. I was in Castlewellan the other day, and that is what they were saying. I was in Downpatrick a few weeks ago, and that is what they were saying. So, Minister, the report card says, "Must do better". We want to see your plan of action to get this A&E open.

The Downe Hospital is a beautiful hospital. It is there because of a courageous decision taken many years ago by Bairbre de Brún when others in the Department would have preferred that the Downe was not built. She set it in train, and she took the courageous decisions, and that is why, along with all the lobbying from all the different parties, we have that beautiful hospital. Do not disappoint the people of south Down. You have squandered public money, denying equality to the gay and lesbian community. You are happy to do that, yet you will not put the money where it needs to go.

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

Mrs McKeivitt: I also thank Sean Rogers, my party colleague, for tabling this Adjournment topic and enabling us to debate an issue that, as we have heard from all the contributors, is of great importance to the people of Down and the wider local area.

Over the past number of years, we have all heard worrying reports about staff shortages in our hospitals, overworked nurses and doctors and longer waiting times for patients. I recognise that the current Health Minister has taken certain steps in an attempt to address those reports, but I do not believe that closing A&E units is the way to deal with staff shortages. Undoubtedly, the closure of an A&E department would put the remaining accident and emergency departments under immense pressure, which is evidenced by the recent crisis in the Royal's accident and emergency department.

The public are deeply concerned. The people of south Down have been told that their local A&E will be closed during the weekend periods and that they will have to attend alternative accident and emergency departments. They then read in the newspapers that those other accident and emergency departments are oversubscribed and that there is a backlog of patients, as was the case on Wednesday 8 January, when a major incident was declared at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

We need to take action to restore public confidence. The reason given for the closure of the A&E departments at the Downe Hospital and Lagan Valley Hospital at the weekends is a lack of middle-grade doctors. Patient safety must be a priority when making decisions regarding healthcare provision, but the safety of patients from the Down area has been put in jeopardy by this decision. The Minister must look at ways to attract middle-grade doctors to the A&E departments.

Since being elected as a public representative, I have fervently campaigned for the provision of automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in sporting clubs, schools and public buildings. Sudden cardiac arrest can happen to absolutely anyone at any time, regardless of their age, gender or creed, and survival rates are increased where there is access to AEDs and the emergency services. Time is everything; it is a numbers game, and the Minister and the Health and Social Care Board are playing fast and loose with lives. God help the patients who have a heart attack or a stroke on a Friday, a Saturday or a Sunday.

The bottom line is that Downe Hospital needs an A&E open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I implore the Health Minister to explore every option to reopen this life-saving service during the weekend period. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust should not be allowed to let staffing situations arise that put lives at risk when they are in the business of saving lives. Minister, you should not accept the argument of staff shortages as an excuse. You should challenge the trust, get the cover and reinstate the A&E for the people of south Down and Lagan Valley. If you do not, Minister, mistakes will, potentially, be buried in the graveyard. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: It is very important that the people in the Public Gallery listen to the contributions, including that of the Minister. This is your Assembly and your representatives are doing their business. Please give them the courtesy to hear the contributions and the responses. Thank you.

Mr McKinney: As the SDLP's health spokesperson, I welcome the opportunity to speak on this topic. There are few issues that provoke as much passion as those around health provision. We all, and I include the Minister in this, want to see a health service that best provides for

our people. The SDLP is proud that its policy is health provided free at the point of need, consistent with the founding principles of the NHS. Where we and the Minister disagree is on the best way forward.

I take the passion and the anger as read. We can see the commitment from the people in the south Down area who have travelled tonight to listen to the debate. I share my colleagues' view that those people feel vulnerable and worried, and they are right to feel so. What we need to do is focus on the decision-making process that has led to what those people find wrong and that has impacted so negatively elsewhere.

Let us look first at the history of how we got here. We cannot ignore the long and deep cuts in the health service. We also cannot ignore the cutbacks that have continued at Downe Hospital. They too have been long and deep and have done enormous harm in undermining confidence. The reductions in service had an impact long before the doctor shortage. In fact, some people might say that they helped contribute to it. What ambitious young doctor wants to work in a part-time A&E? He or she would want to be part of an active, learning-focused emergency department.

Yesterday, we listened to the Minister blame a shortage of doctors. He said that he cannot ignore a trust when it comes to him on the basis that it cannot find doctors and, therefore, cannot provide a safe service. That, to the SDLP, is a crisis. It is a crisis for Downe and Lagan Valley and, in our view, it has also helped to provoke further crises at emergency departments elsewhere. We believe that there has been an impact. Up to 60 people who attended the Royal last week during the major incident process were from areas other than greater Belfast. So cuts, closures and reduced public confidence converged and put pressure on Belfast.

There may be a strategic decision to compensate for the shortage of doctors, but the people of south Down are right to say that that decision does not appropriately provide for them in rural areas and may in fact be contrary to other strategic decisions around emergency health service provision. So we and the public are right to ask how those decisions are actually taken. For example, did the trust take the decision and then inform the Minister that it could not run a safe service? We understand that extra resources were offered to other trusts to compensate, but could extra ideas have been brought to the table? We are right to ask what further actions other than closure could be considered. My colleagues have alluded to those.

The Minister and the Department are keen to deny that there is a crisis, and they point to lots of statistics about how people were treated within certain time frames. That is a process argument and it does not restore confidence. What that says to us is that we managed within a crisis, not that there was not or is not one. We heard lots of blame shared out yesterday. The media, politicians and even the public themselves were blamed. What the public in south Down and those negatively impacted elsewhere need to see is a proper strategic approach to the problem. That will restore confidence.

Yesterday the Minister hit us with a headline about regular attenders. Those substantial figures have built up over a year and, I assume, have taken place at similar levels in other years. What was done to manage those situations over that time? Meanwhile, the Health Committee has

tried to get to the bottom of consultant-led cancellations of appointments. They run to tens of thousands, but there has been no in-depth analysis of what is happening. How can you manage a situation that you do not understand?

We are all familiar with lengthy GP waiting lists. Are they impacting on the extent to which people are turning up at A&E? Are people using A&Es as doctors' surgeries? We have also known about doctor shortages for a long time. What has been done at board and ministerial level to sort that problem out? We actually got a worrying answer in Westminster today in response to a question from South Down MP Margaret Ritchie. There have been no talks between the Northern Ireland Minister and the UK Government about those issues, yet we hear that it is a UK-wide problem. There have been no requests from you, Minister, to the UK Minister.

If the problem is UK-wide, should we not at least think about talking about UK discussions and solutions?

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

Mr McKinney: In short, the public need an answer on what is being done to stop crisis management.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank Mr Rogers for bringing the debate to the House. I think it is useful that we have it. I also think that it is useful that we operate on the basis of facts and information, as opposed to disinformation and attempts to mislead people one way or the other.

9.00 pm

Some people have decided to go down a course of trying to politicise this matter tonight. I will not respond in kind, because I do not think that that would add value to the debate. I certainly want to have the best possible care available right across Northern Ireland, including for people who are living in the south Down area and those who are cared for in the Downe Hospital. I was deeply and profoundly disappointed when I received the news that there was a proposal to close the facility at weekends. That was not something that I supported, and I have made that very clear to the trust's chiefs. It is something that I wish that they would turn around, and I have made it very clear to them that I have an expectation that they will turn it around.

Those people who wish to target me politically on the matter are barking up the wrong tree. That is because I actually support the service in the Downe Hospital being open at the weekend. I do not support its closure. Nonetheless, I understand the reason for its closure, and people do have to make decisions that are based on safety. They cannot service an area if they are going to do it in an unsafe way; that would be irresponsible.

Shortly before Christmas, I was advised that the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, in the light of severe staffing difficulties, would not be able to continue with the current emergency department opening hours at the Downe Hospital. The trust advised that the situation had worsened over the previous six weeks, due to the departure of two specialist doctors and a worsening position on locum recruitment. It was only the goodwill of existing staff, who came forward to cover vacant shifts at short notice, that prevented unexpected closures over

that period or, indeed, at an earlier point. For the previous six weeks, the trust had been reliant on seven of its 11 emergency department (ED) consultants covering vacant shifts. That was not a sustainable position, and it could not continue. I accept that that was the case. The trust had 15 shifts to cover in December 2013, with approximately 70 shifts to cover in January 2014 across the Lagan Valley and Downe sites. The trust stated that it had major difficulties securing locum cover and did not believe that that would improve in the immediate future.

I note that Mr Hazzard said that someone could sort it out in two years. I am very keen to hear that proposal and about how someone could help us to achieve that situation. I hope that it could be done much more quickly than that, if possible.

The position in December 2013 was that the Downe Hospital emergency department had been reliant on locums to cover 50% of shifts. It had been experiencing increasing difficulty in securing the necessary cover. The current staffing position at the hospital is that there are 3.73 whole-time equivalent permanent middle-grade doctors in post. The Downe Hospital emergency department is not recognised for junior doctor training, so it cannot rely on that support.

The minimum staffing that is required to maintain the service between 8.00 am and 10.00 pm, seven days a week, is eight middle-grade doctors to deliver a rota of one in four. However, recruitment agencies are reporting a substantial shortage of suitably qualified locums, and all trusts are experiencing difficulty with covering vacant shifts. It had become a weekly occurrence that trusts were struggling to ensure that they had weekend cover, and they were reliant on consultants to cover the shortfall. As a result, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, in considering a series of options for addressing service provision in the Downe Hospital ED, opted for restricted hours from 8.00 am to 8.00 pm, Monday to Friday, and for closure at weekends. On Monday 23 December, the trust issued a public statement advising that, from the weekend commencing Saturday 4 January, hours of operation would be reduced accordingly.

It is important that we make ourselves aware of the efforts that have been made in recruitment. Although they have not been successful, efforts have certainly been made. Specifically, the trust trawled more than 30 agencies, locally and nationally, for short-term and long-term locum staff. It used job finder agencies to source suitably qualified staff with the correct skills. It maintains links with emergency care consultants throughout the Province to ascertain whether any suitably qualified staff are available. As well as that, the trust used conventional recruitment methods by placing advertisements in the local press, which proved to be the most unsuccessful method of recruitment for this staff group. In addition to the standard recruitment processes, the trust entered into a regional agreement in an attempt to attract staff from eastern European countries. In 2011, the trust interviewed staff in Romania and London for emergency department posts. No appointments were made, because the standard of applicants was deemed to be not of the appropriate level for emergency medicine.

The trust also set up a contract with a Dublin-based recruitment agency in an attempt to attract international junior doctor training posts and, again, no recruitment was

possible. The trust also worked with European agencies to recruit staff and, after a trial period, secured a specialty doctor from the Czech Republic who worked in the Downe Hospital for one year. We understand that, in the most recent recruitment exercise in July 2013, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust had nine vacancies that were advertised for middle-grade doctors across the three emergency departments. Only three applications were received for all of the nine posts, and they were all applications for the Ulster Hospital. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust was only able to fill two of the posts, and both people were candidates who had previously worked in the Ulster Hospital as locums.

Members have said that there has not been an effort made and that more needs to be done, but this is a demonstration that considerable effort has been made and that we are dealing with a problem in emergency departments that exists across the UK and, indeed, in Ireland in recruiting emergency doctors and practitioners for our emergency departments.

We must recognise the facts of how we got here. There have been no cuts in money; let us nail that particular lie. This is not to do with finances; it is about having doctors to man the facilities. If I get the doctors, that facility can be open this weekend. That is a commitment that I am very happy to make; but, at this time, we are finding it challenging to get doctors.

In the meantime, I have asked that a number of steps be taken. First, all appropriate and feasible steps should be taken to ensure that the consequences of these changes are managed in a way that minimises the risk of unmanageable pressures on emergency departments at the Ulster, Royal Victoria and other affected hospitals. I recognised that as soon as the trust came to me with this as a potential problem. We are taking these steps so that patient safety and the quality of the patient experience is not compromised. The trust and the HSC Board have assured me that the number of attendances and admissions likely to arise at other sites will be manageable; and, as I have already said, the contingency arrangements appear to have been working over the weekend, although the Royal did hit particular problems in the middle of last week, and I think that we need to recognise that.

Secondly, I have asked the HSC Board and the trust to accelerate the work to develop and implement the new model of care at Lagan Valley Hospital that will enable many of the people affected by the changes to resume receiving services locally in the short term. Alongside that, work to sustain the model of care in place at the Downe will be no less important.

Thirdly, I have asked that fresh efforts be made to secure medical staffing for both sites. Fourthly, I have required that the HSC Board and the South Eastern Trust bring forward a detailed plan for the future of the Downe and Lagan Valley hospitals, with an implementation plan, to secure confidence in the community that the best possible steps are being taken.

I recognise that confidence has been damaged and diminished in local communities and, indeed, with local representatives as a result of this. I believe that the trust has an important duty to seek to restore that confidence and to ensure that the community believes that it is acting in its best interests at all times. Therefore, I have made

it very clear to the trust that it needs to ensure that every effort is made to enable people to access the Downe Hospital and the Lagan Valley Hospital on a 24/7 basis. I know that some people were quite reluctant to accept the service that was being offered at night in the Downe Hospital. I know that people in Lagan Valley really desire that service, because it ensured that, in particular, the elderly population and people with chronic illnesses could have access to the hospital with particular ease.

A series of things need to be done. I recognise the recruitment issue. Continuing efforts will be made on that particular front. I have insisted that the trust makes specific efforts to seek to recruit more staff. However, we need to be cognisant of the fact that we are operating in an arena where it is problematic not just here, in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, but in Northern Ireland, Ireland and the British Isles. We have a major issue here with recruiting doctors for emergency departments. People can ask why. There is a whole series of reasons for that. We need to recognise that that is an issue. We cannot operate in a vacuum separately from everywhere else.

There is a commitment to seek to support the Downe Hospital to provide services for its local community. It is not to do with finance; it is to do with getting the appropriate number of doctors.

Adjourned at 9.11 pm.

Written Ministerial Statements

The content of these written ministerial statements is as received at the time from the Ministers. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

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Agriculture and Rural Development

Common Agricultural Policy: Transfer of Moneys from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2 Budget

Published at 11.30 am on Friday 20 December 2013

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I wish to make a written statement to the Assembly to advise Members of my decision regarding the transfer of monies from the Pillar 1 to the Pillar 2 budget of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) within the north of Ireland.

The average transfer rate which I intend to apply is 7% for the 2014-2019 years. This will result in a total transfer of €137,482,128 from the Pillar 1 to the Pillar 2 budget.

The issue of a transfer between Pillars 1 and 2 of the CAP was part of my Department's consultation on the proposals for the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020, which was out for public consultation for 16 weeks from the 1st of July to the 21st October 2013. In addition, my officials gave presentations on these proposals at a series of consultation events across the north, and held several meetings with stakeholders and other interested parties to provide more detail on our proposals, and listen to their views.

In making my decision, I have considered carefully the range of opinions from stakeholders on whether funds should be transferred between Pillars 1 and 2 of the CAP. I have looked closely at how any transfer would affect the budget available to both Pillar 1 and Pillar 2, and the sources of funding that could be available to a future rural development programme.

The CAP is structured along two distinct Pillars. Pillar 1 provides for direct payments to farmers, such as the Single Farm Payment. Pillar 2 provides funding to the Rural Development Programme, which is a wide ranging package of measures that supports our agri-food industry, protects and enhances our environment and countryside and helps to improve the quality of life in rural areas.

The European Union's proposals for rural development provide for the option of transferring annually up to 15% of the Pillar 1 budget to Pillar 2. There is also an option to transfer up to 25% of the Pillar 2 budget to Pillar 1. Rates of transfer between the Pillars of the CAP for the years 2014 to 2019 must be declared by Member States to Europe by the 31st December 2013. If a Member State does not meet this deadline, there is a further option to

declare a rate to Europe for the years 2015 to 2019 before the 1st August 2014. However, the declaration must be made on a Member State basis, and as England, Scotland and Wales all intend to declare their rates by the 31st of December, for that reason I must take a decision on the rate for the north of Ireland now too.

Under the European regulations, I have the option to revise the rates for scheme years 2018 and 2019 in 2017. However, the rates may only be revised upwards.

I consider the Rural Development Programme to be a key mechanism in delivering positive change in our rural areas and it is important that it is adequately funded. Similarly, I know how important direct payments are to our farm businesses. The Rural Development Programme will benefit our farmers through ensuring funding for farm capital investment and other farming facing measures, it will allow me to continue to protect our natural environment through a well funded agri environment scheme, and continue to provide support to our rural businesses and voluntary organisations, which are so vital to our rural communities.

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Child Sexual Exploitation: Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland Thematic Review

Published at 5.00 pm on Friday 20 December 2013

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): On 25 September 2013, I announced that an independent expert-led Inquiry and a Thematic Review by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI), both relating to child sexual exploitation, would be undertaken. On 5 November 2013, I announced that the Inquiry would be led by Professor Kathleen Marshall and advised members of the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry. At the same time, I indicated that I would make a further statement on the SBNI Thematic Review following the agreement of the Terms of Reference. The SBNI Review is being directed by my Department under section 4 of the Safeguarding Board Act (NI) 2011. As my Department is required in law to do, draft Directions were forwarded to the SBNI for consultation and, where relevant and appropriate, the comments of SBNI member agencies have been reflected in the final Directions, which include, in the Schedule, the Terms of Reference for the Review.

The final Directions were issued to the SBNI on 10 December 2013 and came into operation on 11 December. As a consequence, both the independent expert-led Inquiry and SBNI Thematic Review are now underway. It is estimated that both will take approximately one year to complete. Given the scope of the Inquiry, the Chair will report to me and the Ministers of Justice and Education. The SBNI Review, which will focus on the handling of 22 cases involving children in or previously in state care, will report solely to me.

Under the Terms of Reference of the Thematic Review, the SBNI has been asked to examine and evaluate:

- the extent to which SBNI member agencies acted in accordance with established policy procedure and guidance governing the welfare and safeguarding of children from the first point of entry by all of the 22 children into the care system;
- the effectiveness of any action taken by SBNI member agencies to safeguard the 22 children and promote their welfare during their time in care, taking into account whether or not steps taken were in accord with existing policy, procedure or guidance;
- the effectiveness of communication and co-operation between SBNI member agencies in accordance with relevant guidance ; and
- the effectiveness of engagement with and nature of relationships of SBNI member agencies staff with young people.

In particular, the Review will consider the following key issues -

- the nature and quality of the assessments carried out in respect of each of the 22 children and how these assessments informed initial decisions to place each child in care and any other placements which may have occurred subsequent to the initial placement, taking account of each child's previous life experience and any specific factors which influenced the decision to place him or her in care;
- the effectiveness of the care planning, risk assessment, risk management and review processes and how those processes took account of those factors which increase a child's vulnerability to risk of harm, including being absent from any placement without permission;
- the adequacy and effectiveness of the provision of care, including therapeutic and specialist services, to the 22 children in any placement or setting;
- the adequacy, effectiveness and timeliness by SBNI member agencies response to any of the 22 children being reported as absent from any placement or setting without permission and their response to allegations of criminal offences being committed against any of the 22 children. This includes any action taken by SBNI member agencies to put a stop to such activities, any preventative measures which were taken and the reporting of allegations to the PSNI;
- the effectiveness of reporting and information-sharing systems employed by SBNI member agencies and their adequacy in securing the safety and wellbeing of the 22 children who are the subject of this Review; and
- the involvement and support provided by senior management to frontline staff in the management of, or responses to any of the 22 children.

Also, taking account of the ongoing police investigation and the need to preserve the integrity of that process, the SBNI has been directed to seek the views of:

- each of the 22 children involved, taking account of each child's willingness to participate in the Review, the need to protect their anonymity and guard their need for confidentiality;
- the families of the young people; and
- key staff involved in the care or protection of any of the 22 children and any other personnel who played a significant role in their lives during the period they were in care.

The SBNI has specifically been directed to identify key learning points and opportunities for improvement. Where relevant, the Review will also feed into the wider Inquiry process. Should learning emerge in the course of the Review, which needs to be acted upon more quickly, the SBNI will advise accordingly. My aim in directing the SBNI to conduct this Review is to ensure that in future children and young people in care are offered the best possible protections from individuals who ruthlessly exploit them.

Committee Stage

Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Finance and Personnel
4 December 2013

Financial Provisions Bill [NIA 22/11-15]

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Daithí McKay (Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle
Mr Leslie Cree
Mr Paul Girvan
Mr John McCallister
Mr Ian McCrea
Mr Adrian McQuillan
Mr Peter Weir

Clause 1 (Repeal of the Development Loans (Agriculture and Fisheries) Act (Northern Ireland) 1968)

The Chairperson: No issues were raised in the evidence to the Committee about the clause.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, mindful that the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development does not have any concerns with its provisions, put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with clause 2, mindful that the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development does not have any concerns with its provisions, put and agreed to.

New Clause

The Chairperson: The new clause is on the rating of owners instead of occupiers in certain cases.

Question, That the Committee is content with the new clause, for which the Minister will table an amendment at Consideration Stage to read as per the wording provided at addendum 1, put and agreed to.

New Clause

The Chairperson: The new clause is on the repeal of articles 23 and 24 of the Rates (NI) Order 1977.

Question, That the Committee is content with the new clause, for which the Minister will table an amendment at Consideration Stage to read as per the wording provided at addendum 2, put and agreed to.

New Clause

The Chairperson: The new clause concerns the power of the Department of Finance and Personnel to require information for rating purposes. An issue was raised about

the clause, to which DFP responded. The Committee was content with the clarification provided.

Question, That the Committee is content with the new clause, for which the Minister will table an amendment at Consideration Stage to read as per the wording provided at addendum 3, put and agreed to.

New Clause

The Chairperson: The new clause is to do with a discount on rates on dwellings.

Question, That the Committee is content with the new clause, for which the Minister will table an amendment at Consideration Stage to read as per the wording provided at addendum 4, put and agreed to.

Mr Girvan: May I just clarify one point? That is to allow those with vacant properties to take advantage of the discount, is that correct?

The Committee Clerk: Yes.

Mr Girvan: That is OK.

Clause 3 (Provision as to payment of interest on funds in court)

The Chairperson: The Committee was content with the clarification provided by the Department. The Department will bring forward an amendment to clause 3 too.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the amendment to be tabled by the Minister at Consideration Stage to read as per the wording provided at addendum 5 and mindful that the Committee for Justice has no concerns with its provisions, put and agreed to.

Clause 4 (Power of Northern Ireland Housing Executive to recover certain costs)

The Chairperson: The Committee was content with the clarification provided by the Department.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, mindful that the Committee for Social Development has not expressed any concerns with its provisions, put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with clause 5, mindful that the Public Accounts Committee and the Audit Committee do not have any concerns with its provisions, put and agreed to.

Clause 6 (Expenditure on bodies providing services for the police, etc.)

The Chairperson: The Committee was content with the clarification provided. The Department will bring forward an amendment to the clause.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the amendment to be tabled by the Minister at Consideration Stage to read as per the wording provided at addendum 6 and mindful that the Committee for Justice does not have any concerns with its provisions, put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with clause 7, put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee in content with clause 8, subject to the amendment to be tabled by the Minister at Consideration Stage to read as per the wording provided at addendum 7, put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, subject to the amendment to be tabled by the Minister at Consideration Stage to read as per the wording provided at addendum 8, put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with clause 9, put and agreed to.

Question, That the Committee agree the long title of the Bill, subject to the amendment to be tabled by the Minister at Consideration Stage to read as per the wording provided at addendum 9, put and agreed to.

The Chairperson: A working draft report has been tabled for Committee consideration. Members are being asked to consider the report and forward any comments to the Committee Clerk before close of play on Friday. The Committee is required to report to the Assembly by 12 December, in accordance with the timetable for the Committee Stage of the Bill. Are members content?

Members indicated assent.

The Committee Clerk: In the tabled papers, there is a short working draft of the report. The first section is background information on the Committee's approach to the evidence taken. There is then a section on the consideration of the Bill's provisions. That narrates the different issues that were identified by members of this Committee and any of the other applicable Committees, as well as the clarifications and explanations provided. There is then a section on clause-by-clause consideration, which will be added to based on the minutes of this meeting. There is then a possible generic conclusion and recommendation, acknowledging the input from other Committees and the Department in responding to and addressing the issues raised by the Committees. The draft report highlights the fact that financial provisions Bills, by their very nature, tend to be catch-all vehicles for different Departments to add provisions, and sometimes that can lead to late amendments, as in this case. Therefore, there is a recommendation to DFP to be mindful of that, going forward.

This is just for members' initial consideration. If there are any thoughts on it, I ask you to relay them to me for Friday. I will provide a final draft for formal consideration next week.

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 29 November 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Sexual Orientation Strategy

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the sexual orientation strategy is due to be published; and what is the reason for the delay.

(AQW 25072/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Together: Building a United Community includes our commitment to publish the Sexual Orientation Strategy.

Public consultation is a key stage in the development of the Sexual Orientation Strategy. A draft consultation document to inform public consultation is under consideration within the Department. Consultation will begin as soon as this is finalised.

Civil Service: OFMDFM Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many Civil Service posts existed in their Department on 1 January 2012 and 1 January 2013 at (i) Administrative Assistant; (ii) Administrative Officer; (iii) Executive Officer 2; (iv) Executive Officer 1; (v) Staff Officer; (vi) Deputy Principal; (vii) Grade 7; and (viii) Grade 6 levels, broken down by local council area.

(AQW 28062/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The number of OFMDFM posts are provided in the tables below.

1 January 2012

Grade	Local Council Areas			
	Belfast	Belfast, Castlereagh	Armagh	Derry/ Londonderry
Administrative Assistant	3	11	1	0
Administrative Officer	9	39.51	1	2.59
Executive Officer 2	4.81	36.33	2.81	0
Executive Officer 1	1	23.92	0	0
Staff Officer	6	64.16	1.5	0
Deputy Principal	4.89	57.3	4	0
Grade 7	2	41.69	1	0
Grade 6	0	2	0	0

1 January 2013

Grade	Local Council Areas			
	Belfast	Belfast, Castlereagh	Armagh	Derry/ Londonderry
Administrative Assistant	3	10	1	0
Administrative Officer	9	39.51	1	2.59
Executive Officer 2	7.51	37.33	2.81	0
Executive Officer 1	1	24.92	0	0

Grade	Local Council Areas			
	Belfast	Belfast, Castlereagh	Armagh	Derry/ Londonderry
Staff Officer	6	68.06	1.5	0
Deputy Principal	3.89	70.26	4	0
Grade 7	3	43.43	1	0
Grade 6	1	3	0	0

Social Investment Fund: Tendering

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the tendering process for the administration of the Social Investment Fund, including the criteria and methods used for selection; and to detail the number of applications received and the successful candidates.

(AQW 28198/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The administration of the Social Investment Fund (SIF) thus far has been provided by OFMDFM officials, therefore there has not been any tendering process for administration.

Social Investment Fund: Payments

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list the payments made to each company or individual for the administration of the Social Investment Fund, including the dates.

(AQW 28199/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The administration of the Social Investment Fund (SIF) thus far has been provided by OFMDFM officials, therefore there have been no payments made to companies or individuals for the administration of SIF.

Social Investment Fund: Update

Mr Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Social Investment Fund.

(AQO 5010/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Strategic area plans were received by the Department on 28 February 2013. Each zone submitted economic appraisals for up to ten projects within their area plans. A significant number of the projects have concluded internal appraisal and discussions are ongoing with the steering groups as to the implementation and roll out of the successful projects.

Commissioner for Older People

Mr D McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland.

(AQO 5011/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Commissioner for Older People's main aim is to safeguard and promote the interests of older people. The Commissioner has made an impact in the Social Security Agency's "Make the Call" campaign and at the Department's invitation, chairs the Ageing Strategy Advisory Group, which has significantly shaped the developing draft Active Ageing Strategy.

Following extensive consultation with older people, the Commissioner is currently undertaking a number of major projects including raising awareness of the positive contribution of older people to our society and publishing and providing information on valuing an ageing workforce.

The Commissioner is also reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness of the law and policy relating to older people. This is in addition to her work with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Health and Social Care Trusts, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority and other relevant bodies to ensure that standards and quality of care are at the heart of services provided to older people.

Gender Equality Strategy

Ms Fearon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Gender Equality Strategy.

(AQW 28440/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A review of the Gender Equality Strategy (GES) and its associated cross departmental Action Plans is currently nearing completion. The Review considered how effectively the Strategy has performed against its objectives; assessed the effectiveness of the Action Plans; and has made recommendations for the aims, objectives and delivery of the Strategy and Action Plans in the years remaining – 2014-16.

A revised GES is currently being developed in consultation with the Gender Advisory Panel (GAP). The GAP is made up of key stakeholder representatives. It is intended that the revised document will be published in January 2014.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Slurry Spreading

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the above average rainfall in the week leading up to the cut off date for the spreading of slurry had an adverse effect on farms.

(AQW 28190/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): While weather conditions were difficult at the start of this year and spring was very late, there has been generally good weather since then. It has been the driest summer in six years, and therefore field conditions have been suitable for slurry spreading.

My Department has consistently advised farmers to spread slurry when grass growth is greatest from spring through to late summer. This will help to maximise the yield response to slurry nutrients and ensure that slurry tanks are empty well ahead of the cut off date for slurry spreading in preparation for winter housing period.

Farms are required to have a minimum of 22 weeks slurry storage capacity, and the closed spreading period is some 16 weeks long. This is to ensure that farms have sufficient storage capacity to allow for times when weather and field conditions are unsuitable either before or after the closed spreading period.

Given these circumstances, any above average rainfall in the week leading up to the cut off date for slurry spreading should not have had any significant adverse effect on farms.

Lough Neagh Working Group

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for a progress report on the inter-departmental/ministerial group on the future ownership of Lough Neagh.

(AQW 28265/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In December last year, I shared the Inter-Departmental Working Group report with ministerial colleagues whose officials had contributed to the report through membership of the Working Group.

Since then, the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure has been considering the value of additional research to complement the findings in the report. I intend to meet Minister Ní Chuilín shortly to discuss the findings of this work and how they might add value to the Inter Departmental Working Group Report. I will then assess next steps, including putting recommendations to the Executive as soon as possible probably in the early part of next year.

North Down: Woodland Cover

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the areas in North Down in which her Department plans to increase the tree population.

(AQW 28275/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Woodland cover in North Down is 8.6 % of land area compared with an average of 8 % in the north of Ireland. I remain committed to increasing the extent woodland cover by provide support to landowners under the Rural Development Programme to encourage creation of new woodland. During the Programme period 2007-2013 funding of almost £10 million supported the establishment of over 1,400 hectares of new woodland. This Programme is now closed to new applicants and my officials are developing new afforestation schemes in consultation with stakeholders in preparation for the 2014 -2020 Rural Development Programme. Stakeholders have told us that they wish to see support continuing for creation of a wide range of woodland types, that new woodland is particularly suited to land of limited agricultural productivity and that forestry schemes should be integrated, where possible, with the delivery of Agri-environment Schemes.

Japanese Knotweed: Legislation

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether Japanese Knotweed will be listed as a noxious weed by an affirmation order under Article 3 (2) (a) of the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.

(AQW 28321/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Japanese knotweed is prescribed under The Wildlife Order (NI) 1985 which makes it an offence for any person to intentionally plant or otherwise cause this Invasive Alien Species to grow in the wild. As there are existing legislative controls available my Department do not see a requirement to introduce new subordinate legislation listing Japanese knotweed under the Noxious Weeds (NI) Order 1977.

North/South Animal Welfare and Transport Working Group

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the work of the North South Animal Welfare and Transport Working Group

(AQW 28345/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In my answer to AQW 26710/11-15 I advised that I raised the issue of wild animals in travelling circuses at the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Agriculture meeting on 10 July 2013 and subsequently my officials met officials from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) under the auspices of the North South Animal Welfare and Transport Working Group on 5 September 2013.

Minister Coveney and I received an update on the issue at the NSMC Agriculture meeting on 13 November.

There are no circuses based here but there are a number of circuses registered in the south of Ireland, some of which travel here. I can advise that DAFM officials have contacted stakeholders and are scheduled to meet them to discuss this issue in the near future.

Officials will report back to Minister Coveney and I once they have met all relevant stakeholders and have had an opportunity to consider the available evidence and information.

Tobacco: Import Inspections

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what role her Department plays in the inspection of tobacco entering Northern Ireland.

(AQW 28368/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Plant Health Order (NI) 2006 does not require tobacco leaf to be inspected at the point of entry. Tobacco in its dried leaf form presents no plant health risk to the north of Ireland and therefore my Department does not routinely inspect imports of dried tobacco leaf.

Countries that grow tobacco as a commercial crop and countries outside the EU which buy cigarettes and other tobacco products produced in the north of Ireland may request Phytosanitary certificates to accompany export consignments. To facilitate this trade officials from my Department produce Phytosanitary certificates in support of exports and undertake inspections at premises to check for the presence of pests including tobacco beetle.

Equine Industry: Research and Development

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what funding arrangements are in place to help the equine industry with research and management issues.

(AQW 28387/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD's Evidence and Innovation Strategy is the overarching framework for all DARD funded research and development to underpin evidence-based policy and delivery and promote innovation in agri-food, farming, forestry and other rural businesses, including equine businesses. There is on-going engagement with stakeholders, including through an annual stakeholder conference, to help inform the identification and prioritisation of research needs. The Equine Council NI, (ECNI), the industry representative body for the equine sector in the north that is taking forward the industry's equine strategy, is involved in this process.

DARD's Research Challenge Fund (RCF) is a key element of the DARD Evidence and Innovation Strategy. It gives small and medium sized businesses from the agri-food and other rural sectors an opportunity to get help with research. It aims to encourage industry-led consortia to get involved in research projects, by providing grant of up to 50% assistance (to a maximum value of £250k) with research funding.

My Department's CAFRE also provides a wide range of education and training programmes to meet the needs of the equine industry. Further and Higher Education programmes for new entrants are delivered at Enniskillen Campus and training programmes for those working in the industry are delivered at out-centres throughout the north.

The equine provision currently includes full-time programmes at Level 2 Diploma, up to BSc (Hons) level, farriery programmes and short courses. Higher Education programmes are validated by the University of Ulster.

Enniskillen Campus has a strong ethos of "learning by doing". Several innovative 'learning by doing' projects are used to support delivery of education programmes, including Equine Breeding, Horse Racing and Equitation Units.

DARD engages closely with ECNI and provided start-up funding to ECNI following its establishment, for the two year period to 31 March 2013. This funding was extended for six months to allow ECNI further time to make its arrangements for self-funding and I recently met ECNI to hear about its plans for future direction and funding.

Greyhound Racing: Legislation

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 25696/11-15, whether there are further plans to meet with (i) Hope 4 Hounds; (ii) Greyhound Rescue NI; (iii) The Dogs Trust; (iv) Mid-Antrim Animal Sanctuary; (v)

ASSISI; (vi) Rainbow Animal Rescue; (vii) Causeway Coast Animal Rescue; and (viii) any other organisations to discuss legislation relating to Greyhound racing and welfare.

(AQW 28399/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Although my Department is not responsible for greyhound racing, my officials and I from time to time meet greyhound organisations in fulfilment of our policy and legislative responsibility for the welfare, control, identification, licensing and breeding of dogs. For example, in December 2012 my officials met Homes for Unwanted Greyhounds and Dogs Trust, and in April this year the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, and I met the Irish Coursing Club to discuss greyhound-related issues.

I do not at present have further meetings planned on this issue but many of the organisations that you mention are consultees with which my Department engages when considering policy and legislative changes relating to dogs or animal welfare. This includes: Dogs Trust; Mid Antrim Animal Sanctuary; Assisi Animal Sanctuary; Rainbow Rescue Centre; and also Greyhound Action NI and Greyhound Rescue NI.

I also sought input from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) on this issue. My ministerial colleague Carál Ní Chuilín MLA has advised that she has not met any of the groups detailed to discuss legislation for greyhound racing.

National Dairy Council: Loss of Business

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she is aware of any local agri-food company that has lost a contract in the Republic of Ireland due to the stance taken by the National Dairy Council.

(AQW 28537/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware that a number of our major milk processors have lost significant business in the south due to the National Dairy Council's campaign.

While country of origin labelling is legal, I am concerned about any loss of business by our processors. I strongly believe that in the current economic climate fostering all Ireland trade would benefit producers in both north and south.

Bovine Tuberculosis: Update

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the current levels of Bovine Tuberculosis.

(AQO 5084/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Bovine TB annual herd incidence has declined from its peak of 7.46% at 31 October 2012 to 6.47% at 30 September 2013.

During 2013 to date there have been 1,021 new TB breakdowns compared with 1,214 in the same period in 2012, which represents a 15.9% reduction.

During 2013 to date there have been 5,785 TB reactors removed to slaughter compared with 7,888 in the same period in 2012, which represents a 26.6% reduction.

While this reduction is welcome I am not complacent and wish to see further progressive reduction in TB levels with the ultimate aim of TB eradication.

Rural Development Programme: Capital Grant Scheme

Mr Milne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has for a capital grant scheme in the new Rural Development Programme that will help farmers improve their farms.

(AQO 5082/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My proposals for a capital grant scheme in the new Rural Development Programme were outlined in a consultation document published on 1 July 2013.

The document detailed proposals for a Business Investment Scheme which aims to improve the competitiveness, efficiency and sustainability of agriculture by providing grant support to:-

- Introduce new technologies and/or processes;
- Upgrade or replace buildings and/or equipment to provide better nutrient management, biosecurity, disease prevention and improved welfare conditions for animals;
- Improve storage facilities for the horticulture and/or arable sectors to provide better bio security and improved crop quality standards on farms; and
- Establish renewable energy technologies on-farm to ensure that farm resources are used to provide a secure energy supply and improve farm income.

My Department consulted on proposals to introduce a single scheme with a 3-tiered funding structure, with a maximum grant amount of £250,000 available, at a grant rate of 40% of total project costs. It was proposed that the requirements of the application process would increase in line with the level of funding sought.

The period of public consultation on the next Rural Development Programme closed on 21 October 2013 and my officials are considering the responses received.

Single Farm Payment: Timeline

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assurance she will give that 90 per cent of Single Farm Payments for the scheme year 2013 will be made by the end of December 2013.

(AQO 5083/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: 37,629 claims were submitted to the 2013 Single Farm Payment (SFP) Scheme. EU legislation permits DARD to release full rate payments on verified claims from 1 December 2013 providing that all eligibility checks, including on-farm checks on the land eligibility inspections which were required in respect of the 2013 year, have been carried out.

Within this legislative framework, our objective is to pay as many claims as possible at the earliest practicable stage.

The total budget for the 2013 Single Farm Payment Scheme is £265.25 million. To keep farmers and the industry informed and to help manage expectations on the flow of payments, the payment timeline was published on 20 November setting out the processing targets for the first three months of the SFP payment window.

We are aiming to finalise 85% of the claims submitted to the scheme in December 2013. The vast majority of farmers will receive their payments before Christmas. This is an increase of 5% on the December 2012 target, and an increase of 2.2% on payments actually achieved in December 2012. We also aim to finalise 95% of claims by the end of February 2014.

Whilst we have improved our payment performance, farmers can help us go further by submitting their claims online. This reduces the volume of manual processing involved and helps us pay claims more quickly. If 40% of farmers submitted their applications online, we could pay 90% of claims in December of that year.

With regard to inspection cases the objective is to finalise the majority of payments by the end of February 2014, which is four months ahead of the position on inspections for 2012.

South Antrim: Forest Service

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much revenue her Department received from the Forest Service in South Antrim in each of the last three years.

(AQO 5085/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Forest Service is an Agency of the Department and all Agency income and expenditure is contained within the DARD Estimates and accounted for through both the DARD and Agency Resource Accounts.

The Forest Service revenue in the South Antrim constituency is called Operating Income and comes from its operating activities in the area. This was £33,227 in 2010/11, £214,574 in 2011/12 and £109,322 in 2012/13.

Fishing: Ardglass/Kilkeel/Portavogie

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when her Department will produce a fishing development plan relating to the ports of Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie.

(AQO 5086/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I met with fishing industry representatives on 5 November 2013 and we agreed to meet early in 2014 to discuss the challenges facing the industry from now to 2020 and how it might adapt. As part of the preparations to implement the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund my Department will be required to develop an investment plan for fisheries for the period 2014-2020. This will be developed in consultation with the fishing industry and is likely to be published by the end of 2014.

Horse Passports

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the effectiveness of the European horse passport system in monitoring the recording and traceability of horses.

(AQO 5087/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Under Commission Regulation (EC) No. 504/2008, it is a requirement for all horses and ponies (and other forms of equidae) within the EU to have a passport identifying the animal. The Regulation is implemented in the north by the Horse Passports Regulations (NI) 2010, on the identification of equidae.

In response to the recent horse meat fraud, the Commission wrote to Member States with its 5 Point Action Plan, which contains a number of measures in relation to food fraud, country of origin labelling and actions in respect of horse passports.

On horse passports, the Commission proposes to amend Commission Regulation (EC) No. 504/2008 to make mandatory the recording of horse passports in a central national database and to transfer the issuing of horse passports entirely to the competent authorities. It also proposes to reduce the number of passport issuing bodies in the forthcoming proposal on Zootechnics.

DARD officials are working with counterparts in Defra, Scotland and Wales with a view to improving the quality of horse passports and producing new efficiency guidelines for Passport Issuing Organisations (PIOs). PIOs have been consulted on the guidelines and it is hoped to have them in place during February 2014.

DARD officials are also working with counterparts in Dublin to explore the possibility of having an all island horse passport centralised database and to enhance the security of the equine identification system.

Given the all-island nature of the equine industry it is important that we co-operate on the arrangements we put in place to strengthen the horse passport system and help to prevent food fraud throughout the island.

Agrifood: Careers

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what she is doing to ensure that younger people enter the agri-food industry as a career.

(AQO 5088/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's College, CAFRE, provides support through its education programmes to those who are preparing for a career in the agri-food industry. I am pleased to report that enrolments are at a five-year high.

CAFRE makes contact with all secondary schools and DEL Careers' Advisers to promote careers in the agri-food industry to young people. During the last academic year over 70 percent of secondary schools hosted a career's talk, arranged for their students to have work experience at CAFRE or participated in a curriculum support activity at one of CAFRE's campuses.

I am conscious that the decision for young people to enter farming in particular can be complex as it impacts on the whole farm family. For this reason, as part of the Rural Development Programme, my Department developed the Family Farm Options programme. This programme provides the family with an Agriculture Mentor who helps them consider the key business issues.

In looking to the future, as part of the local implementation of the reformed Common Agricultural Policy, my Department is consulting with industry stakeholders. The main areas affecting young farmers include additional support through the Basic Payment Scheme and a top-up to financial support available to support investment.

As Minister, I am focussed on encouraging young people to enter the agri-food industry and to helping them build a successful career which will assist the industry achieve its full potential.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Events Company: Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the Central Investigation Service has investigated any aspect of the service delivered by the Northern Ireland Events Company.

(AQW 24629/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Central Investigation Service has not been required to investigate any aspect of the service delivered by the Northern Ireland Events Company.

Following the disclosure of the financial deficit in the Company, the Department engaged a number of other experts to investigate specific aspects of its affairs. Subsequent to this, Company Inspectors were appointed by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment to carry out a comprehensive investigation into the affairs of the Company.

Ulster Museum: Union Flag

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the current policy on flying the Union Flag over the Ulster Museum, Belfast.

(AQW 25444/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: No flags are flown over any NMNI sites.

Sports Stadia: October Monitoring

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if she will bid for further funds for sub-Regional Sports stadia in the October Monitoring Round.

(AQW 25446/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: No bids were submitted in the October Monitoring Round.

Irish Football Association: Windsor Park

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the discussions she had with the Irish Football Association (IFA) in the weeks prior to her recent statement regarding the need for appropriate governance at the IFA before the redevelopment funding for Windsor Park could occur.

(AQW 25754/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Contact with the IFA in the weeks prior to my statement in the Assembly on 10 September 2013, was primarily conducted by my senior officials in the Department however I did have a direct conversation with Mr Patrick Nelson, IFA Chief Executive Officer on one occasion.

Football Clubs: Capital Funding Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the timeframe for the provision of tranches of capital funding for football grounds.

(AQW 26626/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, an arm's length body of my Department, is currently developing a new capital funding programme aimed at multisport, multi-agency partnerships community projects in areas of deprivation and to which football clubs may be eligible to apply.

The programme has an anticipated launch date of Spring 2014 and it is planned that information workshops and further communication will occur from January 2014 onwards. To receive timely information in relation to the development of the programme it is advised that potential applicants register on the Sport NI website at <http://www.sportni.net/Funding+registrations/Funding+Registrations.htm>

Sport NI, has advised that currently there is no capital funding programmes available for football clubs to apply to.

Football Clubs: Capital Funding Programme

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for a timescale on the distribution of funds to Irish League soccer clubs for capital projects.

(AQW 26682/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, an arm's length body of my Department, is currently developing a new capital funding programme aimed at multisport, multi-agency partnerships community projects in areas of deprivation and to which football clubs may be eligible to apply.

The programme has an anticipated launch date of Spring 2014 and it is planned that information workshops and further communication will occur from January 2014 onwards. To receive timely information in relation to the development of the programme it is advised that potential applicants register on the Sport NI website at

<http://www.sportni.net/Funding+registrations/Funding+Registrations.htm>

Sport NI, has advised that currently there is no capital funding programmes available for football clubs to apply to.

Civil Service: DCAL Recruitment

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 26139/11-15, given the significant under representation of those from the Protestant community in applications for posts to her Department, to outline the steps she will take to increase applications.

(AQW 26806/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Recruitment to the NI Civil Service, including DCAL, is regulated by the NI Civil Service Commissioners, who have a statutory duty to ensure that all appointments are made on merit on the basis of fair and open competition.

The three DCAL led competitions referred to in AQW 26139/11-15 were initiated and progressed in compliance with the Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code and in accordance with the NICS Recruitment Policy and Procedures Manual, which may be accessed via the following link.

NICS Recruitment Policy and Procedures Manual Version 13

The Manual includes details of the outreach measures already taken in order to create a welcome for all who might consider a career in the NICS.

In compliance with Article 55 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 all proposed recruitment competitions are referred to the Department of Finance and Personnel's Equality & Diversity Branch for advice on the inclusion of statements in job advertisements welcoming applications from identified under- represented groups. The inclusion of such a statement was not deemed necessary for the three competitions referred to.

Glentoran Football Club: Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to clarify the reported promise of £10 million to Glentoran Football Club by her predecessor, including where funding for the Club now stands, in terms of quantum and timescale.

(AQW 27504/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department is neither bound by, nor committed to, any notional or specific award of funding to any club's development plans at this stage. As any funding for sub-regional stadia development still needs to be secured in the next CSR, subsequent possible bids will be considered on the basis of evidenced need and demonstrable outcomes for society. Therefore no decisions of any kind on funding to assist the development of particular stadiums, has been taken.

Commonwealth Games 2014: Ulster Hockey

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what assistance her Department has provided to the Ulster Hockey team in its endeavours to enter a Northern Ireland team in the Commonwealth Games 2014.

(AQW 27843/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for entering teams from the north of Ireland, into the Commonwealth Games 2014, rests wholly with the NI Commonwealth Games Council (NICGC).

Neither my Department, nor Sport NI - an arms length body of my Department, has been approached by Ulster Hockey or the NICGC to provide assistance in this matter.

However, over the last 5 financial years, Sport NI has provided almost £4.2m of exchequer and Lottery funding towards the development of the sport of hockey across the north of Ireland. During the period 2009-2013 Sport NI provided £1,000,303 to the Ulster Hockey Union through the Investing in Performance Sport Programme.

Furthermore, Sport NI has agreed to invest £840,440 into Ulster Hockey through the Performance Focus Programme for the period 2013-2017.

Legal Action: DCAL Costs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail how much her Department spent on (i) legal costs; and (ii) paying damages or compensation as a consequence of legal actions, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 27960/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The information requested is provided in the table below.

Year	Legal costs (£)	Damages/compensation paid as a consequence of legal actions (£)
2008-09	10,672	-
2009-10	63,396	-
2010-11	85,317	-
2011-12	43,756	36,465
2012-13	94,141	-

Lough Erne: Anglers with a Disability

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on sourcing an alternative access to Lough Erne for anglers with a disability, given the continuing difficulties experienced reopening the Garvary jetty.

(AQW 28023/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has been involved in a series of discussions with land owners regarding access to the Garvary jetty and there are indications of progress towards a positive resolution.

Officials will continue to explore options for additional access to Lough Erne for anglers and in particular for those with a disability.

Fish Deaths: Electricity Supply Board

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions her Department has had with the Electricity Supply Board on the recently reported death of fish at the dam on the River Erne.

(AQW 28070/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My officials met with representatives of the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) on 3 October in Enniskillen to review the operation of the "Trap and Truck" arrangement for the conservation of eels on the Erne.

During the meeting, officials raised reports about recent fish deaths at the dam on the River Erne. ESB officials advised that they had undertaken an investigation but had not found any evidence to substantiate the claims.

ESB has agreed to provide regular updates on the numbers of salmon passing upstream (including any fish that die in the pass) to allow DCAL to monitor Erne salmon runs.

Lough Neagh: Nets

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the number and type of nets permitted on Lough Neagh; and (ii) the monitoring system in place to check the size and grade of nets.

(AQW 28074/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) There are five types of nets permitted on Lough Neagh and these are detailed below:
- Bait net for the taking of freshwater fish other than trout or rainbow trout for use as bait;
 - Eel draft net exceeding 118 metres;
 - Draft net for the capture of salmon and freshwater fish;
 - Single wall set net or trammel net for the capture of trout;
 - Single wall set net or trammel net for the taking of freshwater fish other than trout or rainbow trout.
- (ii) DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers (FPO's) undertake patrols both on and around Lough Neagh to detect, disrupt and deter those involved in illegal fishing activity. FPO's regularly carry out net checks to ensure that these are properly marked, of legal construction and being fished in accordance with legislation.

Nets found to be in breach of legislation may be seized and if the owner is identified the matter will be reported with a view to prosecution. If the owner is not identified the Department will make application to the Courts to issue a destruction order for the nets.

Library Services: Inner South Belfast

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of whether library services are delivering to their full potential for inner south Belfast.

(AQW 28174/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Library services to inner south Belfast are delivered by the Ormeau Road, Lisburn Road and Belfast Central Libraries. Mobile and Homecall services are also provided within the area. The provision of services to any particular area is an operational issue for the Board of Libraries NI.

In line with my Department's 2013/14 business plan, Libraries NI is prioritising resources to those libraries serving the 10% most deprived Super Output Areas, as measured by the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010. These redeployed resources are to enable the release of experienced front-line staff to undertake outreach and community engagement activity in deprived areas. As inner south Belfast contains 5 Super Output Areas that are recognised to be within the top 10% most deprived areas, the area stands to benefit from this approach.

Libraries NI has responded to feedback from community engagement in inner south Belfast by starting regular Rhythm and Rhyme sessions and story-time sessions for mother and toddler groups at both the Markets and Donegal Pass Community Centres. A reading group is also being set up from Lagan Fold and discussions have taken place with Shaftesbury Community Centre in relation to establishing a book group, regular story sessions for children, literacy skills support and a junior reading gang.

Library Services: Demand

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether library services meet demand.

(AQW 28176/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The demand for library services in the north of Ireland was assessed by Libraries NI between 2009 and 2011 as part of its Strategic Review of the Libraries' Estate. It was further assessed by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) in 2012/13 as part of a wider review of the success of the Department's policy for the public library service, Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries.

Both these reviews have shown that the public continues to value the public library service. In order to increase participation and strengthen related demand, Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries contains a number of Public Library Standards designed to improve access to and usage of the library service. Work on meeting these standards is being taken forward by Libraries NI through its annual business plans. In line with the recommendations of the Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries review, DCAL is also in the process of reviewing the existing Public Library Standards with a view to creating new Standards on participation, customer satisfaction, access and usage of libraries by people suffering from poverty and social exclusion. Work on the development of these new Standards is expected to be completed in the New Year.

Library Services: Inner South Belfast

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the demand for library services in inner south Belfast, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28177/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Demand for library services is measured by Libraries NI on the basis of a range of indicators, namely Issues & Renewals, Active Members, Public Access Computer Sessions, Activities¹ and Visits. The branch libraries serving inner south Belfast are Belfast Central, Lisburn Road and Ormeau Road. Mobile and Homecall Services are also provided within the area.

The tables below detail the demand for library services at these branches over the last 3 financial years:-

2010/11

Library	Issues & Renewals	Active Members	Public Access Computer Sessions	Activities		Visits
				Sessions	Participants	
Belfast Central	117,140	9,098	138,560	46	637	384,059
Lisburn Road	67,781	2,803	5,582	171	3,300	57,500
Ormeau Road	67,701	3,451	31,031	189	3,911	91,900
Total	252,622	15,352	175,173	406	7,848	533,459

2011/12

Library	Issues & Renewals	Active Members	Public Access Computer Sessions	Activities		Visits
				Sessions	Participants	
Belfast Central	114,371	8,234	139,165	50	737	391,282
Lisburn Road	69,515	3,088	5,691	203	5,059	69,172
Ormeau Road*	50,829	3,465	22,114	154	2,958	64,540
Total	234,715	14,787	166,970	407	8,754	524,994

* Ormeau Road was closed January - March 2012 for refurbishment

2012/13

Library	Issues & Renewals	Active Members	Public Access Computer Sessions	Activities		Visits
				Sessions	Participants	
Belfast Central	97,744	7,840	131,709	91	1,490	357,687
Lisburn Road	67,659	3,024	5,129	210	4,889	62,458
Ormeau Road	72,044	3,955	29,864	200	3,681	90,207
Total	237,447	14,819	166,702	501	10,060	510,352

Figures for Mobile Library and Homecall services over the last 3 years are held separately and are not immediately available. I will therefore write to the member with details of these as soon as I receive them.

Lough Erne: Fish Surveys

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the results of the Lough Erne Netting Survey Report will be published.

(AQW 28182/11-15)

1 Activities include class visits, Got IT? sessions, Reading Groups, Rhythm & Rhyme, Storytime, Knit & Natter groups, Job Clubs

Ms Ní Chuilín: A draft report on the recent survey of pike stocks in spawning areas of Lower Lough Erne is currently under consideration by my Department and is expected to be released to the public shortly.

This initial survey and report are part of a wider, on-going body of fish stock scientific monitoring and assessment of the Lough Erne fishery. The results of the full surveys will be available early in 2014.

Derry: DCAL Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 27945/11-15, why no civil servants from her Department are based in Derry.

(AQW 28244/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department is the main funder of the City of Culture's Cultural Programme of projects and events during 2013. While my officials were not permanently located in Derry, the Head of 2013 Projects Team spent much of the year working with project partners in the City. Regular oversight and project management meetings were also held in Derry which included representation up to Permanent Secretary level.

As part of City of Culture legacy plans, I recently announced that DCAL wishes to widen its focus after 2013 to the North West area. A delivery structure including a new delivery body will be required to take forward future support and development of DCAL's objectives in the North West.

As part of this new delivery structure, DCAL will establish a DCAL North West office to provide support with the establishment of the new body, establish effective governance within the new organisation and continue to work with community organisations and stakeholders to deliver DCAL's key objectives of tackling poverty and social exclusion in the region.

Detailed arrangements and costs for the new DCAL North West office and delivery body have not yet been finalised.

Windsor Park: Redevelopment

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Windsor Park redevelopment project.

(AQW 28282/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The IFA IST tenders were returned on 23rd September 2013 and are currently being assessed with regard to compliance to budget and specification. In addition DCAL are working with the IFA to be assured that appropriate governance and accountability structures are in place.

I remain confident that these issues will be resolved and that any delays around any legal challenges are avoided, and that the Windsor Park development will remain on programme.

Capital Projects: DCAL

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, following the concerns over the contract awarded for the rebuilding of the Lyric Theatre, to detail (i) the changes that have been made to how her Department manages capital projects; and (ii) whether the recommendations made by the NI Audit Office have been implemented.

(AQW 28344/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

- (i) The following changes to managing major capital projects have been made:
- The Department now requires capital projects to adhere to the best practice project management structure of "Achieving Excellence in Construction".
 - Capital projects will undergo either a full Gateway Review or a Gateway Healthcheck.
 - A senior departmental official will be appointed as Investment Decision Maker (IDM) or joint IDM.
 - A Senior Responsible Owner will be appointed for each project and will be a representative from the contracting authority. The SRO reports to the Investment Decision Maker and is accountable for the project delivery.
 - Each project is required to have rigorous management structures in place at different levels. A Project Board is put in place that will meet at least bi-monthly and take a strategic overview of the project.
 - Each capital project must also have a steering group which meets on a monthly basis to address technical and financial issues and provide funders with an update on how potential risks will be managed.
 - The Department engages the services of CPD. The CPD client advisor provides procurement advice from the beginning of the project and on-going technical and project management advice throughout the life of the project through to Post Project Evaluation.
 - The use of CPD as the COPE is included in letters of offer, for capital projects, issued by the Department as a condition of funding.
 - New guidance and procedures in relation to Post Project Evaluation (PPE) within DCAL were launched in June 2011. The Department has made compliance with this guidance a condition of funding.
 - A benefits realisation plan must be in place for every capital project.

- It is the Department's policy to retain all contract documentation in line with public sector practice. The Department is also amending procedures to ensure the requirement to retain contract documentation in line with public practice is communicated to all partners engaged in the delivery of capital projects.
- (ii) Five of the nine recommendations made by NIAO have already been implemented, three are partially implemented and one is not implemented. The Department has drafted procedures that will ensure all of the recommendations are fully implemented prior to the end of the financial year.

City of Culture 2013: Contingency Fund

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why AQW 26871/11-15 remains unanswered. (AQW 28397/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The answer to AQW 26871/11-15 was issued to the Member on 20 November 2013.

Antrim/Ballyclare: Library Membership

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of members of (i) Antrim; and (ii) Ballyclare libraries, in each of the last three years. (AQW 28472/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The number of active members of i) Antrim ii) Ballyclare libraries, in each of the last three years is as follows:

	1st April 2011	1st April 2012	1st April 2013
(i) Antrim Library	4,098	4,111	4,147
(ii) Ballyclare Library	2,759	2,659	2,516

Commonwealth Games 2014: Ministerial Attendance

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans she has to attend the Commonwealth Games 2014 in Glasgow. (AQW 28482/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My diary commitments for July and August 2014 have not yet been planned.

EU Funding: DCAL

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the EU funding surrendered by her Department in each of the last two financial years. (AQW 28494/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has surrendered no EU funding in each of the last two financial years.

Performing Arts Framework: Further and Higher Education

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions she has had with the Minister for Employment and Learning about developing a Performing Arts Framework for Further and Higher Education. (AQW 28496/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not had any discussions with the Minister for Employment and Learning about developing a Performing Arts Framework for Further and Higher Education.

Broadcasting Powers: Devolution

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions she has had with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on the devolution of broadcasting powers. (AQW 28497/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have had initial discussions with DCMS Ministers, most recently with Ed Vaizey around the potential devolution of broadcasting.

Cycling: Velodrome

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she would consider commissioning a business case for a velodrome. (AQW 28498/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for bringing forward proposals for the development of a cycling velodrome rests in the first instance with the governing body of the sport, Cycling Ireland.

A Business Case for such a facility would have to demonstrate value for money, and would need to be considered within the wide context of the Executive's priorities, my Departmental priorities for sport, including those set out in Sport Matters, and as part of a clear co-ordinated strategy for the sport, developed by the governing body.

The first stage in considering DCALs potential role in the development of a velodrome is through a feasibility study which I would ask my officials to consider.

Any proposal would need to set out how any such facility would be sustainable going forward.

Lough Neagh/River Bann: Commercial Fishing Licences

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the current commercial fishing licences granted for Lough Neagh and the River Bann.

(AQW 28520/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The following commercial fishing licences for Lough Neagh and the Lower Bann have been issued in the current year up to 22 November.

Long line for eels Lough Neagh (less than 1200 hooks)	91
Long line for eels Lough Neagh (more than 1200 hooks)	6
Eel draft net	47
Eel weir - Toome	1
Eel weir - Portna Upper Row	1
Draft net for L Neagh	24
Single wall set net or trammel net for the capture of trout	73
Single wall set net or trammel net - coarse	128
Bait net	73

With the exception of the eel weirs, commercial fishing is not permitted in the River Bann.

Waterways Ireland: Religious Monitoring

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of staff employed by Waterways Ireland, broken down by religion.

(AQW 28562/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The total number of staff employed by Waterways Ireland is 333. There is no legal requirement for Waterways Ireland to monitor the religion of the 249 staff working in the South. Currently Waterways Ireland employs 84 staff in the North. Of these one is employed from a recruitment agency and as such details relating to religion are not available.

Of the remaining 83 employees, 29 are Protestant, 51 are Roman Catholic and 3 declared as other.

Ulster-Scots Agency: Religious Monitoring

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of staff employed by the Ulster Scots Agency, broken down by religion.

(AQW 28564/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The total number of staff employed by the Ulster Scots Agency is 16 of which 14 are based in the North.

There is no legal requirement to monitor the religion of the 2 staff working in the South.

As there are only 14 staff based in the North and less than five of those are in one of the categories it would not be appropriate to provide a breakdown by religion in this case.

Irish Language: Strategy

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the implementation of the Strategy for Protecting and Enhancing the Development of the Irish Language.

(AQW 28583/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Now that the consultation process – including with Executive colleagues' Departments – has closed, and views have been taken into account, I am currently considering next steps in relation to delivering a Strategy to Enhance and Protect the Development of the Irish Language, in line with my Department's 2011-2015 Programme for Government commitment.

City of Culture 2013: DCAL Tenders/Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) tenders awarded; and (ii) funding provided to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 28672/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has allocated a total of £12.6m (£6.5m for 2012/13 and £6.1m for 2013/14) to Derry City Council for the 2013 City of Culture's cultural programme of events.

Derry City Council has responsibility for awarding any tenders and providing funding to organisations for events as part of the cultural programme.

C S Lewis: Fiftieth Anniversary

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department and its arm's-length bodies publicly commemorated the fifty year anniversary of the death of C.S. Lewis.

(AQO 5097/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: To commemorate the anniversary, Libraries NI is running a programme of events including exhibitions, talks and readings. These are centred around Holywood Arches library and Belfast Central library both of which are close to where CS Lewis was born.

The Arts Council contributed to the commemorations by acting as an adviser on aspects of the inaugural C.S. Lewis Festival. As part of the Festival, Replay Theatre, a funded client of the Arts Council, toured an interactive adventure inspired by C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*. The Belfast Film Festival, which is funded by NI Screen, participated by screening the *Through Joy and Beyond* documentary and PRONI displayed copies of some original C.S. Lewis material over the course of the week of the festival.

In addition my Department, through the Ulster Scots Agency, was involved in a joint project with Tourism Ireland on the production of a book that records Lewis's Ulster Scots ancestral links. These links can be traced back to James II of Scotland and include connections to the Hamilton and Montgomery story. This connection has been endorsed and welcomed by the Hamilton Rowan's of Killyleagh while the Ulster Historical Foundation has confirmed the validity of the Lewis link to Scotland and to the royal lineage.

River Mourne: Anaerobic Digester

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if she proposes to make a submission to the Planning Appeals Commission in relation to the proposal to construct an Anaerobic Digester on the River Mourne in Sion Mills. [R]

(AQO 5098/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The appropriate siting and the granting of planning permission for anaerobic digester plants are a matter for DoE and the Planning Service.

The River Mourne is an important salmon river. As Fisheries Minister, I will want to be assured that any potential impacts on salmon and their habitats are properly considered and my officials are liaising with the Loughs Agency to submit a statement to the Planning Appeals Commission.

My officials have also been liaising with DARD on this application. DARD has provided comments to Planning Service in relation to the protection of animal health, the requirement for approval under animal by-products legislation and the location of the proposed digester close to a floodplain.

Ulster-Scots Dictionary: Public Money

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much public money has been spent by her Department on the provision of an Ulster-Scots dictionary.

(AQO 5099/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has spent £25,673 on preparatory work for an Ulster-Scots dictionary. £20,673 was for the development of an Ulster-Scots "Spelling and Pronunciation Guide" and "Word Glossary" under the auspices of the Ulster-Scots Academy Implementation Group in 2011, £13,523 of this money was spent by the Ulster-Scots Academy Implementation Group and £7,150 by the Ulster-Scots Agency. The Ministerial Advisory Group Ulster Scots Academy has provided a further £5,000 to the Ulster Scots Language Society for completion and publication of the "Spelling and Pronunciation Guide" and "Word Glossary" and their subsequent launch in March of this year. Their publication included an invitation for consultation feedback. These documents will make an important contribution to the aim of the Ministerial Advisory Group – Ulster Scots Academy to develop an Ulster-Scots dictionary. This will first require agreement on the orthography of Ulster Scots. This will be a step by step process based on consensus across the Ulster Scots sector and is likely to take some time to develop. Preparation of an Ulster-Scots dictionary is an important piece of work to be taken forward by the Ulster-Scots academy.

Fish: Hydroelectric Schemes

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what are the current specifications for the installation of fish passes on hydro-electric schemes.

(AQO 5100/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: All hydro electric planning applications are submitted to DCAL Inland Fisheries Group, as a statutory planning consultee. Each application is assessed as to compliance with Section 54 of the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966 (as amended) which requires adequate and appropriate fish passage arrangements for impoundments in watercourses.

Assessment of proposed fish passage arrangements is carried out by a Technical Assessment Group (TAG) consisting of Senior Fisheries Officers and Fisheries Scientists. The TAG uses best practice guidance as detailed in technical manuals used by DEFRA, the Environment Agency and the Food and Agriculture Organisation. These run to hundreds of pages and are available on the appropriate websites. A recommendation is then made by the TAG on whether DCAL should approve the proposed fish passage arrangements based on the information provided. Section 54 of the Fisheries Act requires that all fish passes must be approved by DCAL.

The TAG also considers the potential impact of the abstraction operation on the existing fisheries ecology and fish passage opportunities within the depleted channel.

Casement Park: Redevelopment

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given that Casement Park is currently closed, what plans she has to provide assistance and support to other grounds during any re-development period.

(AQO 5101/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The redevelopment of Ravenhill and the planned redevelopment of Windsor Park allow for the use of the Stadiums to be maintained during the construction period.

The situation with Casement Park, due to its complexity means that the use of the Stadium, during the redevelopment cannot be maintained.

Whilst the UCGAA are responsible for developing proposals and alternatives for this situation, my officials are willing to engage and consider any request for assistance and support which may develop.

Currently no assistance or support has been requested during the redevelopment phase, but proposals are being reviewed and considered for post completion phase.

Department of Education

Education: Optimising Achievement

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how he proposes to take forward the recommendations contained in the final pilot evaluation report on the Regional Training Unit project Optimising Achievement through a whole school approach to Wellbeing. **(AQW 28139/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The report on the evaluation of a pilot training course about the 'Optimising Achievement' materials has only recently been forwarded to my Department. The report reflects the feedback from staff from 15 schools immediately following the 3 days of training completed in early March. Until I have had an opportunity to consider the evaluation report and its wider implications, there will be no decision on the place which the 'Optimising Achievement' approach to pupils' emotional health and wellbeing has within the overall 'iMatter' Programme.

Nonetheless, the priority at this time within the 'iMatter' Programme is the development and piloting of an audit tool for use by schools to assess their current approach to promoting pupils' emotional health and wellbeing and how that might be improved.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Focused Inspections

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many (i) full; and (ii) focused inspections were carried out in schools by the Education and Training Inspectorate, in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 28203/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

Academic Year	'Full' inspections	'Focused' inspections *
September 2003- August 2004	63	-
September 2004- August 2005	113	-
September 2005- August 2006	114	-

Academic Year	'Full' inspections	'Focused' inspections *
September 2006- August 2007	117	-
September 2007- August 2008	123	75
September 2008- August 2009	104	49
September 2009- August 2010	133	49
September 2010- August 2011	128	73
September 2011- August 2012	168	65
September 2012- August 2013	155	53

***Note:** 'focused' inspections are a subset 'full' inspections.

Note:

- The figures provided are for primary, post-primary, independent and special schools.
- The inspection figures in the table above do not take account of any follow-up inspection work, survey evaluation visits or district inspection visits.
- A 'focused' inspection is a 'full' primary inspection. Note: 'full' inspection includes all inspections, involving an evaluation of quality of provision for learning, leadership and management, achievements and standards, and overall effectiveness.
- Prior to 2007, inspection data was held manually. The number of 'full' inspections has been included in the response; however, the cost of providing a more detailed breakdown of 'focused' inspections would be disproportionate.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Inspection Grades

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many inspections were graded (i) outstanding; (ii) very good; (iii) good; (iv) satisfactory; and (v) inadequate, in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 28204/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

Academic Year	Inspection grade: 'Outstanding'	Inspection grade: 'Very Good'	Inspection grade: 'Good'	Inspection grade: 'Satisfactory'	Inspection grade: 'Inadequate'
September 2008 – August 2009	18	65	82	63	18
September 2009 – August 2010	30	73	85	60	14
September 2010 – August 2011	36	86	83	57	15
September 2011 – August 2012	23	110	122	55	17
September 2012 – August 2013	34	114	121	73	20

Schools: Crossing Patrols

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many assessments have been made on a school crossing patrol being retained, in each of the last five years; and how many of these assessments resulted in the removal of the patrol.

(AQW 28214/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have advised that the number of assessments made on a school crossing patrol being retained, in each of the last five years, and how many of these assessments resulted in the removal of the patrol, is as follows:

Year	Number of assessments of school crossing patrols	Number of patrols removed
2009	219	10
2010	219	9
2011	229	14

Year	Number of assessments of school crossing patrols	Number of patrols removed
2012	222	15
2013	213	9

North Down: Classroom Assistants

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of classroom assistants in each school in North Down. (AQW 28423/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below details the number of classroom assistants (headcount) in schools in North Down.

School Name	Headcount
Bangor Central Nursery School	3
Hollywood Nursery School	nil
Trinity Nursery School	1
Ballyholme Primary School	15
Ballymagee Primary School	13
Ballyvester Primary School	2
Bangor Central Primary School	15
Bloomfield Primary School	17
Clandeboye Primary School	7
Crawfordsburn Primary School	8
Cygnets House Preparatory Department	1
Donaghadee Primary School	16
Glencraig Integrated Primary School	7
Grange Park Primary School	8
Hollywood Primary School	7
Kilcooley Primary School	5
Kilmaine Primary School	18
Millisle Primary School	7
Rathmore Primary School	14
St Anne's Primary School	2
St Comgall's Primary School	10
St Malachy's Primary School	8
St Patrick's Primary School	9
Sullivan Upper Preparatory School	4
Towerview Primary School	14
Bangor Academy & 6th Form College	9
Bangor Grammar School	13
Glennola Collegiate	2
Priory College	18
St Columbanus' College	14
Sullivan Upper School	11
Clifton Special School	59
Killard House School	35
Lakewood Special School	7

Literacy and Numeracy: Delivering Social Change

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what training and support is in place for teachers who have been appointed as part of the Signature project.

(AQW 28475/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Over 270 additional teachers will be in 300 schools as part of the Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Project. A wide programme of support has been put in place to support both the additional recent graduate teachers and the teachers seconded to provide the support to pupils.

General information about the project and contact details of officers in the implementation team (CASS and HR) and local ELB CASS Officers has been provided to all schools in hard copy and via the WELB website.

A dedicated website NISPLAN has been set up to provide specific help and support. This includes an online help facility. All queries submitted via the help facility are responded to by the relevant specialist and CASS Officers in each ELB provide support by telephone, email and school visits (as required).

All the recent graduate teachers who are beginning teachers (BT) or in Early Professional Development (EPD) are being supported through the Beginning Teacher/EPD programme, already provided by the ELBs.

All Teacher Tutors (teachers in school who provide support in house to BTs/EPDs) are provided with support and training through the BT/EPD programme.

A specific training programme has been developed and is being delivered to all centrally recruited recent graduate teachers who will provide the direct support to pupils. A specific training programme has been developed and will be delivered over December and January 2014 to all the experienced seconded teachers.

Youth Organisations: Funding Criteria

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what criteria was used to determine need in relation to the investment of £12m in the youth sector.

(AQW 28476/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: To be eligible for grant-aid funding, the youth organisation must be registered with and have the support of an education and library board or receive funding from Youth Council for Northern Ireland. The organisations must also demonstrate they operate a Youth Service Programme for a minimum 9 hours per week over at least 30 weeks per year.

All eligible applications which met the above criteria were then scored and weighted against: creating access and facilities for the disabled; carrying out essential Health & Safety work; fire safety; child protection; meeting the needs of young people within section 75; collaboration, partnership, sharing facilities/resources; existing use by youth; and cost effectiveness/value for money.

Youth Capital Funding Scheme

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to list the projects which have benefitted from the announcement of capital investment in the youth sector; and to detail the funding allocated to each project.

(AQW 28477/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In my announcement on 14 November 2013, 53 schemes were successful in applying for grant-aid from the Youth Capital Funding Scheme for Voluntary Organisations for 2013/2014. I have enclosed a table listing the successful schemes and the approximate costs that the Department of Education (DE) has been asked to contribute. The actual cost for each scheme and DE's contribution will be dependent on Departmental approval of detailed drawings and costings.

Youth Organisation	Location	Approx Cost to DE
*1st Hillsborough Scout Group	Hillsborough	£50,000.00
1st Randalstown Scout Group	Randalstown	£50,000.00
1st Tyrone Scouts	Dungannon	£309,800.00
314 Northern Ireland Girls Brigade, Monkstown	Monkstown, Newtownabbey	£150,000.00
4th Portadown (St Mark's) Scout Group	Portadown	£140,000.00
6th Belfast Scout Group	Ophir Gardens, Belfast	£5,000.00
6th Fermanagh Scouting Ireland	Irvinestown	£18,665.00
6th Tyrone Scouts	Cookstown	£66,871.00
Ardoyne Youth Club	Ardoyne, Belfast	£324,000.00
Ardstraw Presbyterian Church Youth Council	Omagh	£144,177.00

Youth Organisation	Location	Approx Cost to DE
*Ballysillan Youth for Christ Community Drop in Centre	Benview Road, Belfast	£360,000.00
Boys Brigade Belvoir Project	BB House,14 May Street, Belfast,BT1 4NR	£299,000.00
Catholic Guides of Ireland Northern Region, Belfast	Beechmount Drive, Belfast	£246,322.00
Cladagh Glen Centre, Fermanagh	Enniskillen	£142,529.00
*Clann Eirann Youth Club	Lurgan	£850,000.00
Comber Youth for Christ	Comber	£119,130.00
Conway Youth Centre	Conway Street, Belfast	£103,102.00
Corpus Christi Youth Centre	Ballymurphy Road, Belfast	£146,295.00
Croi Éanna	Glengormley	£5,000.00
Deanby Youth Centre	Oldpark Road, Belfast	£112,000.00
Downpatrick Group Scouting Ireland	Downpatrick	£12,780.00
Ebrington Church Youth Council	Derry	£107,260.00
Fairhill Youth Centre, Maghera	Maghera	£49,000.00
Forthspring Inter Community Group	Springfield Road, Belfast	£29,094.00
Gallbally Youth and Community Association	Gallbally, Dungannon	£87,336.00
Girlguiding Ulster, Lorne House, Craigavad	Craigavad, Holywood	£145,000.00
Glarryford Young Farmers' Club	Glarryford, Ballymena	£50,000.00
*Glenview Community Centre	Derry	£150,000.00
Goal Line Youth Trust, Portadown	Portadown	£93,011.00
Holy Family Youth Centre, Belfast	Limestone Road, Belfast	£135,216.00
Holy Trinity Youth Centre	Norglen Gardens, Belfast	£116,900.00
Hollywood Family Trust	Hollywood	£140,000.00
John Paul II Youth Club	Brookfield Place, Belfast	£292,487.00
Kingdom Youth Club	Kilkeel	£36,000.00
Londonderry YMCA	Londonderry	£148,000.00
Loughiel Community Association	Loughiel, Antrim	£89,352.00
Magnet Young Adult Centre	Newry	£312,000.00
National Council of YMCAs of Ireland, Newcastle	Newcastle	£146,000.00
Newhill Youth & Community Centre Association	Whiterock Road, Belfast	£607,200.00
Patrician Youth Centre, D'patrick	Downpatrick	£137,500.00
*Portadown YMCA	Portadown	£1,200,000.00
Rosario Youth Centre	Ormeau Road, Belfast	£200,580.00
Saints Youth Centre	Twinbrook, Belfast	£149,895.00
Share Discovery Village	Lisnaskea	£55,440.00
St Comgalls Youth Centre	Antrim	£149,756.00
*St Mary's Youth Club, Derry	Derry	£2,384,073.00
St Michael's Scout Group Enniskillen	Drumlyon, Enniskillen	£140,890.00
St Patricks Youth Centre, Donaghmore	Donaghmore	£117,000.00
St Peter's Immaculata Youth Centre	St Peter's Square North, Belfast	£77,064.00
St Teresa's Youth Club, Belfast	Glen Road, Belfast	£149,980.00

Youth Organisation	Location	Approx Cost to DE
The Scout Association - NI Scout Council	National Scout Centre Crawfordsburn	£500,000.00
West Kirk Community Project	Conway Street, Belfast	£140,000.00
Willowfield Parish Church	My Lady's Road, Belfast	£240,000.00
Overall Total		£12,030,705.00

Schools: Governor Appointments

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how he will ensure that nominees for Boards of Governors, as part of the current reconstitution process, will be empathetic to the ethos of the various schools.

(AQW 28479/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Applicants for governor appointments to be made by the Department or the education and library boards are invited to describe on their application forms their commitment to the ethos of the schools or types of schools in which they would prefer to serve. The information on the form will be considered for the purpose of ensuring that governor appointments comply with statutory requirements.

Education Bill: Political Meetings

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 28068/11-15, to detail (i) the dates on which he has met with political representatives or parties; (ii) the name of each political party at each meeting; (iii) the attendees at each meeting; (iv) the purpose of each meeting; and (v) the outcomes from each meeting.

(AQW 28613/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My diary does not record details of political meetings. I have met with a large number of political representatives regarding the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA). The establishment of ESA is raised at most meetings with educational and political stakeholders as a matter of course.

South Eastern Education and Library Board: Special Educational Needs

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether the South Eastern Education and Library Board will be allocated extra resources due to an anticipated increase in numbers of children with special education needs.

(AQW 28679/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The majority of special educational needs (SEN) expenditure is met from the Board's block grant and resulting pressures/easements are considered in conjunction with other block grant pressures/easements. The South Eastern Education and Library Board 2013-14 budget is currently being assessed, in conjunction with the bids submitted by the Board, as part of the January 2013/14 Monitoring exercise.

Education: CEO Salaries

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to detail the salaries of the CEO of (i) each Education and Library Board; (ii) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; (iii) the Irish Medium support body; and (iv) the Integrated Education support body.

(AQW 28732/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not give details of individuals' salaries or other payments.

The remuneration for CEOs in each public body sponsored by the Executive is published annually by OFMDFM in the Public Bodies Annual Report. The latest report available (2011/12) can be viewed at <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/public-appointments-annual-reports>.

Comhairle Na Gaelscolaíochta and the Council for Integrated Education were designated as public bodies in 2012/13. Information on these bodies will be included in the 2012/13 report when published.

Department for Employment and Learning

Work Contracts: Zero Hours

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the differences for people employed on a zero hours contract compared with those with a twenty hour contract in terms of redundancy, maternity/paternity pay/leave, sick pay, holiday pay, tax credits, housing benefit and other such rights or benefits.

(AQW 27973/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I have grouped the answers to these three questions together for ease of reference.

I am not aware of any official type of contract called a "twenty hour contract". I therefore am assuming that the question refers to a part-time worker contract.

The main difference between a zero-hours contract and a part-time worker contract is that for the former, a person agrees to be available for work as and when required, but has no guaranteed hours or times of work. A part-time worker on a twenty hour per week contract, for example, does have guaranteed hours of work.

It is difficult to address the general rights of people on zero-hours contracts, as there are a variety of cases and situations in which these contracts can be used. For example, most people on a zero-hours contract are workers who operate under a contract, and are entitled to:

- the National Minimum Wage;
- rest breaks, paid holiday and night work limits;
- protection against unauthorised deductions from pay;
- statutory maternity, paternity and adoption pay (but not leave);
- protection under Public Interest Disclosure law;
- protection from unlawful discrimination;
- Health and Safety protection; and
- additional rights under the Agency Workers Regulations (NI) 2011.

Whilst most people on zero-hours contracts are 'workers', a 2012 employment tribunal case in Great Britain, Pulse Healthcare Ltd -v- Care Watch Care Services Ltd, found that six individuals employed on zero-hours contracts were 'employees'.

Employees have all the rights of workers, plus:

- maternity, paternity and adoption leave;
- unfair dismissal rights; and
- eligibility for statutory redundancy pay.

Therefore, if a zero-hours contract worker is, by the terms and conditions of his/her appointment an employee, they would receive these additional rights, as would a part-time worker in a similar contractual position.

Zero-hours contracts generally do not provide a worker with sick pay. A part-time worker would receive sick pay under the provisions of the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000, if, as is likely, a comparable full-time worker receives sick pay.

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has advised that Working Tax Credit (WTC) is a work incentive measure to top up the earnings of workers on low incomes and is available only to people who are in qualifying remunerative work. Remunerative work is defined as work done for payment (or in expectation of payment) for at least 16 hours a week or a higher figure depending on a person's circumstances. An additional requirement is that the work must be expected to last for at least 4 weeks from the date of claim.

In principle, HMRC treats zero-hours contracts similarly to how it treats other contracts. HMRC asks a WTC claimant to advise how many hours of paid work they normally do each week. If a claimant normally works more than the qualifying number of hours, with only the occasional week dipping below, they are treated as eligible. If, on the other hand, their working pattern is unpredictable and they regularly work less than the qualifying number of hours, then they would not be regarded as normally working the qualifying number of hours and they would not be treated as eligible.

The Department for Social Development (DSD) has advised that Social Security benefit claimants on a zero-hours contract can claim, in the same way as other part-time workers, for hours that they can work, and for payment disregards for paid employment. In order to claim Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support, a person must not be working, or working less than 16 hours per week. As a rule, claimants who are receiving Employment Support Allowance are not permitted to work; however, there are some exceptions which apply to certain categories of claimants.

DSD has also advised that partners of claimants who are receiving Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or income-related Employment Support Allowance can work up to 24 hours a week. For claimants receiving contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance, or contribution-based Employment Support Allowance, the hours that the partner works do not affect the claimant's claim.

Zero-hours contracts have no impact on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, but I assume that the question refers to the impacts of zero-hours contracts on the various categories of person listed in Section 75, particularly women and young people.

Seasonally unadjusted figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggest that in the period October to December 2012, there were 76,000 persons aged 16-24 in the UK employed on a zero hours contract, out of a total of around 200,000. The same figures stated that there were 78,000 people aged 25-49, and 47,000 people aged 50 and over, on zero-hours contracts.

The ONS figures also stated that of the 200,000 people estimated to be on zero-hours contracts in October to December 2012, there were 96,000 men and 104,000 women. There does not appear to be a disproportionate impact on women or young people.

I have no immediate plans at present to regulate or legislate on zero-hours contracts. I am aware that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has reviewed the use of zero-hours contracts in GB, and may be producing legislation. I will

monitor developments there, and will await the production of quantitative and qualitative research on the position in Northern Ireland, before making decisions on any potential regulation or legislation here.

Work Contracts: Zero Hours/Section 75

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the impact that zero hour contracts may have on Section 75 legislation, given that they are predicted to be more common amongst women and young people
(AQW 27974/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have grouped the answers to these three questions together for ease of reference.

I am not aware of any official type of contract called a "twenty hour contract". I therefore am assuming that the question refers to a part-time worker contract.

The main difference between a zero-hours contract and a part-time worker contract is that for the former, a person agrees to be available for work as and when required, but has no guaranteed hours or times of work. A part-time worker on a twenty hour per week contract, for example, does have guaranteed hours of work.

It is difficult to address the general rights of people on zero-hours contracts, as there are a variety of cases and situations in which these contracts can be used. For example, most people on a zero-hours contract are workers who operate under a contract, and are entitled to:

- the National Minimum Wage;
- rest breaks, paid holiday and night work limits;
- protection against unauthorised deductions from pay;
- statutory maternity, paternity and adoption pay (but not leave);
- protection under Public Interest Disclosure law;
- protection from unlawful discrimination;
- Health and Safety protection; and
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Whilst most people on zero-hours contracts are 'workers', a 2012 employment tribunal case in Great Britain, Pulse Healthcare Ltd -v- Care Watch Care Services Ltd, found that six individuals employed on zero-hours contracts were 'employees'.

Employees have all the rights of workers, plus:

- maternity, paternity and adoption leave;
- unfair dismissal rights; and
- eligibility for statutory redundancy pay.

Therefore, if a zero-hours contract worker is, by the terms and conditions of his/her appointment an employee, they would receive these additional rights, as would a part-time worker in a similar contractual position.

Zero-hours contracts generally do not provide a worker with sick pay. A part-time worker would receive sick pay under the provisions of the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000, if, as is likely, a comparable full-time worker receives sick pay.

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has advised that Working Tax Credit (WTC) is a work incentive measure to top up the earnings of workers on low incomes and is available only to people who are in qualifying remunerative work. Remunerative work is defined as work done for payment (or in expectation of payment) for at least 16 hours a week or a higher figure depending on a person's circumstances. An additional requirement is that the work must be expected to last for at least 4 weeks from the date of claim.

In principle, HMRC treats zero-hours contracts similarly to how it treats other contracts. HMRC asks a WTC claimant to advise how many hours of paid work they normally do each week. If a claimant normally works more than the qualifying number of hours, with only the occasional week dipping below, they are treated as eligible. If, on the other hand, their working pattern is unpredictable and they regularly work less than the qualifying number of hours, then they would not be regarded as normally working the qualifying number of hours and they would not be treated as eligible.

The Department for Social Development (DSD) has advised that Social Security benefit claimants on a zero-hours contract can claim, in the same way as other part-time workers, for hours that they can work, and for payment disregards for paid employment. In order to claim Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support, a person must not be working, or working less than 16 hours per week. As a rule, claimants who are receiving Employment Support Allowance are not permitted to work; however, there are some exceptions which apply to certain categories of claimants.

DSD has also advised that partners of claimants who are receiving Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or income-related Employment Support Allowance can work up to 24 hours a week. For claimants receiving contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance, or contribution-based Employment Support Allowance, the hours that the partner works do not affect the claimant's claim.

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The ONS figures also stated that of the 200,000 people estimated to be on zero-hours contracts in October to December 2012, there were 96,000 men and 104,000 women. There does not appear to be a disproportionate impact on women or young people.

I have no immediate plans at present to regulate or legislate on zero-hours contracts. I am aware that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has reviewed the use of zero-hours contracts in GB, and may be producing legislation. I will monitor developments there, and will await the production of quantitative and qualitative research on the position in Northern Ireland, before making decisions on any potential regulation or legislation here.

Work Contracts: Zero Hours/Legislation

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail any plans to regulate or legislate for zero hour contracts. (AQW 27975/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have grouped the answers to these three questions together for ease of reference.

I am not aware of any official type of contract called a "twenty hour contract". I therefore am assuming that the question refers to a part-time worker contract.

The main difference between a zero-hours contract and a part-time worker contract is that for the former, a person agrees to be available for work as and when required, but has no guaranteed hours or times of work. A part-time worker on a twenty hour per week contract, for example, does have guaranteed hours of work.

It is difficult to address the general rights of people on zero-hours contracts, as there are a variety of cases and situations in which these contracts can be used. For example, most people on a zero-hours contract are workers who operate under a contract, and are entitled to:

- the National Minimum Wage;
- rest breaks, paid holiday and night work limits;
- protection against unauthorised deductions from pay;
- statutory maternity, paternity and adoption pay (but not leave);
- protection under Public Interest Disclosure law;
- protection from unlawful discrimination;
- Health and Safety protection; and
- additional rights under the Agency Workers Regulations (NI) 2011.

Whilst most people on zero-hours contracts are 'workers', a 2012 employment tribunal case in Great Britain, Pulse Healthcare Ltd -v- Care Watch Care Services Ltd, found that six individuals employed on zero-hours contracts were 'employees'.

Employees have all the rights of workers, plus:

- maternity, paternity and adoption leave;
- unfair dismissal rights; and
- eligibility for statutory redundancy pay.

Therefore, if a zero-hours contract worker is, by the terms and conditions of his/her appointment an employee, they would receive these additional rights, as would a part-time worker in a similar contractual position.

Zero-hours contracts generally do not provide a worker with sick pay. A part-time worker would receive sick pay under the provisions of the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000, if, as is likely, a comparable full-time worker receives sick pay.

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has advised that Working Tax Credit (WTC) is a work incentive measure to top up the earnings of workers on low incomes and is available only to people who are in qualifying remunerative work. Remunerative work is defined as work done for payment (or in expectation of payment) for at least 16 hours a week or a higher figure depending on a person's circumstances. An additional requirement is that the work must be expected to last for at least 4 weeks from the date of claim.

In principle, HMRC treats zero-hours contracts similarly to how it treats other contracts. HMRC asks a WTC claimant to advise how many hours of paid work they normally do each week. If a claimant normally works more than the qualifying number of hours, with only the occasional week dipping below, they are treated as eligible. If, on the other hand, their working pattern is unpredictable and they regularly work less than the qualifying number of hours, then they would not be regarded as normally working the qualifying number of hours and they would not be treated as eligible.

The Department for Social Development (DSD) has advised that Social Security benefit claimants on a zero-hours contract can claim, in the same way as other part-time workers, for hours that they can work, and for payment disregards for paid employment. In order to claim Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support, a person must not be working, or working less than 16 hours per week. As a rule, claimants who are receiving Employment Support Allowance are not permitted to work; however, there are some exceptions which apply to certain categories of claimants.

DSD has also advised that partners of claimants who are receiving Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or income-related Employment Support Allowance can work up to 24 hours a week. For claimants receiving contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance, or contribution-based Employment Support Allowance, the hours that the partner works do not affect the claimant's claim.

Zero-hours contracts have no impact on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, but I assume that the question refers to the impacts of zero-hours contracts on the various categories of person listed in Section 75, particularly women and young people.

Seasonally unadjusted figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggest that in the period October to December 2012, there were 76,000 persons aged 16-24 in the UK employed on a zero hours contract, out of a total of around 200,000. The same figures stated that there were 78,000 people aged 25-49, and 47,000 people aged 50 and over, on zero-hours contracts.

The ONS figures also stated that of the 200,000 people estimated to be on zero-hours contracts in October to December 2012, there were 96,000 men and 104,000 women. There does not appear to be a disproportionate impact on women or young people.

I have no immediate plans at present to regulate or legislate on zero-hours contracts. I am aware that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has reviewed the use of zero-hours contracts in GB, and may be producing legislation. I will monitor developments there, and will await the production of quantitative and qualitative research on the position in Northern Ireland, before making decisions on any potential regulation or legislation here.

Childcare Strategy

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline (i) the opportunities for alignment between initiatives, programmes and strategies for employment and training support; and (ii) the 15 key actions associated with a childcare strategy, including information on the 4 key actions in respect of workforce development.

(AQW 28145/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Executive's Bright Start programme provides an opportunity for a number of key Departments to undertake greater partnership working in order to better support and develop the childcare sector.

My Department's main contribution concerns the four actions under the programme's 'Workforce Development' theme. Support for these actions will directly support the delivery of many of the other actions in the programme, including the provision of additional childcare places.

In particular, we will continue to work with the NI Social Care Council and employers, largely through the SkillsActive Sector Skills Council, to help address skills demand, and support the development of greater capacity and better quality provision to support the sector's expansion. The Department's on-going work with the sector will give a particular priority to addressing the issues highlighted in Bright Start.

Many of my Department's services and programmes already support clients who wish to pursue a career in the childcare sector. In addition, we recognise the need for accessible entry points to the childcare workforce for those who are unemployed or economically inactive, including young people. Therefore, my Department's Bridge to Employment Programme will provide a route to help unemployed people gain the necessary skills to enable them to compete for specific vacancies on an equal basis with others.

To help address the need for initiatives to encourage greater diversity in the childcare workforce, my Department provides funding for ESOL courses for people who do not have English as their first language. My Department is also open to exploring with OFMDFM colleagues, with regard to their equality remit, the opportunities for better support for minority ethnic communities.

Learning Disability: DEL Statistics

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail why there is no specific section or addendum inclusion for learning disability provision on his departmental website under the Statistics section of Training and Employment Programmes.

(AQW 28150/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Statistics section of the Department's website contains information produced by its Analytical Services Unit. Each of the main areas in the 'Training and Employment Programmes' sub-section contains a breakdown of participation from Section 75 groups, including disability. There is no further breakdown into those with a learning disability as they are not always separately identifiable and if they are, the numbers are often small and potentially disclosive.

Analytical Services also publishes an article in its Labour Market Bulletin detailing the equality breakdown of participants in a wide range of the Department's provision, including participation by those with a disability.

Programmes specifically for people with a disability are managed by the Department's Disability Employment Service. Whilst statistics on this provision are not currently published, Analytical Services and the Disability Employment Service are

currently working together to develop official statistics in relation to disability employment related matters to be published on the Department's website in due course. The decision has yet to be taken as to whether learning disability will be separately identified, but if there is a user need to do so and the numbers are robust, then it is likely that statistics will be produced.

University of Ulster: One Plan

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail any discussions he has had with the University of Ulster regarding the One Plan target of 9400 students by 2020.

(AQW 28272/11-15)

Dr Farry: I and my officials have discussed the expansion of the University of Ulster's Magee campus on various occasions in the past few years. The focus of those discussions was the One Plan's interim target for an additional 1,000 undergraduate places by 2015.

Within the resources available to me for higher education, I have been able to allocate an additional 652 undergraduate places to the University of Ulster which it has undertaken to locate at Magee. These will be in place by 2015.

I will continue to bid for resources for additional higher education places for Northern Ireland and I would hope to be able to move the University close to, if not achieve, the interim target by 2015.

University of Ulster: Transfer of Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether there are any plans to relocate University of Ulster staff from Magee to any other campus.

(AQW 28273/11-15)

Dr Farry: This is not information that my Department would normally hold. However, further to the response given to you in AQW 28279/11-15, the University has informed me that it has no plans to transfer any posts from Magee to any other University of Ulster campus

South West Regional College: Learning Disability

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning in relation to learning disability provision within South West Regional College and specifically the Dungannon & Cookstown campuses, what consideration was given and consultation took place in relation to difficulties of Post-19 students from the Dungannon area accessing the Cookstown Campus.

(AQW 28473/11-15)

Dr Farry: I will refer the member to my response to AQW 25350/11-15 and AQW 25524/11-15, when I provided details of the collaboration between South West College (SWC) and Transitions Officers, Day Opportunity Workers and the Principals and staff of Sperrinview and Kilonan schools.

As advised previously, SWC have informed my Department that the College has well-established links with Transitions Officers and Day Opportunity Workers. As a result of these links, provision for young adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been expanded at the Cookstown campus, during the last 5 years. During this period, the College used meetings, open days and celebration of achievement events to discuss opportunities with students, parents and school managers.

North West Regional College: Code of Governance

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide an update on the Colleges Code of Governance incorporating the McConnell Recommendations, and a date for its completion.

(AQW 28655/11-15)

Dr Farry: The McConnell report identified issues relating to the modus operandi of the Governing Body. Specifically, these were around the conflicts of interest associated with the role of the staff and principal on the Governing Body and the scope of debate of Governing Body discussions. Mr McConnell understood that there was work ongoing on a Code of Governance. The work on the Code had in fact concluded and the Code was in place in 2012. It originated from the Review of Governance and its purpose was to provide clarity around the roles and responsibilities of the Governing Body, the Principal, and the Department.

The discussions which led to the Action Plan identified that the Governing Body would benefit from further training on the Code. It was the intention to provide this at a scheduled meeting of the Governing Body in September. However, this was postponed in order to prioritise the implementation of other recommendations from the review of industrial relations at the college. It will be held at a Governing Body meeting in early 2014.

The Department has already presented and discussed the Code with the North West Regional College Governing Body in February 2012. The further training will underpin this and specifically examine the roles of staff and principal members of Governing Bodies and the accountability lines between the Governing Body and the management team of the college. This session will be used to identify any lessons learned from the issues in NWRC and the Code will be amended, if necessary, after this session.

European Social Fund: DEL Drawdown

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the current drawdown of European Social Fund monies for programmes within his Department, and the measures that are being put in place to maximise this resource. (AQO 5120/11-15)

Dr Farry: The level of drawdown from the European Social Fund is largely determined by the actual spend for each of the individual projects assisted by the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme, 2007-13.

Since the commencement of the European Social Fund Programme in 2007, my Department has achieved all annual spending targets set by the European Commission. This has ensured that there has been no de-commitment or loss of funds to the programme.

A total of €71 million of European Social Funding has been drawn down from the European Commission since from the start of the programme, with a further €25 million to be drawn down before the end of December 2013.

My Department has taken action to increase the capacity of the European Social Fund Programme through the appropriate utilisation of under-spends in other European funds, and through additional funding made available by the NI Executive.

The initial allocation of €166 million from the European Social Fund was augmented by the transfer of €24 million from the European Regional Development Fund.

This additional funding has enabled my Department to increase the number of projects assisted by the programme, and the actual number of individual participants that will be supported by the fund.

My Department has fully committed all available funding and anticipates that all funding still to be drawn down will be fully utilised over the duration of the Programme, which runs until 31 March 2015.

Employment Law Review: Consultation

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many responses were received to the consultation on the Employment Law Review. (AQO 5124/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department launched a 16-week consultation on a review of employment law in July this year, in order to fulfil a commitment in the Executive's Economic Strategy. The consultation, which closed on 5th November, elicited 41 responses. In the interest of obtaining as much evidence as possible, extensions have been given to a small number of stakeholders who did not meet the deadline.

The responses received provide a significant amount of information and comment on the Department's initial proposals. My officials are analysing the responses at present, and are drafting the Department's response.

The Departmental response will outline the firm proposals for reform which I intend to bring forward, and I plan to publish this response early in the New Year.

However, many of the policy proposals will require primary and secondary legislation. I will therefore arrange for the Assembly Committee to be briefed on the outcomes of the public consultation early in the New Year. As soon as possible thereafter, I plan to present final policy proposals to the Executive.

Universities: Research Funding

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his efforts to support university research. (AQO 5125/11-15)

Dr Farry: Under "Graduating to Success my Department's Higher Education Strategy", I have introduced a new model which directs funding towards research which makes a meaningful contribution to the economy of our region and the wider community.

This model distributes £48.7 million to our Universities and I have recently approved a £3 million increase to core research funding for the current academic year.

Critically, our universities are punching above their weight compared to their UK counterparts with income from business and community interaction.

Contributory factors to this strong overall performance are:

- Income from collaborative research – 3.6% of UK total;
- Income from intellectual property – 6.9% of UK total,
- The number of spin-off companies still active after 3 years is now standing at 48 which is 4.8% of the UK total.

In view of this strong performance, I have increased recurrent funding for Knowledge Transfer, through the Higher Education Innovation Fund, by £2.68m to £11.68m.

My Department has also supported 12 leading edge, tri-national project through the US-Ireland R&D Partnership.

Furthermore, the European Commission's Framework 7 programme will shortly be succeeded by Horizon 2020 which will run from 2014-2020 with a budget of €77 billion¹.

Together with the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment, my Department has developed a £1.8m Higher Education EU Support Fund for 7 Northern Ireland Contact Points who provide specialist support to academics and businesses across areas of economic relevance to us, such as energy, advanced materials and transport technologies, information and communication technologies and connected health.

In order to offer our students a wider range of postgraduate opportunities here, I have committed also to a substantial increase in the number of directly funded PhD places.

As a first step I have identified funding to support an additional 350 PhD places over the next three Academic Years towards the target in the Strategy of 1,000 postgraduate awards by 2020.

The Research and Development undertaken by our Universities will continue to play a critical role in successfully rebuilding our economy and, moving forward, funding, at least at current levels is necessary for them to develop and sustain a world-class research base in Northern Ireland.

¹. Confirmed on 21 November 2013

Parental Leave: Shared

Ms Fearon asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the shared paternal leave proposals. (AQO 5121/11-15)

Dr Farry: Public consultation dealing with shared parental leave and pay, and a proposed extension of the right to request flexible working, formally closed on 23 August.

A majority of the 28 substantive responses received by my Department supported the introduction of a Northern Ireland system of shared parental leave and pay that corresponds with that currently being taken forward in Great Britain. There was also support for extending the right to request flexible working to cover all employees.

Shared parental leave and pay are intended to afford working parents greater choice and flexibility around how they share between them caring responsibilities following the birth or adoption of a child.

Extending the right to request flexible working will support the wider recognition of changing patterns in family life and the shift away from the 9 to 5 workplace.

The Committee for Employment and Learning was briefed on the outcome of the consultation on 25 September and the proposals were further considered by the Executive on 7 November, when agreement was given to draft an Assembly Bill.

Once drafting is complete and the necessary approvals have been secured, my objective will be to introduce the Bill in the Assembly in March 2014, with regulations to follow. Ultimately I intend to make the rights available from April 2015.

Jobs: Vacancies

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many employment vacancies are on display through Jobs and Benefits Offices compared with unemployment figures. (AQO 5123/11-15)

Dr Farry: As at Monday 18 November 2013, the total number of vacancies listed on JobCentre Online was 1,607. JobCentre Online displays all vacancies notified to the Department.

The number of vacancies notified to the Department increased by 21% to 58,890 in 2012/13 in comparison with 48,658 notified in 2011/12. The claimant count at October 2013 was 60,119 which makes up 6.6% of the workforce. This is a decrease of 3% from the previous month and a decrease of 5.3% from the previous year.

F G Wilson/Caterpillar: Retraining

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what retraining his Department has offered people affected by redundancies at FG Wilson/Caterpillar. (AQO 5126/11-15)

Dr Farry: Retraining was offered to all employees affected by the redundancies at FG Wilson /Caterpillar.

My Redundancy Advice Service delivered a tailored package of support to staff across all three FG Wilson/Caterpillar sites in Larne, Monkstown and Springvale.

In addition, my officials worked with the company's appointed out-placement provider, Lee Hecht Harrison, represented locally by Gilpin Executive Search and Development, to organise a job fair and a training and recruitment fair, at each of the sites. My Department offered retraining to all individuals who needed reskilling or up-skilling to facilitate a move into a new role. A number of recruiting companies participated in the job fairs. One example was the retraining offered in relation to 28 posts identified in the food processing sector, mainly with Moy Park.

The training and recruitment fairs provided an opportunity for workers facing redundancy to find out more about relevant opportunities and pathways into a different career. Northern Regional College, South Eastern Regional College and Belfast Metropolitan College participated in these fairs, along with the relevant Sector Skills Councils and a number of private recruitment agencies.

At November 2013, of the 244 former employees who initially made a claim for Jobseekers Allowance, 72 are still in receipt of benefit. All individuals receive help and support from the Employment Service and advice on training and employment programmes. Our records indicate that former FG Wilson employees are availing or have participated in the Steps to Work Programme, Jobclubs and Short Accredited Training Programmes, to assist them return to work.

North West Regional College: Industrial Relations

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the McConnell Review of Industrial Relations in the North West Regional College Report.
(AQO 5127/11-15)

Dr Farry: There has been notable progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the Review of Industrial Relations in North West Regional College.

After the report had been published, the college developed a plan detailing the actions required to implement the report. This was developed and agreed with stakeholders, including the University and College Union. The production of the action plan demonstrated the commitment of the Governing Body and senior management to a process of change in the college.

The college subsequently appointed a Change Manager to implement the action plan. I am pleased that all parties have been engaging with the change manager and have been working to implement the report.

There have been some notable actions, which have already been completed. In particular, the college has agreed a revised Course and Performance Review system with the University and College Union. This has been implemented with effect from this academic year.

The Human Resource Services Department of the college has also made significant progress addressing recommendations, and is currently consulting on a new draft strategy.

Finally, the Change Manager has been brokering negotiations between the University and Colleges Union in the college, and the Governing Body and senior management of the college, with the aim of them rejoining the local liaison forum.

It is important to note that the report stated that it would take between three to five years to change relationships in the college. Therefore, the full benefits of the changes in the college will only be realised in the longer term. Nevertheless, the Department will continue to monitor and hold the college to account for the ongoing implementation of the report.

Unemployment: Young People

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the unemployment rate for 18-24 year olds as outlined in the latest labour market figures.
(AQO 5128/11-15)

Dr Farry: The latest unemployment rate published in the monthly Labour Market Report is derived from the Labour Force Survey. The survey is a small sample of 3,000 households. I have previously stated in response to oral question AQO 4935/11 – 15 that, as the young unemployed group is a subset of the overall sample, there is a sampling error associated with the Youth Unemployment rate of plus or minus 5.8%. The November report estimates the unemployment rate for 18 to 24 year olds at 24.7%, an increase of 5.5 percentage points over the year. As I said in my previous answer on this subject, while I would not want to underplay the level of youth unemployment, it is important to note that this change over the year is not statistically significant.

In terms of the Northern Ireland claimant count, at October 2013 there were 16,286 under twenty-fives claiming benefit, representing a decrease of 6.3% over the month and a decrease of 11.3% over the year. This is a real change which is not subject to sampling error. While the number of young persons claiming benefits remains high, at 27.1% of all claimants, I welcome the decrease of over 1000 claimants this month and the decrease of over 2000 in the past twelve months.

My Department continues to implement and review policies and programmes to address youth unemployment. Pathways to Success and our Youth Employment Scheme provide employment and skills incentives to assist young people. A post implementation review of the Youth Employment Scheme has resulted in enhancements being introduced, at the end of September, to increase the participation of both young people and employers.

Apprenticeships: Cross-border Portability

Mr Milne asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the level of portability of apprenticeships across the border.
(AQO 5129/11-15)

Dr Farry: Every apprentice funded by my department follows an apprenticeship framework, approved by the relevant Sector Skills Councils; this framework sets out the appropriate national occupational standards and qualifications, which must be achieved by the participant.

Framework qualifications must appear on the Register of Regulated Qualifications.

Over the years, the Qualifications' Regulators across the UK and Ireland have sought to gain a better appreciation of the comparability of qualifications offered in the different countries. This joint working has resulted in the publication of a reference leaflet: Qualifications can cross boundaries: a rough guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland.

The leaflet provides a better understanding of how qualifications in the UK and Ireland are organised, and makes it possible to compare qualifications across national boundaries. It also allows comparisons to be drawn between the UK and Irish frameworks, and the European qualifications frameworks.

The fourth edition of the leaflet was published in July 2013 and is available to view or download from the Regulators' websites.

Finally, as the member will be aware, back in February I announced a major review of my Department's apprenticeship policy. The review process has included discussions with Ruari Quinn, TD Minister for Education and Skills, about mutual apprenticeships reviews, co-operation on training opportunities, and qualifications.

The outcome of the apprenticeship review, which will be announced shortly, considers the issue of portability by examining how to ensure that an apprenticeship in Northern Ireland is seen internationally as a substantial achievement, with a recognised currency.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

European Regional Competitiveness and Employment: Funding

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the programmes under her responsibility which have received funding from the current round of European Regional Competitiveness and Employment funding.

(AQW 28103/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):

1 Programmes under my responsibility, listed by Intermediate Body (IB) are:

Intermediate Body	Programme
Invest NI	Business Improvement Agent
Invest NI	Business Information Centre
Invest NI	Compete
Invest NI	Design Development Programme
Invest NI	Envirowise
Invest NI	NI Symbiosis Programme
Invest NI	Product and Process Development
Invest NI	Proof of Concept Programme
Invest NI	Research & Technology Development Centres of Excellence
Invest NI	SMART
Invest NI	Start
Invest NI	Grant for Research and Development
Invest NI	Interim Management Programme
Invest NI	ICT Awareness
Invest NI	Management Information System
Invest NI	Co-investment Fund
DETI	NI Science Park Connect Programme
Invest NI	Enterprise, Entrepreneurship and Innovation Promotion in SMEs (EEIPS)
Invest NI	Northern Ireland Screen
Invest NI	Selective Financial Assistance

Intermediate Body	Programme
DETI	Local Economic Development
NITB	Tourism Marketing
NITB	Tourism Innovation Fund
NITB	Tourism Development Scheme
NITB	Giro D'Italia
DETI	Broadband Fund
DETI	ICT Demonstration Centres
DETI	Next Generation Broadband
DETI	Action Renewables
DETI	Offshore Renewables
DETI	Renewable Energy Research Activities
DETI	Sustainable Energy
DETI	Common Arrangements for Gas
Invest NI	Environmental and Renewable Energy Fund
DETI	Technical Assistance
Invest NI	Technical Assistance
NITB	Technical Assistance

- 2 Further information on the projects and activities funded can be obtained from the Programme website (www.eucompni.gov.uk). A full list of the Programme beneficiaries is also available at <http://www.eugrants-successes.org>

Consumer Council: Future Arrangements

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether a decision on the future of the Consumer Council would have to be taken at Executive level, given the cross-cutting nature of its functions.

(AQW 28107/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I will bring my recommendations on the future arrangements for consumer representation to the Executive for consideration in 2014.

Health and Safety: Building Sites

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether there are plans to introduce legal powers to compel the administrators of construction companies to make building sites safe and meet health and safety requirements.

(AQW 28109/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has responsibility for oversight of the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI).

Whilst HSENI has a legal remit on a construction site where there is a work activity being carried out, I am afraid that the power to compel administrators of construction companies to make building sites safe and meet health and safety requirements is outside their remit and there is no intention of introducing such legal powers at this time.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Ministerial Meetings

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the people and organisations that have contracted her requesting a meeting to discuss their concerns regarding hydraulic fracturing; (ii) the requests she has accepted; and (iii) which people/organisation she has subsequently met.

(AQW 28112/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In light of Data Protection considerations, it is not appropriate to name specific individuals but I can confirm that three people contacted me requesting a meeting to discuss their concerns regarding hydraulic fracturing:

- (i) a Belfast resident;
a fellow MLA; and
the Director of a Development Media Workshop based in Northern Ireland;
- (ii) of these requests, one was accepted;
- (iii) a meeting with the MLA took place on 28 May 2012.

I have met a number of people and groups as a local constituency representative.

Carbon Trust Loan Scheme: Renewable Heat Incentive

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the Carbon Trust Loan Scheme is compatible with the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive.

(AQW 28127/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The issue of whether the Carbon Trust Loan Scheme is compatible with the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive is currently being considered by my Department under the Renewable Heat Incentive dispute resolution procedures. The outcome of the review will be published on the DETI website in due course.

Renewables Obligation Certificate

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount paid in subsidies for wind turbine energy production, in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 28133/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Support for renewable electricity generation is provided under the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) in the form of Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation Certificates (NIROCs). As the NIRO is a market-based support mechanism, the actual value of a NIROC to a generator will depend on the supply and demand for NIROCs during a given obligation period, and the individual arrangements reached between generators and the supplier or other person to whom they sell their NIROCs. Table 1 sets out the approximate value of NIROCs issued in each of the last three financial years for wind generation. Totals for all three Renewables Obligations (NIRO, Renewables Obligation Scotland and Renewables Obligation England & Wales) are provided in brackets.

Table 1

Year	NIROCs issued*	ROC value (buyout price plus 10%)	Total
2010-11	694,828 (7,683,275)	£40.68	£28,265,603 (£312,555,627)
2011-12	1,127,027 (11,661,386)	£42.55	£47,954,998 (£496,191,974)
2012-13	1,059,842 (12,181,066)	£44.78	£47,459,724 (£545,468,135)

* **Source:** Ofgem RO Annual Reports and Ofgem Renewables and CHP Register

Electricity: Renewable Sources

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the research and assessment carried out on the capacity of the electricity grid to receive the resulting flow, prior to the Executive embarking on incentives to induce 40 percent of electricity production from renewable sources; and why there is such a volume of non-viable approvals.

(AQW 28220/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Executive's decision to set a target of 40 percent electricity consumption to come from renewable sources by 2020 was informed by a number of assessments, one of which was the 2008 All Island Grid Study. The Study was a comprehensive assessment of the ability of the electrical power system on the island to absorb large amounts of electricity from renewable sources.

The study concluded that it was technically feasible for up to 42 percent of electricity demand to come from renewable generation. It was envisaged that the majority of this would come from large scale onshore wind which is the least cost renewable generation option. The study recognised that significant capital investment in the grid would be necessary in some areas to accommodate the anticipated higher levels of renewable generation. The scale and timing of grid investment is a matter for Northern Ireland Electricity and the Utility Regulator through the price determination regime.

Unprecedented demand for small scale renewable generation connections has put a strain on the 11kV distribution network. Under current arrangements approved by the Utility Regulator, the cost of connecting small scale generation to the 11kV network is met by the generator. This means that the cost of upgrading 11kV lines to connect individual generators in certain circumstances may be prohibitive.

Electricity: Renewable Sources

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many approved renewable schemes, in number and their capacity, have not been implemented due to a lack of a viable/affordable connection to the electricity grid.

(AQW 28221/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No information is held by the Department on the reasons why individual developers may decide not to proceed with renewable electricity projects.

Electricity: Grid Overload

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action has been, and will be, taken to address the overloading of the electricity grid.

(AQW 28222/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Energy policy for Northern Ireland is set out in the Strategic Energy Framework which has been endorsed by the Northern Ireland Executive and which establishes energy priorities to 2020.

Approval for investment in the electricity grid is a matter for the Utility Regulator under the Price Determination regime.

However, DETI is currently in discussion with the Regulator, Northern Ireland Electricity and the System Operator (SONI) to examine the potential to use some European funding, with the aim of supporting investment in the grid to enable the integration of greater renewable electricity generation. Discussions which are at an early stage, are subject to securing the necessary approvals and the quantum will be small in relation to the scale of requirements in the current NIE price determination.

Tourist Board: Review

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether there is a requirement to periodically review the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, and if so, when the most recent review was completed.

(AQW 28249/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Executive, in its 2011-15 Budget, committed to undertake periodic reviews of Arms Length Bodies to ensure Ministerial priorities and statutory commitments continue to be delivered in the most cost-effective manner. The review of NITB and wider tourism structures is a continuation of this process of ensuring value for money in the use of public funds and the delivery of services to the Northern Ireland public. The last Departmental review of NITB took place in 1997.

Petroleum Exploration Wells: Monitoring

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of times that abandoned petroleum wells have been inspected, in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 28250/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI currently has no programme of on-going monitoring of petroleum exploration wells after they have been permanently plugged and abandoned in accordance with a specification approved by the Department.

South Antrim: Invest NI

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the manufacturing and engineering companies in South Antrim that are clients of InvestNI.

(AQW 28255/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Manufacturing Sector includes a range of industries, one of which is Engineering. Therefore to answer the question, Table 1 contains the names of manufacturing businesses located in the South Antrim Parliamentary Constituency Area that have been supported by Invest NI between 1st April 2010 and 31st March 2013. The table also highlights those businesses, whose primary activity is engineering.

Table 1: Invest NI Manufacturing Customers Offered Support in South Antrim PCA (2010-11 to 2012-13)

Name	Engineering
A A Joinery	
Abbey-Crete Limited	
Amtec Medical Limited	Y
Andrew Christie Engineering Ltd	Y
Antrim Hills Spring Water Company Limited	
Ashers Baking Company Limited	
ATC Systems Limited	Y
B M SYSTEMS	Y
B.N.E. Electronics Limited	Y

Name	Engineering
Belfast Foiling Company	
Belfast Print Finishers Ltd	
Big Ted's American Cookies	
Brett Martin Limited	
Camden Group Limited	
Canyon Europe Limited	Y
Centurion Systems UK & Ireland Limited	Y
Cherry Polymers Ltd	
Chesapeake Belfast Limited	
Contract Acoustic Testing Services Limited	
Craig Foods (NI) Limited	
Crawford And Pearce Electrical	Y
Crosskey's Fast Food Limited	
D Engineering Limited	Y
Diffusion (NI) Limited	
Edgewater Contracts Ltd	
Electronic Sports Solutions Ltd	Y
Fast Engineering Limited	Y
Findmea Europe Limited	
Fortress Diagnostics Ltd	
Fortress Doors (NI) Ltd	Y
Frameline Systems Ltd	
Fred C. Robinson Limited	
Fujitsu Telecommunications Europe Limited	Y
Giltspur Scientific Limited	Y
Glory Be	
Golden Popcorn Limited	
Golf Network	
Gray & Adams (Ireland) Limited	Y
GRP Systems Ltd	
H Ireland & Son Ltd	
Hoys Farmhouse Ice Cream	
Indigo Ivy	
Inspecvision Limited	Y
Jordan Products Ltd	Y
Kerrikids Ltd	
King Medical Ltd	Y

Name	Engineering
L.M. Innov8s Limited	Y
Leadlines & D Esler Stained Glass	
Linnodee Limited	
Listo Limited	
LMI Foods Limited	
Lough Neagh Foods Ltd	
M.E.T. Steel Limited	Y
Marcon Fit-Out Ltd	Y
McCauley Trailers Ltd	Y
McGrath Trailers & Co	Y
MDF Engineering Ltd	Y
Metal Technology Limited	Y
Mo Team Ltd	Y
Moover Limited	
N. K. Coatings Ltd	Y
N.L. Rubber Limited	
N.M. Williams (UK) Ltd.	
National Food Treasures	
New Olive Company Limited	
Nicholl Engineering	Y
Nicholson & Bass Limited	
Nu-Track Limited	Y
Oakdene Services	
Oakfield Cabinets Ltd	
Oakwood Door Designs Limited	
Okotech Limited	Y
P. F. Copeland Limited	Y
Pneutrol International Limited	Y
Primepac Ltd	
R & D Laboratories Limited	
Randox Food Diagnostics Limited	
Randox Laboratories Limited	
Randox Sectional Buildings	
Randox Toxicology Ltd	
Rea Sawmills	
Richard Atkinson and Company, Limited	
RLC (UK) Limited	Y

Name	Engineering
Robinson Fit-Out Limited	
S.M. Components Ltd	Y
Schrader Electronics Limited	Y
Springfarm Architectural Mouldings Limited	
Springvale EPS Limited	
Stonebridge Premium Feeds	
Stoneyford Technocrete Corporation Limited	
Tardree Stone	
TEC Heating Controls	Y
The Dog's Apron Limited	
The Pallet Centre Limited	
Thornton Roofing (Ireland) Limited	Y
Top Glass Contracts Ltd	
Traktronic Limited	Y
Unibase Cabinet Systems Limited	
Unique Coffins	
Unitek Ltd	
Varifed Ltd	
Vaughan Engineering Group Limited	Y
Vertical Wind Energy Limited	
W. & G. Baird Limited	
William Coates Ltd	Y
Windflow (NI) Ltd	

Electricity: Small-scale Generation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any improvements made in the local electricity network to ensure it can receive surplus electricity from small generation schemes.

(AQW 28268/11-15)

Mrs Foster: On 25 October 2013, Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) announced that it had been granted investment approval by the Utility Regulator of up to £2.3 million to facilitate additional small scale generation export from the 11 kilovolt (kV) network to the 33kV network. This approval covers investments at 40 primary (33kV) substations, which will enable reverse power flow from the 11kV network to the upstream 33kV network when generation levels are high.

DETI is currently in discussion with the Utility Regulator, NIE and the System Operator (SONI) to examine the potential to use the European Regional Development Fund to support investment in the grid to enable the integration of greater renewable electricity generation, including small scale. Discussions which are at an early stage, are subject to securing the necessary approvals and the quantum will be small in relation to the scale of requirements in the current NIE price determination.

Energy Market: Hedging Policy

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she intends to improve public perception and understanding in relation to energy companies hedging investments in energy stocks.

(AQW 28293/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Hedging policy relates to the detailed operations of the energy market. As such, it is a matter for the energy companies, not my Department, and I have no plans to undertake such work.

Energy: Retail Tariffs

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she will take to reduce the ability of energy companies to sharply increase or decrease their prices, allowing domestic and non-domestic customers to prepare for predicted energy costs.

(AQW 28294/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Energy companies which operate in Northern Ireland are licensed and regulated by the Utility Regulator, and where appropriate, this includes the regulation of retail energy supply tariffs.

The Utility Regulator carries out tariff reviews, on at least an annual basis, of the incumbent electricity and natural gas suppliers, and encourages energy suppliers to have suitable hedging policies in place to reduce the likelihood of significant price changes.

However, wholesale energy costs in world markets largely dictate final retail prices, and such markets react to external political, environmental, economic and financial impacts, which can sometimes result in sharp changes in retail energy prices.

Upper Bann: Jobs Promoted

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of jobs that have been promoted in the Upper Bann constituency in each of the last five years.

(AQW 28296/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below shows the number of jobs promoted by Invest NI in the Upper Bann constituency area in each of the five years between 2008-09 and 2012-13.

Year	Jobs Promoted
2008-09	357
2009-10	780
2010-11	197
2011-12	224
2012-13	519

Upper Bann: Invest NI

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many businesses have been assisted by InvestNI in the Upper Bann constituency, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28297/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Table 1 below shows the number of businesses which have been assisted by Invest NI in the Upper Bann Parliamentary constituency area (PCA) in each of the years between 2010-11 and 2012-13.

Table 1: Number of Businesses Offered Support in Upper Bann PCA (2010-11 to 2012-13)

Year	Number
2010-11	155
2011-12	180
2012-13	201

In addition, Invest NI offered support and guidance to individuals wishing to start a business through the Regional Start Initiative (RSI), formerly known as the Enterprise Development Programme. These are detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Number of Individuals in Upper Bann PCA Offered Support Through RSI (2010-11 to 2012-13)

Year	Number
2010-11	164
2011-12	150
2012-13	75

Note: A number of individuals receiving RSI offers went on to avail of further Invest NI support. These individuals are removed from Table 1 and counted in Table 2 above.

In addition, Invest NI launched its Boosting Business initiative on 14th November 2011.

This initiative identifies the range of support and advice available to local businesses and provides accessible contact points, via telephone, email and social media. Invest NI now has a dedicated full time Business Support Team in place to deal with

enquiries from businesses across Northern Ireland. Since its inception there have been 533 additional enquiries from the Upper Bann area.

South Down: Programme for Government Jobs Target

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the Programme for Government 2011/15 commitment to increase levels of employment by supporting the promotion of over 25,000 new jobs, in particular the number of jobs promoted in South Down.

(AQW 28354/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Despite the difficult and uncertain economic climate, we are continuing to make excellent progress towards our Programme for Government target of promoting over 25,000 new jobs by 31 March 2015. The most recently available figures show that, at the end of September 2013, a total of 17,201 jobs had been promoted, 612 of which were promoted in South Down.

Agri-food Loan Scheme

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment with regard to the Agri-Food loan scheme, to detail (i) the aim of the scheme; (ii) how long it will run; (iii) who can apply; and (iv) the application process.

(AQW 28395/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) The aim of the Agri-Food Loan Scheme is to enable the local agri-food industry to maximise the significant opportunity presented by the decision of several major retailers to stock only UK sourced meat. The scheme will help local food producers, who form part of an integrated supply chain, to access the finance they need to invest in the farm buildings necessary to increase supply of the primary produce for processing. A key objective of the scheme is to help producers to overcome difficulties in accessing bank finance, an issue which was identified in "Going for Growth", the Strategic Action Plan developed by the Agri-Food Strategy Board.
- (ii) Given the aim of reacting to this market opportunity it is intended that the scheme will operate for a limited period only and is not expected to be open for new business beyond 2015. The first phase of the scheme will be open to broiler (poultry) producers and we in Government are working with the banks with the aim of, where it is shown to be feasible, rolling out subsequent phases of the scheme to other agri-food sectors; with a commitment to examine the potential to extend the scheme to pork, red meat, dairy and eggs by March 2014.
- (iii) & (iv) Producers will apply through their usual bank channels, with processes in the banks and Invest NI co-ordinated to ensure that applicants will only be required to submit one application for finance. For the impending poultry scheme the participating banks have prepared, for applicants, a standard checklist of information required in making an application to them under the scheme. While anyone may apply, ultimately, those applicants that are part of an integrated supply chain are likely to have the greatest chances of making a successful application – in practical terms for this first phase of the scheme, this will be those producers with a supply contract for their poultry produce. Standardised contractual arrangements will also be in place for the poultry scheme to further simplify the process.

North Down: Invest NI

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the manufacturing and engineering companies in North Down that are clients of InvestNI.

(AQW 28412/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Manufacturing Sector includes a range of industries, one of which is Engineering. Therefore to answer the question, Table 1 contains the names of manufacturing businesses located in the North Down Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) that have been supported by Invest NI between 1st April 2010 and 31st March 2013. The table also highlights those businesses, whose primary activity is engineering.

Table 1: Invest NI Manufacturing Customers Offered Support in North Down PCA (2010-11 to 2012-13)

Name	Engineering
Agri Web	Y
Belfast Distillery Company Limited	
Calerrific Ltd	
Choux Choux Limited	
Cordiners Kitchens & Bedrooms Limited	
Denman International Limited	

Name	Engineering
Denroy Plastics Limited	
DLLNI Limited	
Ecogen Energy & Enviromental Technologies Limited	
Empower Energy Systems Limited	Y
Grace's Irish Foods Ltd	
Greenacre Innovations Ltd	
Greenway Healthcare (NI) Limited	
Heatherlea Fine Foods NI Limited	
I'm On It (NI) Limited	
Koka Chocolate Ltd	
Marine Services Ireland	Y
McWhinney's Sausages Limited	
Millcraft Furniture Company Limited	
Motivation in Learning Limited	
Munster Simms Engineering Limited	Y
Oakridge Trading Limited	Y
PIA Rossini Ltd	
PPC Environmental Ltd	
Primacy Meats Ltd	
Priory Press	
Richmond Reproduction (Manufacturing) Limited	
Salt & Pepper Catering Ltd	
Scrabo Disability Solutions Ltd	
Sitex Protective Fabrics	
Spiceart	
The Bay Tree Coffee House Limited	
The Clandeboye Estate Company Limited	
The Crossle Car Company Limited	Y
The Feldstein Agency	
The Signature Works Limited	
Ulster Weavers Apparel Limited	
Ulster Weavers Home Fashions Limited	
Valpar Industrial Limited	

Note: The disclosure of third party personal data such as sole traders who have received small amounts of assistance would breach the first and second principles of the Data Protection Act 1998; therefore, these names have been removed from the table.

Narrow Water Bridge: DETI Meetings

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of meetings held by her office relating to the Narrow Water Bridge project, in the last twelve months.
(AQW 28539/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have not held any meetings relating to the Narrow Water Bridge project in the last twelve months.

Energy: Domestic Prices

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the actions she intends to take to make domestic energy more affordable.

(AQW 28557/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has no direct role in the setting of energy prices which are mainly driven by wholesale costs set on global markets. Energy companies which operate in Northern Ireland are licensed and regulated by the Utility Regulator, and where appropriate, this includes the regulation of retail energy supply tariffs.

The Utility Regulator carries out regular tariff reviews, of the incumbent electricity and natural gas suppliers, and my Department works with the Regulator and the energy sector to improve competition and provide options for consumers to reduce bills by switching supplier.

There are a number of active suppliers in the domestic electricity market in Northern Ireland, and there is competition in the domestic gas market in Greater Belfast. The domestic gas market outside Greater Belfast will be open to competition from April 2015.

It is also my intention to give consumers additional energy choice by extending the availability of natural gas to towns in the West and North-West, and to other areas where gas extension is economically viable. I am also working to extend the Renewable Heat Incentive to the domestic sector before Spring of next year and already have a premium payment scheme in place to assist with the capital cost of the transition to renewable forms of heat.

I also await the outcome of the ETI Committee review of electricity policy and pricing, including any recommendations the Committee may make.

Energy: Industrial and Commercial

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the level of competition within the local industrial and commercial energy supply market.

(AQW 28588/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Utility Regulator reports that there are currently five active domestic electricity suppliers and eight active industrial and commercial suppliers in Northern Ireland. A number of these suppliers have entered the market in 2011 and 2012, suggesting that the level of competition continues to evolve.

Department of the Environment

Planning: Non-farming Rural Dwellers

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what options are available to non-farming rural dwellers who wish to build a home in the countryside; (ii) whether he plans to carry out a fundamental policy review; and (iii) what assessment he has made of the kinship method carried out in the south of Ireland for non-farming rural dwellers.

(AQW 27681/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): In relation to point (i) regarding the options available to non-farming rural dwellers to live in the countryside I can advise that PPS 21 'Sustainable Development in Countryside' already provides significant opportunities for non-farming rural dwellers wishing to live in the countryside. It does this by providing for:

- Replacement dwellings;
- The conversion and reuse of non-residential buildings as dwellings;
- New dwellings within an existing cluster or ribbon of buildings;
- Social and affordable housing schemes;
- Development within designated Dispersed Rural Communities; and
- A dwelling to meet compelling personal or domestic circumstances.

In relation to points (ii) and (iii) you will be aware of the work of my predecessor Alex Attwood MLA on the review into the operation of PPS21. In his July statement to the Assembly on the outcome of that review he expressed the view that PPS21 was working more effectively, and therefore the issue of a fundamental review did not arise at that time.

I am satisfied that in the period since the previous Ministers statement the policy continues to applied more flexibility to ensure that it meets the needs of rural dwellers. The most recent published statistics support this view. Figures for the first quarter of 2013/14 reveal an approval rate for new single dwellings in the countryside of 90.1%. This is up from 88.8% in the equivalent period the year before. In relation to replacement dwellings the approval rate in the first quarter stood at 93.3%, up from 92% on the equivalent period last year.

However, given the continued interest on the issue of non-farming rural dwellers, I will give further consideration to this matter as part of work on the development of a new single Strategic Planning Policy Statement. As part of this process I will also reflect on what lessons can be learned from the South of Ireland in relation to kinship.

Civil Service: DOE Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of the Environment how many Civil Service posts existed in his Department on 1 January 2012 and 1 January 2013 at (i) Administrative Assistant; (ii) Administrative Officer; (iii) Executive Officer 2; (iv) Executive Officer 1; (v) Staff Officer; (vi) Deputy Principal; (vii) Grade 7; and (viii) Grade 6 levels, broken down by local council area. **(AQW 27953/11-15)**

Mr Durkan: The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) Northern Ireland Civil Service posts in DOE on 1 January 2012 and 1 January 2013 broken down by specified grades, including analogous grades, and local council area are as follows:

Number of Posts (FTE)– January 2012

Council Area	General Service & Analogous Grades								Total
	AA	AO	EO2	EO1	Staff Officer	DP	Grade 7	Grade 6	
Ards	-	42.7	-	7.0	1.0	-	-	-	50.7
Armagh	1.0	25.8	1.0	3.0	2.0	-	-	-	32.8
Ballymena	5.5	36.5	4.3	15.6	19.8	9.4	2.0	1.0	94.0
Belfast	34.4	221.8	109.0	161.9	280.6	240.3	84.0	15.7	1147.6
Carrickfergus	-	1.0	-	1.0	-	-	-	-	2.0
Castlereagh	1.0	-	-	4.0	-	-	-	-	5.0
Coleraine	78.9	226.5	42.9	33.4	36.3	17.5	7.8	2.0	445.3
Cookstown	-	26.6	-	3.0	1.0	-	-	-	30.6
Craigavon	6.6	37.9	5.8	19.8	27.3	7.7	3.0	-	108.2
Derry	2.4	31.6	7.8	15.8	14.6	5.0	2.0	-	79.2
Down	7.0	33.1	3.9	14.7	21.0	6.6	2.0	-	88.4
Dungannon & South Tyrone	1.0	2.0	-	4.0	4.0	-	-	-	11.0
Fermanagh	2.0	30.6	2.0	12.4	7.5	3.0	-	-	57.5
Larne	-	20.5	-	2.0	1.0	-	-	-	23.5
Limavady	-	4.0	-	3.0	-	-	-	-	7.0
Lisburn	9.5	48.9	6.6	68.3	79.7	30.4	7.0	2.0	252.5
Magherafelt	-	-	-	-	1.0	-	-	-	1.0
Newry & Mourne	1.0	21.7	-	6.0	1.0	-	-	-	29.7
Newtownabbey	-	28.5	-	3.0	1.0	-	-	-	32.5
North Down	-	1.0	-	1.0	1.0	-	-	-	3.0
Omagh	4.6	35.4	6.0	7.0	22.0	7.0	4.0	1.0	87.0
Totals	154.9	876.1	189.3	386.0	521.8	327.0	111.8	21.7	2588.5

Staff at Industrial grades are not included.

Number of Posts (FTE) – January 2013

Council Area	Analogous Grade								Total
	AA	AO	EO2	EO1	Staff Officer	DP	Grade 7	Grade 6	
Ards	-	35.0	4.0	7.0	1.0	-	-	-	47.0
Armagh	1.0	24.3	2.0	3.0	2.0	-	-	-	32.3
Ballymena	4.6	35.2	7.8	15.6	17.8	8.4	2.0	1.0	92.3
Belfast	44.3	226.1	127.0	177.6	294.1	267.2	98.0	13.3	1247.7
Carrickfergus	-	-	1.0	-	-	-	-	-	1.0

Council Area	Analogous Grade								
	AA	AO	EO2	EO1	Staff Officer	DP	Grade 7	Grade 6	Total
Castlereagh	1.0	-	-	4.0	-	-	-	-	5.0
Coleraine	76.3	226.1	47.8	34.4	40.6	15.2	6.8	2.0	449.3
Cookstown		25.0	3.0	4.0	1.0	-	-	-	33.0
Craigavon	6.6	32.4	9.0	24.3	29.3	7.7	2.0	1.0	112.2
Derry	3.5	33.6	9.8	18.8	13.6	7.0	3.0	1.0	90.3
Down	7.0	29.4	7.9	22.4	19.4	6.6	3.0	1.0	96.7
Dungannon & South Tyrone	1.0	1.0	1.0	4.0	5.0	-	-	-	12.0
Fermanagh	1.0	26.8	6.0	11.4	7.0	2.0	-	-	54.2
Larne	-	18.0	3.5	2.0	1.0	-	-	-	24.5
Limavady	-	-	1.0	5.0	1.0	-	-	-	7.0
Lisburn	8.8	50.4	8.7	78.6	79.7	30.4	9.8	1.0	267.4
Newry & Mourne	-	24.3	2.0	6.0	1.0	-	-	-	33.3
Newtownabbey	-	30.5	-	3.0	1.0	-	-	-	34.5
North Down	-	-	-	1.0	-	-	-	-	1.0
Omagh	3.6	34.8	8.0	7.0	20.0	8.0	3.0	1.0	85.4
Various / TBD*	-	11.5	16.5	8.5	1	1.0	-	-	38.5
Totals	158.6	864.5	260.0	437.6	535.5	353.6	127.6	21.3	2758.6

Staff at Senior Civil Service and Industrial grades are not included.

*To be determined.

Carrier Bag Levy: Low-cost Reusable

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment whether research has been completed on the impact of consumer behaviour as a result of a levy on low cost reusable carrier bags.

(AQW 27965/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department's research in this area has focused on the environmental consequences of not extending the carrier bag levy to low cost reusable bags. In these circumstances, the relatively low price of low cost reusable bags could lead some people to treat them as single use bags – and discard them prematurely, with significant adverse impact on the environment.

Emerging evidence from Phase 1 appears consistent with this conclusion. That evidence reveals a significant fall in single use bag numbers – but a huge increase in sales of low cost reusable bags.

The Department had anticipated that the levy on single use bags would generate an increase of approximately 70% in annual sales of low cost reusable bags, in the period before the levy was extended to cover them. However data supplied by a number of retailers operating across Northern Ireland suggest increases in excess of 850% in the first six months following the introduction of the single use carrier bag levy.

This data comes from a total of 168 outlets across the region and shows that since April this year those retailers have sold over 1.5 million re-usable bags that are not currently subject to the levy. Moreover a recent local survey, carried out for the Department in June 2013, shows that only 56% of shoppers in Northern Ireland regularly reuse their carrier bags – and evidence from Scotland and Wales suggests that even this figure may overstate the actual percentage of shoppers regularly reusing their carrier bags. Clearly such trends, if they continue unchecked, would diminish the environmental benefits of the carrier bag levy.

Just as the 5 pence levy on single use bags encouraged greater reuse of carrier bags and reduced the number of single use bags being dispensed, I believe that applying a 5 pence levy to low cost reusable bags should help significantly reduce unnecessary purchases of these bags, encourage even higher levels of reuse and generate substantial environmental benefit.

Councils: Community Planning

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to outline how community planning structures for new council structures will take on board the views of young people; and support their participation in civic life.

(AQW 27978/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Local Government Bill that I introduced into the Assembly on 23 September 2013 provides the legislative framework for council-led community planning. This framework provides that a council and its community planning partners must ensure that arrangements are made so that the community has the opportunity to express its views on community planning and the production of the council's community plan.

To support the operation of community planning, provision is made for my Department to issue statutory guidance. Based on experience elsewhere, this guidance will, among other issues, provide advice on the arrangements that a council could put in place in relation to its engagement with the community, including children and young people. It will be a matter for each council to determine how best to undertake this engagement.

Magherafelt/Cookstown: Wind Turbines

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of single wind turbines which have received planning permission in (i) Magherafelt; and (ii) Cookstown District Council areas. in each of the last five years.

(AQW 27993/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The table below identifies all Single wind turbine applications that have been approved from 2008/09 to 30th September 20131

	Decision by Financial year					
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14 (up to 30/09/20131)
Cookstown	1	3	2	13	39	6
Magherafelt	2	8	5	13	18	12
Total	3	11	7	26	57	18

Notes:

- 1 Official Planning statistics published by the Department of the Environment 30th October 2013.

Illegal Waste: Mobuoy Road, Derry

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the extent and potential toxicity of pollution from the illegal waste site on Mobuoy Road, Co. Londonderry.

(AQW 28007/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The criminal investigation involved the collection of 35 samples of liquid that was either present in the infilled waste (leachate) or collected from liquid on the surface of the infilled areas. The detailed results of the analysis of these samples is being utilised currently and will form key evidence when the prosecution case is submitted to the Public Prosecution Service.

The investigation noted that the waste was actively producing leachate and landfill gas which are generally grossly polluting in nature.

Taxis: Illegal Activity

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27141/11-15, and given that this figure appears disproportionately low for a two year period, and in view of complaints, representations and, in some cases, clear evidence of infringements, what action he will take to address this issue.

(AQW 28010/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Driver and Vehicle Agency continues to seek to improve compliance levels within the taxi industry by targeting its resources to those areas where greatest impact can be made. This has included focussing resources across a range of activities within the taxi industry, including ensuring taxi operator licensing has been implemented and illegal activities are detected and addressed.

Over the last few months, the Agency has directed more enforcement resources towards addressing the problem of taxis illegally plying for hire, and there has been a significant increase in the detection of PSV Licensing offences committed within the city limits of Belfast, with additional fixed penalty notices continuing to be issued during the period 1st July 2013 to 30th September 2013.

Further to this, I have instructed the Agency to ensure there is a sustained focus on deterring and detecting taxis illegally plying for hire.

Statistics that relate to the period 1 June 2013 to 30 September 2013 cannot be made available until the next publication of official government statistics which is planned for 28 November 2013.

Carrier Bag Levy: Projections

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what projections his Department has made of carrier bag usage in each of the next three years, based on the single use plastic bag levy remaining at 5 pence.

(AQW 28014/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department estimates that around 300 million new single use carrier bags (paper and plastic) were dispensed in Northern Ireland each year prior to the introduction of the single use carrier bag levy in April 2013. Since the introduction of the levy, the number of new carrier bags being dispensed by registered retailers has fallen dramatically.

Declarations from retailers provisionally indicate that 18.4 million new single use bags were dispensed in the first quarter from 8 April to 30 June 2013. Retailer declarations received so far for the second quarter provisionally indicate around 18 million new single use bags were dispensed between 1 July and 30 September 2013.

While it is not possible to accurately forecast the final annual figure for carrier bag use, because of a number of factors such as seasonal variation, data from the first two quarters suggest that the final annual figure for 2013/14 will be in the region of 80 million single use carrier bags. The Department anticipates that the bag use figures for 2014/15 and 2015/16 will be of a similar magnitude.

The Department intends to provide validated statistics for 2013/14 next year.

Carrier Bag Levy: Ministerial Meetings/Correspondence

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to list the phone calls, meetings and correspondence since he took up office relating to the single use plastic bag levy.

(AQW 28015/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The table attached at Annex A provides a summary of the meetings I have been involved in and correspondence I have received in relation to the single use carrier bag levy since taking office on 16 July 2013. The information has been grouped into Assembly Questions (oral), Assembly Questions (written), correspondence cases, invitations and meetings.

The figures cited in the table relate to correspondence and meetings in which carrier bag issues have featured either exclusively or substantially. There may well be other instances where references have been made to bags issues; however it is neither practical nor appropriate to keep records of these.

The Department does not log individual phone calls and for this reason it is not possible to provide a list of the phone calls that I have received in relation to the single use carrier bag levy since taking office.

Annex A

Ministerial Meetings and Correspondence since 16 July 2013

	Number
Assembly Questions (Oral)	2
Assembly Questions (Written)	7
Correspondence Cases	10
Invitations	3
Meetings	3

Planning Applications: Wind Turbines

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the number of planning applications (i) received; and (ii) approved for single wind turbines between 1 May 2010 and 1 November 2013, broken down by generator output levels of (a) 0kW to 50kW; (b) 51kW to 100kW; (c) 101kW to 200kW; and (d) 201kW to 250kW.

(AQW 28018/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The number of planning applications received and approved for single wind turbines between 1 April 2010 and 10 September 2013 is included in Table 1 below.

The Department does not, however, actively seek information on the output level of proposed renewable energy devices. The applicant may provide this information as part of the applications submission; however we have no independent means to verify this information. It is therefore not possible from the information held on the database to provide validated statistical data in relation to the request for output levels.

Table 1: Single wind turbine planning applications received and approved from 1st April 2010 to the 30th of September 2013¹

	Financial year				
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14 (up to 30/09/2013) ¹	Total
Received	629	674	614	315	2232
Approved	117	266	499	205	1087

Notes:

1 Latest available fully validated renewable energy information.

Taxis: Video Evidence

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27215/11-15, what assurances he can give that all video evidence gathered by Driver and Vehicle Agency enforcement officers in these circumstances is viewed, assessed and examined; and what grades of staff are involved in the process.

(AQW 28046/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Driver and Vehicle Agency enforcement officers use video footage to assist them with the collection of information and evidence that may be considered during the course of an investigation.

The responsibility for viewing, assessing and examining evidence rests with investigating officers who are required to follow set standards and procedures contained within the Criminal Procedure and Investigation Act (CPIA). The Act regulates the investigation process and provides assurance that any evidence gathered is considered in accordance with best practice.

The investigating officer would normally be a Traffic Examiner or a Professional and Technical Officer. Where case files are prepared for prosecution, these are signed off by the relevant Team Manager (High Professional Technical Officer) and submitted to the Public Prosecution Service for consideration.

Rates Convergence: Fermanagh/Omagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment how much of the funding set aside to deal with the issue of rates convergence will be allocated to the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area.

(AQW 28075/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Earlier this year the Executive agreed to provide councils with a reform funding package of £17.8 million over the 2013 to 2015 period, with a commitment of up to £30 million for rates convergence beyond 2015.

The funding will be made available for managing rates convergence as a consequence of councils merging and other boundary changes arising from implementation of the local government reform. DFP and DOE continue to work on the design of a transitional rates relief scheme, within the cost envelope of £30m, which will protect those ratepayers who otherwise would face sudden and excessive increases as a direct consequence of councils merging or due to other boundary changes. The precise model for how this £30 million will be administered and over what period of time has not yet been finalised.

The preferred option is a district rate adjustment at bill level. This would involve a lower rate being applied to the individual rates bills of those ratepayers who would otherwise face sudden and excessive increases. Under this option, the rate relief that will apply to a District Council area will depend on the rate increases faced by ratepayers as a result of the level district rates settle at in the initial years of the new council. As the rates for the new councils have not yet been set, it is too early to estimate the rate relief that will apply.

The primary legislative powers to give effect to a rates convergence scheme is included in the Local Government Bill.

Taxis: Video Evidence

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27215/11-15, whether his Department or the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) accept non-DVA video footage as evidence in these circumstances.

(AQW 28116/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Criminal Procedure and Investigation Act requires 'all reasonable lines of enquiry to be pursued' in the course of an investigation. DVA investigators are required to consider all relevant evidence that may prove or disprove a criminal offence, including video evidence tendered by a third party.

Glen Lyon Park, Hollywood: Red Squirrels

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment why his Department are not taking action to protect the Red Squirrel population at Glen Lyon, Hollywood.

(AQW 28118/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Glen Lyon in Holywood is owned and managed by North Down Borough Council. My Department has provided advice to council staff in relation to the conservation of red squirrels in the past. Further advice is publically available through the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's (NIEA) website

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/biodiversity/northern_ireland_squirrel_forum.htm

or through the Northern Ireland Red Squirrel Forum should the local council wish to become involved.

My Department is currently supporting projects which favour red squirrel protection on two landholdings adjacent to Glen Lyon.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest: Compensation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment what compensation arrangements exist for farmers suffering loss from having lands designated as Areas of Special Scientific Interest.

(AQW 28155/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) are declared and protected in accordance with the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 (the Order). Written consent from NIEA is required before notifiable operations are undertaken by the owner or occupier and applications for such consent must be considered and reported on by NIEA in the context of the statutory requirements imposed by the Order.

The Order does not provide for compensation in the event of consent being refused.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest: Wind Turbines

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment whether there are any limitations on wind turbines being located within an Area of Special Scientific Interest; and if not, how many turbines are located in such areas.

(AQW 28156/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department's policy for assessing windfarm proposals does not distinguish explicitly between Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) and other undesignated landscapes. However, it is a policy presumption that development will not be allowed where this will result in an unacceptable adverse impact on visual amenity or landscape character of that area.

The Department does not hold information on wind turbines or wind farms that are located within ASSIs; however it can provide the numbers of applications that have been approved within those areas.

Between April 2002 and September 2013, 2 applications for single wind turbines were approved within the boundaries of an ASSI, while 8 applications for single wind turbines were approved within a 50m buffered area around an ASSI.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: Planning Appeals Commission

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment, given that some recent Planning Appeals Commission's decisions have indicated that the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) is an aspiration, how much weight the Planning Service can place on BMAP; and whether the Planning Appeals Commission been informed of the Planning Service's stance.

(AQW 28159/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I would refer you to the Joint Ministerial Statement published in January 2005 which clarified the weight that should be given to a draft plan in making planning decisions. Paragraph 21 states that planning applications will continue to be considered in the light of both current policies and policies in emerging development plans that are going through the statutory processes. It further states that the weight to be attached to policies in emerging plans will depend upon the stage of plan preparation, increasing as successive stages are reached.

I can confirm that the final stages of BMAP have been reached, and that on the 21 October 2013 the Department for Regional Development awarded the Plan a certificate of general conformity with the Regional Development Strategy 2035. Planning officials will advise the PAC of the current status of the Plan at any appeal hearings where BMAP is a consideration.

In many circumstances the Plan already carries significant determining weight, particularly following Minister Attwood's statement of June 2012 when he published the PAC Reports into BMAP.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: Status

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment what is the current status of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan; and when he expects it to be signed off.

(AQW 28160/11-15)

Mr Durkan: After extensive assessment of the recommendations made by the Planning Appeals Commission, my Department recently submitted BMAP to the Department for Regional Development for assessment of the Plan against the Regional Development Strategy 2035. I can confirm that the Plan was awarded a Certificate of General Conformity on 21 October 2013 and I am now considering the next steps in the process.

Taxis: Ravenhill Rugby Ground

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27215/11-15, (i) whether Driver and Vehicle Agency enforcement officers have taken any video evidence to date; (ii) if so, why the decision was taken not to prosecute; and (iii) who is responsible for deciding whether to prosecute.

(AQW 28201/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Driver and Vehicle Agency enforcement officers used video footage to capture the manner in which taxi services were being provided at Ravenhill rugby ground. The purpose of the video footage was to gain a better understanding of the issues that had been previously highlighted by Belfast Public Hire representatives.

The Department has since determined that the provision of taxi services at Ravenhill rugby ground is compliant with the requirements of the Taxi Act (NI) 2008 and other related legislation and as such no prosecutions are being pursued.

Planning Applications: Parking Surveys

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment how the Planning Service ensures that surveys relating to planning applications, such as parking surveys, are validated by the relevant statutory agency.

(AQW 28202/11-15)

Mr Durkan: When processing a planning application any supporting information which is submitted for consideration is forwarded to the relevant authority as part of the consultation process. This allows the appropriate authority to validate and comment on the information. Supporting information and consultation responses are material considerations which are available for public inspection on the Planning Portal Website.

In the case of parking surveys accompanying planning applications, they are forwarded to Roads Service, as the appropriate authority, for their consideration and comment.

The planning authority will take into account the consultee's advice. However, it is ultimately for the planning authority to make the decision and decide if an application should be approved (with or without conditions) or refused. The planning authority is therefore the final arbitrator in deciding what weight is to be attached to all material considerations.

Flags: DOE Buildings

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department's policy on the flying of flags on buildings and property under its control.

(AQW 28210/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I can confirm that my Department flies flags in accordance with the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) Order 2000 which makes provision for specified government buildings to fly flags on designated days and this includes the Driver & Vehicle Agency Test Centres across Northern Ireland.

The Premises Management team of each building is responsible for ensuring that the regulations within the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) Order 2000 are adhered to.

Planning Applications: Environment Agency

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what is the average time taken by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to respond to a consultation on a planning application.

(AQW 28212/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Between 1st January 2011 and 19th November 2013, DoE Planning consulted the Northern Ireland Environment Agency 17,974 times on planning applications with 16,831 responses having been received. Out of the 16,831 responses, there was a median response time of 12 working days.

It should be noted that in many planning applications further information is required which often results in multiple consultations and responses on an individual case.

It must be noted that these figures are provided from Planning administrative systems and do not form part of published and validated DOE Official Statistics.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: Update

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment for an update, including the timeframe, of announcements on the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

(AQW 28219/11-15)

Mr Durkan: After extensive assessment of the recommendations made by the Planning Appeals Commission, my Department recently submitted BMAP to the Department for Regional Development for assessment of the Plan against the Regional Development Strategy 2035. I can confirm that the Plan was awarded a Certificate of General Conformity on 21 October 2013 and I am now considering the next steps in the process.

Taxis: Insurance

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27263/11-15, in respect of insurance cover in these instances, whether departmental officials will review this matter as any invalidation of insurance under public liability matters in relation to the incorrect management of obtaining passengers/fares (i) puts the public at risk; and (ii) would reflect detrimentally on the licence issuer and controller.

(AQW 28259/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In terms of insurance, each situation where a private hire taxi obtained a fare through plying for hire without a pre-booking would be considered individually, and would be a matter for the individual insurer to consider.

However, in terms of public liability, the 6th Motor Insurance Directive requires Member States to make provision for a body to guarantee that victims of road traffic collisions will not remain without compensation where the vehicle which caused the accident is uninsured (or incorrectly insured) or unidentified. In the UK, this body is the Motor Insurers' Bureau (MIB). The Uninsured Drivers Agreement (between the Department and MIB) requires the MIB to meet unsatisfied Civil Court Judgements against identified motorists who may not have been insured as required by the Road Traffic Act 1988.

If, as a result of a Civil Court Judgement, it became apparent that a taxi was operating without appropriate insurance, this would be taken into account when considering the repute of a taxi operator.

Planning Permission: A-boards

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment whether 'A' boards, or similar advertising structures located outside commercial premises, require planning permission.

(AQW 28271/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Advertisements are dealt with under the The Planning (Control of Advertisement) Regulations (NI) 1992 (as amended). "A" Boards, as a type of advertisement, do not benefit from the deemed consent or express consent within this and therefore require planning permission.

The only exception would be under Class 6 for an advertisement on a forecourt where the advertisement can be displayed on the forecourt providing that:

- it does not exceed in aggregate 5sqm in area;
- is not illuminated
- no character or symbol on the advertisement is greater than 0.3m in height
- no part of the advertisement is more than 5m above ground level

Drumclay Crannog, County Fermanagh: Review

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the internal inquiry into the difficulties protecting Drumclay Crannog.

(AQW 28292/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Review Team, led by Professor Gabriel Cooney Chair of the Historic Monuments Council, the statutory advisory body to the Department on historic monument matters, has now submitted its final report. This report was passed to me on 23 October.

The Review is welcomed as an objective assessment of what happened at the site, and, as you will appreciate, I wish to give the Review and its recommendations careful consideration before deciding on the next steps.

It is my intention to distribute copies of this review to the Minister for Regional Development, the Committee for the Environment, and; the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, plus; elected representatives for this area, and yourself included once I have had the opportunity to give it my initial careful consideration.

Flags: DVA Test Centres

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department's policy on the flying of the Union Flag at MOT test centres.

(AQW 28323/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I can confirm that my Department flies flags in accordance with the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) Order 2000 which makes provision for specified government buildings to fly flags on designated days and this includes the Driver & Vehicle Agency Test Centres across Northern Ireland.

The Premises Management team of each building is responsible for ensuring that the regulations within the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) Order 2000 are adhered to.

European Charter of Local Self-government

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment why Northern Ireland is the only region out of 47 member states that does not subscribe to the European Charter of Local Self Government; and what steps he is taking to address this situation.

(AQW 28324/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The European Charter for Local Self-Government is a matter for the UK Government. In 1998 when the UK Government ratified the Charter it acknowledged that the Charter enshrines the basic principles reflected in the United Kingdom system of local democracy. At that time, however, it was decided that the Charter would not apply to councils in Northern Ireland, given the lesser range of functions then assigned to those councils, compared with the other regions. The right was reserved to review this position.

The issue of whether the Charter should apply to Northern Ireland, through the UK Government adding the region to its ratification of the Charter, will need to be considered following the transfer of additional functions to councils, as a result of the reform of local government.

Councils: Capital Assets

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the value of the capital assets of each council.

(AQW 28340/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The most up-to-date information for the value of the capital assets of each council, as at 31 March 2013, is set out in the table below. It should be noted that the capital assets are the net book value of the fixed assets as at the 31 March 2013, taken from the certified accounts of 25 councils and the uncertified accounts of Craigavon Borough Council for 2012/2013.

Council	Net Book Value of Fixed Assets at 31 March 2013 £
Antrim	50,033,824
Ards	45,576,071
Armagh	50,816,369
Ballymena	74,080,877
Ballymoney	21,343,890
Banbridge	27,858,901
Belfast	458,709,626
Carrickfergus	33,077,465
Castlereagh	48,556,833
Coleraine	65,939,952
Cookstown	24,986,916
Craigavon*	63,850,581
Derry	89,764,098
Down	56,255,619
Dungannon & S Tyrone	27,023,549
Fermanagh	43,823,894
Larne	36,903,132
Limavady	23,409,090
Lisburn	72,199,410
Magherafelt	28,816,390
Moyle	23,694,397
Newry & Mourne	56,520,972
Newtownabbey	77,948,202
North Down	115,719,263
Omagh	43,501,005

Council	Net Book Value of Fixed Assets at 31 March 2013 £
Strabane	14,251,161
Total	1,674,661,487

Driver and Vehicle Agency, Coleraine: Update

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the discussions over the retention of jobs at the Driver and Vehicle Agency in Coleraine.

(AQW 28363/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I met Robert Goodwill, the recently appointed Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport, on 6 November 2013. At the meeting, I emphasised the potentially very damaging impact on the economy of Northern Ireland, and on Coleraine in particular, of the potential loss of 300 jobs in the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA). I also pointed out that such cuts would be totally inconsistent with the UK Government's commitments to supporting the NI Executive in developing the local economy.

Mr Goodwill acknowledged the robust arguments put forward to support the retention of these jobs in DVA and the significant level of opposition to centralisation in Swansea from public representatives in Northern Ireland. It was very clear from our discussions that the Minister undoubtedly understands the significance of this decision and appreciates the unique factors applicable to Northern Ireland.

I reminded Mr Goodwill of the exemplary performance of staff in DVA, the clear wish of motorists here to be able to deal with DVA staff and the inevitable reduction in the standards of service that centralisation in Swansea would bring.

Mr Goodwill drew attention to the pressure on public sector expenditure and to the centralisation programme in Britain and to the need to extend new services to motorists in Northern Ireland. I pointed out that these services should have been delivered here many years ago through proper investment locally by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and I emphasised that the use of new services presents no justification for centralising all work in Swansea.

I reminded the Minister that, with access to the new IT system, staff in DVA could continue to deliver high quality services to customers in Northern Ireland and, for the first time, would also be able to deliver vehicle licensing services to customers anywhere in the UK.

I am satisfied that the strongest possible case has been made for the retention of vehicle licensing services in DVA and I remain hopeful that the right decision will be made for motorists in Northern Ireland and for the staff in DVA.

Mr Goodwill indicated that a decision is likely to be made early next year.

Taxis: Illegal Activity

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27215/11-15, how many convictions have been secured in the absence of video footage since enforcement officers began these investigations.

(AQW 28364/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Private hire taxis being used to illegally ply for hire will be in breach of condition of licence which falls within the scope of a generic PSV licensing offence.

This offence would normally be dealt with by way of a £30 fixed penalty ticket although depending on the specific circumstances may be pursued through court. Whilst the Driver and Vehicle Agency holds records relating to convictions for PSV licensing offences, those records do not distinguish which convictions relate to drivers who used their vehicle's to illegally ply for hire within the city limits of Belfast.

Taxis: Ravenhill Rugby Ground

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27856/11-15, whether such a report exists; and if so, to place a copy in the Assembly library.

(AQW 28378/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As confirmed in my response to AQW 27856/11-15, careful consideration was given to the provision of private hire taxis at Ravenhill rugby ground, which included assessing a number of sources of evidence and advice. A report of the findings was not produced but rather the final determination of the legal position as regards the provision of private hire taxis at Ravenhill was compiled and was attached to the response to AQW 27856/11-15.

North Down: Listed Buildings

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the names of the listed buildings in the North Down constituency.

(AQW 28390/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Based upon the 1974 ward boundaries, which is how the department holds such records, the total number of listed buildings in the North Down Borough Council (NDBC) area is 287. The North Down constituency also includes two electoral wards of Ards Borough Council in Donaghadee, which contain a further 58 listed buildings (highlighted in bold in the attached table). This gives a total of 345 listed buildings in your constituency.

It should be noted that North Down is being reviewed currently under the second survey process, and this figure may change again, when all records have been reviewed.

To provide the detail of all of these listed buildings by hard copy would be unwieldy; however, the information that you have sought may be accessed electronically at the following link www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/other-index/content-databases/content-databases-build.htm.

Once you have accepted the terms and conditions of the site, a search may be carried out by Council area – in this case Ards and North Down.

You will be aware, however, that there have been boundary changes since 1974, and as a result the figures should not be taken as definitive, in relation to the current boundaries. For that reason I have appended, for your information, a table which shows the number of the listed buildings within each ward of the North Down and Ards Borough Council Areas.

You may also wish to note that NDBC - which is a statutory consultee in the listing process - has been provided with a copy of each listing in its area, since the introduction of the legislation in the early 1970's.

Number of Listed buildings in the North Down and Ards District Council Areas

HB23 - North Down			HB24 - Ards		
1	Groomspoint	16	1	Portaferry	73
2	Churchill	1	2	Kircubbin	22
3	Ballyholme	4	3	Ballyhalbert	5
4	Ballymagee	2	4	Grey Abbey	63
5	Bangor Harbour	26	5	Carrowdore	6
6	Conlig	5	6	Donaghadee North	26
7	Bangor Castle	26	7	Donaghadee South	32
8	Whitehill	0	8	Loughries	10
9	Rathgael	0	9	Movilla	5
10	Clandeboye	23	10	Glen	3
11	Silverstream	0	11	Scrabo	16
12	Spring Hill	1	12	Ulsterville	0
13	Bryansburn	1	13	Central	42
14	Princetown	15	14	Comber North	0
15	Crawfordsburn	30	15	Comber South	32
16	Craigavad	21	16	Ballygowan	13
17	Loughview	7	17	Killinchy	31
18	Cultra	29			
19	Hollywood Demesne	11			
20	Hollywood Priory	69			
	Total	287		Total	379

Planning Applications: Bombardier

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of the Environment when he will make a decision on Bombardier's proposal to build their own energy plant at Queen's Island.

(AQW 28402/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department received the Addendum to the application on 4th November 2013.

As required by the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 this information has been advertised and sent to relevant consultees for comment.

When this statutory process is complete I will be in a position to make a final decision. I anticipate I will be able to do this by the end of the calendar year.

Planning Applications: Sunset Park, Portstewart

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the (i) current status of planning permission; (ii) number of proposed dwellings; and (iii) the expiry date of, the vacant premises at Sunset Park, Portstewart.

(AQW 28420/11-15)

Mr Durkan:

- (i) There are currently two live planning permissions on this site for alternative residential development proposals.
- (ii) Planning application Ref: C/2007/0618/F, granted on 23rd February 2009, provides for a total of 18 residential units comprising 10 replacement apartments and 8 townhouses. Planning application Ref: C/2013/0019/F, granted on 19th September 2013, provides for a total of 18 residential units comprising 6 replacement apartments and 12 semi-detached houses.
- (iii) Planning application Ref: C/2007/0618/F expires on 22nd February 2014, and planning application Ref: C/2013/0019/F expires on 18th September 2018.

Planning Applications: Environmental Statements

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 26973/11-15, how many of the 8 applications requiring an Environmental Statement were retrospective; and to detail these 8 EIA cases.

(AQW 28463/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Subsequent to AQW 26973/11-15, of the 8 applications accompanied by an Environmental Statement, 1 application is retrospective in nature (ref: J/2011/0272/F).

Details of the 8 applications are as follows;

1 C/2009/0806/F

Proposal: Northerly and westerly extension to Cam Quarry with restoration to conservation habitats

Location: Whitemountain Quarries, Cam Quarries, 39 Cam Road, Macosquin, Coleraine, BT51 4PX

2 F/2011/0256/F

Proposal: Lateral extension of Demesne Quarry southwards into Tully Field, providing for the agricultural restoration of Parishagh Quarry to original ground level and Demesne Quarry in part to original ground level and Tully Field extraction area to agricultural and biodiversity restoration at a lower level

Location: Tully Field, Parishagh Quarry and Demesne Quarry, 17 Munie Road, Glenarm, Co Antrim, BT44 0B

3 I/2011/0156/F

Proposal: Extraction of sand and gravel by mechanical shovel, processing of extracted minerals using mobile dry screening plant and restoration of site, and passing bays

Location: 250m due south of junction of Cavanoneill Road and Keenaghan Road, Cookstown, BT80 9EJ

4 J/2007/0416/F

Proposal: The phased extension to an existing sand and gravel pit including the excavation of bedrock, phased restoration, regularisation of existing washing plant with associated settlement lagoons and final restoration of the entire area to agricultural grass lands.

Location: 360m North East of 35 Castlewarren Road, Donemana, Co. Tyrone (Church Hill & Fawney Townlands), BT82 0PJ

5 J/2010/0319/F

Proposal: Proposed extraction of sand and gravel, the erection of temporary processing plant and office unit, the construction of setting ponds and restoration of the extraction area to agricultural use.

Location: Approx 180 metres east of No. 20 Tievenny Road, Killeen, Victoria Bridge, Co Tyrone, BT82 9LW

6 J/2011/0272/F (Retrospective)

Proposal: Westerly extension (retrospective) to existing sand pit and proposed proximate south-western extension to existing pit to provide for extraction of sand and gravel, and full restoration of site. Works also include: retrospective retention of mobile washing plant, crushing plant and mobile screener, removal of unauthorised static washing plant, replacement of unauthorised office with new office block, new toilet block, realignment of internal haul roads and staff parking.

Location: Tyrone Sand and Gravel Ltd, Old Bridge Road, Victoria Bridge, Strabane, BT82 9JR (lands located c. 250m west of the northern junction of Old Bridge Road with Mulvin Road and 240m west of 1 Old Bridge Road, Victoria Bridge and lands located immediately north-east of no 5 Derg Road, Victoria Bridge, Strabane

7 K/2012/0373/F

Proposal: Underground mine and associated surface level works to include car parking area, ancillary buildings (including fan room, miners dry room, ore storage building, mill building, general storage compound), plant (including conveyor belt, material transfer station) and equipment and removal of rock off-site. Non-compliance with condition No. 37 of planning approval K/1992/0713/F; to allow the extension of mine operations beyond the 8 year limit as per condition No 37.

Location: 56 Upper Botera Road, Cavanacaw, Omagh, BT78 5LH

8 U/2011/0415/F

Proposal: South-westerly extension to existing hard rock quarry for continued extraction of basalt and continuation of on-site processing.

Location: Lands approximately 195m south of 24 Bernice Road, Mallusk, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Service: Permanent Secretaries

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail how many Permanent Secretaries are currently employed within the Civil Service; and how many are female.

(AQW 27998/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): There are 12 members of staff at substantive Permanent Secretary level currently employed within the Civil Service, of whom 1 is female.

Civil Service: Grade 5

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail how many Grade 5 Civil Servants are currently in post; and how many are female.

(AQW 27999/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There are 163 substantive Grade 5 civil servants currently in post, of whom 69 are female.

Civil Service: Grade 3

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail how many Grade 3 Civil Servants are currently in post; and how many are female.

(AQW 28001/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There are 39 substantive Grade 3 civil servants currently in post, of whom 9 are female.

Pay: Median Hourly Rate

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the average hourly rate of pay for each year since 2003.

(AQW 28114/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Information on the median hourly rate of pay for each year since 2003 is provided in Table 1 below, from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) conducted by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

The ASHE is based on a 1% sample of employee jobs taken from HM Revenue and Customs pay as you earn (PAYE) records and the reported estimates therefore have an associated degree of sampling error.

Table 1: Median hourly pay (excluding overtime) for all employee jobs¹ - Northern Ireland 2003-2012

Year ²	Median ³ (£/hr)
2003	7.86
2004	8.23
2005	8.73
2006	9.00
2007	9.00

Year ²	Median ³ (£/hr)
2008	9.47
2009	9.95
2010	9.70
2011	9.85
2012	10.01

Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)

- 1 Employees (full time and part time) on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay-period was not affected by absence.
- 2 The heavy black line in the table indicate discontinuities arising from methodological changes and care should be taken when making comparisons between such periods (see background notes in http://www.detini.gov.uk/northern_ireland_ashe_2012_bulletin-revised_22-11-12.pdf).
- 3 The median is the value of earnings below which 50% of employees fall.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Western Health and Social Care Trust: Home Helps

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are any plans to make redundant all Western Health and Social Care Trust employees who operate as Home Helps.

(AQW 28011/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Western Trust does not plan to make home help staff compulsorily redundant.

The Trust is in the process of reforming its domiciliary care services and intends to accommodate home help staff within the reform process. Throughout the process, the Trust is engaging with staff and with their unions.

If staff cannot, or choose not to be accommodated within this process, then other options such as redeployment will be explored.

Children: Foster Care

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of children (i) in foster care; and (ii) awaiting foster care; and the number of children in each category in each of the previous five years.

(AQW 28058/11-15)

Mr Poots: Table 1 below details the number of children in foster care at 31st March in each of the previous five years. These figures can be found in 'Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2012/13' published on the Department's website at the following link: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib/statistics_and_research-cib-pub/children_statistics/stats-cib-children_order.htm

Table 1: Children in Foster Care at 31st March (2009 – 2013)

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
No. of Children in Foster Care	1,607	1,687	1,862	1,946	2,112

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions Returns, HSCB

Table 2 below details the number of children awaiting foster care at 12th November 2013.

Table 2: Children Awaiting Foster Care at 12th November 2013

	2013
No. of Children awaiting Foster Care	35

Source: Health and Social Care Trusts

Note: These figures have not been verified by DHSSPS

Note: Trusts were not able to provide figures for five years

Independent Ambulance Service: Trust Usage

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what use each Health and Social Care Trust has made of the Independent Ambulance Service since May 2011.

(AQW 28098/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department is aware of the need to ensure that appropriate safety and care standards are applied by the private ambulance sector and the standards of service identified by each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust are described below. Information on the usage of the Independent Ambulance Service (IAS) in respect of each HSC Trust is as follows.

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Services (NIAS) does not use and has not used the IAS, however NIAS has used Voluntary Ambulance Services (VAS) i.e. St John's Ambulance, Red Cross and Order of Malta in the event of a major incident and as part of business continuity plan on certain occasions (such as over the Christmas period, Halloween and other periods of significant patient demand). Under the direction of NIAS Command and Control, the VAS has responded to 579 calls since May 2011. In the context of overall activity this represents an exceptionally small proportion of responses undertaken.

NIAS has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the VAS which outlines nationally agreed personnel, driving, vehicles, medical supplies, medical records and training standards that must be in place within the VAS to be able to support NIAS. However, information on training courses available for staff within the VAS or IAS is not centrally held by NIAS.

NIAS is currently developing an exacting specification which will clearly outline the standards and quality expected in future from the IAS and the VAS including the skills, qualifications of staff, the roadworthiness of vehicles, standard of equipment as well as the performance monitoring and management arrangements to be followed.

The South Eastern HSC Trust has not used private sector/independent ambulance services since May 2011.

The Northern HSC Trust has used private/independent sector ambulances for 485 hospital discharges or transfers during the period May 2011 until August 2013 (inclusive), although the Trust cannot confirm what percentage of its total ambulance usage this is.

The Trust does not tender for independent ambulances and do not manage any contracts for independent ambulances. The Procurement and Logistics Service (PaLS) within the Business Services Organisation (BSO) assists the Northern Trust in procuring this non-direct care transport.

The Belfast HSC Trust provides on average 110 journeys per month by private sector/independent ambulances, this equates to 7% of overall ambulance use for transfers and discharge.

Staff providing the service must be suitably trained to carry out the requirements of the role. All drivers and escorts are to have a minimum level of training in basic first aid to include:

- Basic life support with BVM including adult & child CPR
- Defibrillation using an automatic defibrillator
- Airway management & oxygen therapy.

They must also be trained in:

- Moving and handling including the moving of bariatric patients
- Infection and prevention control
- Customer care.

In addition drivers are to have completed a recognised driving course appropriate to the vehicle. Transport providers were required to provide evidence of training that was evaluated as part of the contract award process.

The Trust's contract specification for the supply of non-emergency patient transport services imposes standards on the type and condition of the vehicle used. It also identifies the required standard for staff in relation to safeguarding adults; training; patient care; and presentation and conduct while providing a service for the Trust.

As part of the contract award process the suppliers were evaluated on technical capacity; quality assurance; staff training; health & safety arrangements; booking & response standards. They provided details of policies and operating arrangements that gave the Trust assurance that the required standards could be maintained. There is no formal compliance monitoring in place other than for verification of invoices.

The Western HSC Trust uses private ambulances to transfer patients to their own homes, private nursing homes and other hospitals especially when NIAS cannot provide this on a timely manner due to limited capacity. This is done through the patient flow manager who then makes contact with the relevant parties. Trust records are unable to give a breakdown of instances where the Trust has used this service or the percentage of total ambulance work.

Ambulance staff who provide the service are expected to be trained in basic life support. Under the terms of the contract, the providers must provide staff with a suitable level of training. The British Red Cross are quality-assured by CQC, the English quality standard body.

CPNI/paramedics have provided documents outlining the requirements of their vehicles/training of staff and levels of service they can provide. The contracts department also hold information regarding St John's, Order of Malta and British Red Cross.

The Southern HSC Trust uses St John's Ambulance, aside from NIAS. Since May 2011 there have been 778 runs using private ambulances, although the Trust cannot confirm what percentage of its total ambulance usage this is.

Training received by all staff includes:

- Induction courses parts A&B
- Child and vulnerable adult protection course
- Operational first aid course
- Automatic external defibrillator course
- Patient moving and handling for first aiders
- Supervised public duty.

The Trust has a contract in place with St John's covering this arrangement.

The Trust receives yearly service history from St John's Ambulance, Portadown division, on equipment service history, MOT, insurance. The Trust requests each member's qualifications and hold record of same.

Independent Ambulance Service: Safety

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he will take to ensure that private ambulance services are safe and undertake a professional and patient care centred approach.

(AQW 28099/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department is aware of the need to ensure that appropriate safety and care standards are applied by the private ambulance sector and the standards of service identified by each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust are described below. Information on the usage of the Independent Ambulance Service (IAS) in respect of each HSC Trust is as follows.

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Independent Ambulance Service: Training

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what training courses are available for staff in the Independent Ambulance Service.

(AQW 28100/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department is aware of the need to ensure that appropriate safety and care standards are applied by the private ambulance sector and the standards of service identified by each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust are described below. Information on the usage of the Independent Ambulance Service (IAS) in respect of each HSC Trust is as follows.

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Independent Ambulance Service: Standards

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the standards that must be met by the staff and vehicles of the Independent Ambulance Service; and what procedures are in place to ensure that these standards are met.

(AQW 28101/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department is aware of the need to ensure that appropriate safety and care standards are applied by the private ambulance sector and the standards of service identified by each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust are described below. Information on the usage of the Independent Ambulance Service (IAS) in respect of each HSC Trust is as follows.

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Domiciliary Care: Spend

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much each Health and Social Care Trust has spent, in real terms, per person on domiciliary care, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 28104/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information is not available in the format requested.

Emergency Medicine: Consultants

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken to ensure an increase in the number of emergency medicine consultants.

(AQW 28230/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are currently fifty five consultant posts in emergency medicine across the five Health and Social Care Trusts. Out of the fifty five posts there are three vacancies and these are being filled by locum consultants. Any increase in the number of consultant posts in emergency medicine is a matter for the Health and Social Care Board as commissioner of services. HSC Trusts are working closely with the Health and Social Board on current staffing levels including the number of consultant posts required in emergency medicine.

Allergy NI: Funding

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the financial support provided to Allergy NI. **(AQW 28287/11-15)**

Mr Poots: Allergy NI is a registered local charity and receives no financial support from my Department. My Department has no plans at present to provide core funding to voluntary organisations in respect of new applications for funding.

Allergy Services

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to develop the provision of allergy services.

(AQW 28288/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board, which commissions services on behalf of the Health Service in Northern Ireland, has just completed an in-depth assessment of need for paediatric asthma, allergy and anaphylaxis services as part of the local implementation of recent NICE guidance which has been issued on food allergy (CG116) and anaphylaxis (CG134).

The Board has allocated over £400k recurrent funding for these services to the Health and Social Care Trusts to start addressing waiting lists. Much of this funding will meet the needs of children with allergy specifically.

Active Tremor: Public Awareness Campaign

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department has taken to raise public awareness of Essential Tremor.

(AQW 28326/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been advised by the Public Health Agency that active tremor is not a condition which they have identified as benefiting from a public awareness campaign.

Dementia Strategy

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he has taken, in line with his Department's Dementia Strategy commitments, to address the significant differential in dementia diagnosis rates.

(AQW 28371/11-15)

Mr Poots: The regional dementia strategy, which I published in November 2011, addresses the importance of early diagnosis, and includes an action for the HSC Board in collaboration with the Public Health Agency and HSC Trusts to draw up criteria and clear protocols for referral from GP practices to memory services. This will assist in the assessment and diagnosis of dementia. Work is underway to complete this action, as part of the wider implementation of the strategy. .

You may also be aware that the Alzheimer's Society study entitled 'Mapping the Dementia Gap' shows that Northern Ireland has a diagnosis rate of 63% (11'800 people) which is just marginally below Scotland (64.4%) and well above the UK average of 46%. This is based on the number of people on GP dementia registers.

Broken down by area, the Belfast HSC Trust rates are highest in UK.

South Belfast: Registered Carers

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of registered carers who are over the age of 60, in the South Belfast constituency.

(AQW 28448/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available.

Health and Safety: Fire-rated Glass

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the actions his Department has taken to protect public safety with regards to the claims that Glassworks Ireland Ltd was installing supposedly fire-rated glass, which wasn't recognised, approved or certified as fire-rated.

(AQW 28457/11-15)

Mr Poots: In response to information received from the PSNI and with their agreement, a safety alert was issued to all HSC bodies by the Northern Ireland Adverse Incident Centre (NIAIC) on 29th August 2013. The purpose of this alert was to notify HSC bodies and the wider health and social care community of the possibility that counterfeit fire rated glass may have been installed in their facilities. The alert advised of the action required to manage this risk for ensuring the safety of the public, staff and service users within the health and social care environment.

As part of the ongoing PSNI investigation to identify the extent of possible locations where the counterfeit glass is installed, the PSNI have issued appropriate information through the broadcast and print media in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Bretten Hall

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 27937/11-15, given that a business case is still being developed, why a decision has been announced; and whether any staff have been transferred.

(AQW 28469/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is not uncommon for a decision on the way forward to be announced prior to business case approval for any associated expenditure. The decision to relocate leads to development of the business case quantifying and seeking approval for any expenditure commitment which may be required. The Northern Trust Board has approved the proposal to locate the Trust senior team at Bretten Hall. The business case is being revised to take account of the emerging solution which also includes a move of some staff from the Business Services Organisation.

A small number of senior staff moved to Bretten Hall in May 2013 at the time of the appointment of the turnaround team and prior to the decision to locate the Trust HQ at Bretten Hall.

Bangor Community Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to address the temporary closure of the Bangor Minor Injuries Unit at weekends.

(AQW 28506/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the minor injuries unit at Bangor Community Hospital will be closed at weekends starting from Saturday, 23 November 2013 until further notice. This is a temporary measure due to a staff shortage and the South Eastern Trust is exploring a number of options to address this. In the meantime, the minor injuries unit will be open from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Bretten Hall

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the proposed relocation of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust headquarters to Bretton Hall, Antrim Area Hospital will go ahead; and what is the cost of this proposed move.

(AQW 28519/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust Board has agreed to relocate its senior management team to Bretten Hall on the Antrim Hospital site.

A revised business case is currently being developed by the Trust to address the emerging solution. This will take account of all of the costs involved in the proposed organisational moves and final costs will not be known until the business case has been completed.

Autism: DHSSPS Buildings

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to what provision is made within his departmental buildings to receive visitors diagnosed with autism and to cater for their needs.

(AQW 28542/11-15)

Mr Poots: All visitors to government buildings are treated with courtesy and respect by staff. Where possible, details of visitors are notified to reception in advance of their arrival. Where visitors with disabilities, including those with autism spectrum conditions, advise of additional help and support to cater for their needs, every effort will be made to ensure this is provided for them. All visitors who are attending by invitation, or notify us in advance, are met at reception and are accompanied to their destination.

As required by the Autism Act (NI) 2011, my department led on the development of the cross departmental Autism Strategy and Action Plan, which is currently with the NI Executive for approval. The Action Plan contains proposals for autism awareness training for frontline staff in NICS. Subject to Executive approval, I anticipate being able to launch the Strategy and Action Plan for publication before the end of the year.

South West Acute Hospital: Pseudomonas

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the recent Pseudomonas outbreak at the South West Acute Hospital, Enniskillen, to outline the steps his Department is taking to prevent further outbreaks.
(AQW 28550/11-15)

Mr Poots: There has not been an outbreak of pseudomonas in the South West Acute Hospital.

The recent temporary closure of the neonatal unit in the South West Acute Hospital was a precautionary measure taken by the Western Trust. On routine inspection one infant was found to be carrying pseudomonas – known as colonisation – but was not infected or ill.

With regard to the prevention of cases of pseudomonas infection, through the RQIA I commissioned an independent review of the pseudomonas incidents of December 2011 and January 2012 at the earliest opportunity, in February 2012, in order to identify as quickly as possible any lessons that needed to be learned and acted on to minimise the risk of further tragedies. Professor Pat Troop and her team produced two reports: an interim report published on 31 March 2012 and the final report published on 31 May 2012. The reports contained a total of 32 recommendations, which I accepted immediately. All the recommendations have been implemented. The implementation of two of them has not been completed yet as they involve significant building work, which is progressing.

Social Care Council: Judicial Review

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the ruling by Mr Justice Treacy on his decision not to appoint a trade union official to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.
(AQW 28612/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department has received the written judgment on 9 November 2013 on the outcome of the judicial review. We will wish to consider the detail of the judgment and consult our legal representatives before making any further comment.

Protect Life: Provision of Services

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any Health and Social Care Trusts intend to apply, as part of the Protect Life strategy, to carry out services that would normally have been tendered and carried out by the community sector.
(AQW 28617/11-15)

Mr Poots: Under EU Procurement Regulations the Public Health Agency is required to go to public tender for the provision of services such as those currently being delivered under the Protect Life Strategy by the community sector. In line with the Regulations, public tenders must be open to applications from all organisations, including statutory bodies. Health and Social Care Trusts are, therefore, entitled to apply.

It has not been possible to establish all Trusts' intentions on this issue within the time available. However, I can confirm that, at this stage, the Belfast and Western HSC Trusts have no plans to tender for services currently provided by the community sector.

Department of Justice

Prisoners: Suicide/Self-harm

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27245/11-15, whether he is satisfied that first aid is an appropriate intervention in cases of vulnerable prisoners who are at risk of suicide and self-harm attempts and cannot access Accident and Emergency facilities or similar immediate response services.
(AQW 27906/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Prisoners who are at risk of suicide and self-harm will be managed under the Supporting Prisoners At Risk procedures, where they are reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team.

At Maghaberry and Magilligan Prison and Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre the Samaritans provide the peer support Listener Scheme – a confidential service available to prisoners 24 hours a day. At Hydebank Wood Prison Samaritans

volunteers provide 'one to one' emotional support during their regular visits. A dedicated Samaritans helpline is also available 24 hours a day to prisoners in distress and in need of support.

Vulnerable prisoners have access to a range of other support measures including CRUSE bereavement counselling; abuse counselling; prison chaplaincy; family support and diversionary activities. The Donard Programme in Maghaberry Prison provides a range of therapeutic interventions for the most vulnerable offenders including individually designed programmes delivered on a multi-agency basis.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust are responsible for providing healthcare within Northern Ireland Prisons, including any appropriate healthcare interventions required by prisoners who are at risk of suicide or self-harm, which may comprise of an assessment and treatment through the mental health team.

All prisoners can request to see a nurse at any time and prison healthcare staff will decide whether treatment required will be given in the prison or at outside hospital.

Prisoners: Terrorism Offences

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 22062/11-15, to detail (i) the number of prisoners, serving a sentence for terrorism offences, that have been granted home leave this year, broken down by prison; (ii) how many total periods of home leave have been granted by prison; and (iii) the number of days that have been granted as release by prison. (AQW 28064/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below outlines, by prison, the information requested.

Prisoners serving a sentence for terrorism offences

	Maghaberry	Magilligan	Hydebank Wood
Number of prisoners granted home leave	7	4	0
Total periods of home leave granted	11	18	0
Number of days that have been granted as release	25	41	0

Prisoners: Accommodation on Release

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice what support is provided to offenders with complex needs such as alcoholism, substance abuse and learning difficulties to find accommodation when released from prison. (AQW 28084/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice is committed to supporting prisoners to access appropriate accommodation on release from prison. Those who need housing upon release are referred to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. A key element of resettlement planning includes assessment of offenders needs, such as mental health, learning disabilities and addiction problems.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive jointly fund a Housing Advice in Prisons Project providing information, advice and advocacy to those in custody. This work is carried out in partnership with the prisoner and other relevant parties such as Probation Board for Northern Ireland, voluntary services partners who run hostels, and private landlords. Before a prisoner is released every effort is made to secure accommodation appropriate to their needs.

Prisoners: Support on Release

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice what facilities are available, with supervision, to support offenders with complex needs such as alcoholism, substance abuse and learning difficulties when released from prison. (AQW 28085/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice and a range of other organisations and agencies, work together to support offenders with complex needs such as alcoholism, substance abuse and learning difficulties, prior to and on their release from prison.

My Department and other criminal justice organisations are major contributors to the outcomes defined in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs 2011-16. These outcomes include the development of a care pathway for prisoners leaving prison to return to the community and discharge procedures, involving both in-prison health services and Voluntary and Community agencies, to ensure that on release prisoners have access to services and support across Northern Ireland.

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) currently delivers substance misuse interventions for those under its supervision. PBNI also funds a number of organisations across Northern Ireland which provide support services for addiction problems. If deemed appropriate, offenders will be referred to these services on release from prison.

Prisoners: Interjurisdictional Cooperation on Release

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department works with other jurisdictions to find suitable facilities for offenders with complex needs such as alcoholism, substance abuse and learning difficulties when released from prison.

(AQW 28086/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am committed to working in close co-operation with Ministers from other jurisdictions to share experience, knowledge and best practice. On 15 November, I, with Alan Shatter TD, opened the 4th Partnership Working for Public Protection conference (PPAG). PPAG provides an excellent annual opportunity for the Probation Board for Northern Ireland the Probation Service to discuss strategic issues of mutual interest.

My Department also continues to work closely with a range of agencies, in a number of other jurisdictions, in designing and developing interventions to ensure a co-ordinated approach to dealing with offenders with complex needs and inform the implementation of best practice programmes.

Prostitution: Research

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice when the timetable for the review into prostitution will be published.

(AQW 28153/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I announced in September, I am commissioning research into the extent and nature of prostitution in Northern Ireland. Work on the tendering process is underway, in line with Northern Ireland Civil Service procurement guidelines, and I anticipate that the advertisement seeking tenders will be issued within the next few weeks. Tenders will then be evaluated and the award of contract will follow.

Police Ombudsman: Historical Cases

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the average time taken for the Office of the Police Ombudsman to complete a historical investigation; and the average cost associated with investigations.

(AQW 28165/11-15)

Mr Ford: Due to the varying nature and complexity of individual cases, it is difficult to provide an accurate figure for the average time taken. Some cases have been completed within three to four months; others have taken a number of years to complete. My Department has provided additional funding for historical cases and the Office of the Police Ombudsman is now confident that 75% of these cases can be completed within one year of their commencement. Although the Police Ombudsman's Office does not individually cost investigations, it is anticipated that the average cost of each historical case will be over £65,000.

Police Ombudsman: CJINI/McCusker Reports

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to detail how the Office of the Police Ombudsman has changed following the Northern Ireland Office and the Criminal Justice Inspection reports.

(AQW 28166/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since the McCusker Report, commissioned by me as Minister of Justice, and the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) Report commissioned by the then Police Ombudsman in 2011, there have been very significant changes in the Office of the Police Ombudsman (OPONI).

A new Police Ombudsman was appointed in July 2012 and a new Chief Executive Officer took up post in January 2013. They have overseen significant changes to the management structure and governance of the organisation, focusing on improving policies, procedures, and quality assurance processes.

CJINI published a report of its follow up review of the independence of the Office in January 2013. The Chief Inspector referred to there having been "a sea change" within the organisation since the report of September 2011. The review concluded that substantial progress had been made and that it was satisfied that the issues identified in the 2011 report had been remedied to such an extent that it was happy that the Office should recommence the investigation of historical cases.

In particular, the report recognised that "new structures and processes" had been put in place "focused on providing comprehensive and robust quality assurance of investigations into historical cases and the subsequent production of public reports."

Police Ombudsman: Inspections

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to outline how many inspections by Her Majesty's Inspectorate have taken place since the formation of the Office of the Police Ombudsman.

(AQW 28168/11-15)

Mr Ford: As the Office of the Police Ombudsman is not subject to inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, no such inspections have taken place. The Office falls under the remit of Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, which has carried out two inspections.

Police Ombudsman: Budget

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to provide a breakdown of the increases in budget allocated to the Office of the Police Ombudsman since its formation.

(AQW 28169/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below details the budget allocated to the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland since its formation and the increase, or decrease, from year to year.

Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland Budget Allocation since 2000

Year	Budget Allocation (£'000s)	Increase/Decrease (£'000s)
2000/2001	3,518	
2001/2002	6,585	3,067
2002/2003	6,635	50
2003/2004	6,825	190
2004/2005	7,233	408
2005/2006	7,200	-33
2006/2007	8,170	970
2007/2008	8,676	506
2008/2009	8,827	151
2009/2010	9,059	232
2010/2011	8,797	-262
2011/2012	9,658	861
2012/2013	9,524	-134

Police Ombudsman: Public Prosecution Service

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total number of cases the Police Ombudsman has submitted to the Public Prosecution Service; and how many have resulted in prosecutions in respect of (i) serving officers; and (ii) retired officers.

(AQW 28170/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since 1 April 2009, the Police Ombudsman has submitted 3,938 cases to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS). There were recommendations for prosecutions in 48 cases. The PPS has directed 18 prosecutions in respect of serving officers and none in respect of retired officers.

Illegal Fuel: Laundering

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of fuel laundering plants that have been discovered since he took office; (ii) the number of arrests in connection with the discoveries; (iii) the number of related convictions during this period; (iv) the number of landowners, where laundering activities were taking place, were identified; (v) the number of landowners that have been brought before the courts in relation to fuel laundering on their property; and (vi) the number of cases that are pending as a result of allegations of fuel laundering.

(AQW 28185/11-15)

Mr Ford: HM Revenue and Customs, which has responsibility for fuel fraud offences, has provided the following information:

- (i) HMRC has identified and dismantled 99 laundering plants since 01/04/2010 (20 in 2010/11; 29 in 2011/12; 22 in 2012/13 and 28 to date in 2013/14);
- (ii) HMRC Criminal Investigation has recorded 58 arrests in respect of all fuel fraud cases since 01/04/2010 (specific records for laundering operation are not kept) and these are split as 18, 12, 8 and 20 across the years;
- (iii) Convictions for fuel fraud (not solely related to laundering plants) total 22 during the period 01/04/2010 to date;
- (iv) HMRC does not hold this data;
- (v) HMRC does not hold this data; and
- (vi) There are 32 individuals with cases pending in respect of fuel fraud.

Kristoff Alauya

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of occasions Kristoff Alauya has committed an offence whilst a remand or sentenced prisoner, including (i) the date of offence; (ii) the nature of the offence; and (iii) the relevant disposal. **(AQW 28194/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The information requested constitutes sensitive personal information as defined at section 2 of the Data Protection Act 1998. To release such information would be in breach of the first and second data protection principles.

Noel Parker

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 24552/11-15, to answer part (i) of the question. **(AQW 28196/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The investigation found specific documentation relating to the prisoner's accompanied release from custody, in both typed and hand-written form.

None of the documents indicated the relationship between the prisoner and the bride as being that of a father and a daughter.

Hydebank Wood: Governor

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27080/11-15, given the previous recommendations on this matter have not been implemented, why the appointment of a new Governor at Hydebank Wood is relevant, particularly as the post has been vacant for some time and a replacement would be a mandatory requirement for the Northern Ireland Prison Service. **(AQW 28252/11-15)**

Mr Ford: This was relevant in the context that at the time of the inspection a permanent Governor and Deputy Governor had not been appointed.

Criminal Justice: Case 13/091473

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the Preliminary Enquiry for the prisoner in case number 13/091473 at Craigavon Magistrates Court on 4 October 2013, to detail (i) why the committal hearing took place in a court house cell and not in the court room; (ii) why notification was not given to the media in advance of the hearing alerting them reporting restrictions were to be sought as per the guidance from the Lord Chief Justice following the judgement of 8 July 2013 on Anonymity Orders; (iii) why, despite media representatives being in attendance in the courtroom, they were not permitted to be present at the hearing; (iv) under what grounds reporting restrictions were granted, given the name and case in question has been reported widely since the first appearance and there is no nexus to the alleged victim; and (v) whether this matter will be reviewed. **(AQW 28258/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The location of the hearing and the ordering of reporting restrictions are judicial decisions. The reporting restrictions in any case may be reviewed by the Judge when the case is next listed for hearing.

Prisoners: Female Released

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the circumstances leading to the erroneous release of a female prisoner in early November 2013, including (i) the nature and date of conviction; (ii) the tariff imposed; (iii) the court in question; and (iv) the error in release. **(AQW 28260/11-15)**

Mr Ford: Although reported as such in certain media, I can confirm that no female prisoner was released in error by the Prison Service in early November.

A female prisoner appeared at Belfast Crown Court on 4 November for sentencing in respect of charges for which she had been convicted in September. Although on bail in respect of these charges, she was in prison serving a sentence for other offences. This sentence was due for expiry on 5 November.

On 4 November, the judge imposed a Determinate Custodial Sentence of two years – one year in prison and one year on licence. The prisoner was returned to prison and in accordance with the warrant issued, the legal document on which sentence calculation is based, was correctly released from prison on 5 November.

However, when the judge became aware that the prisoner had been released, he amended the order to reflect his wish that the sentence he imposed on 4 November should run consecutive to the existing sentence, rather than concurrently, and the individual was returned to prison.

There are reporting restrictions on this case that limit the level of detail which can be placed in the public domain.

Police Ombudsman: Historical Cases

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the duration the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland anticipates it will take to complete their investigations into cases related to the Troubles.

(AQW 28319/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland anticipates that its current workload of historical cases will be completed within six years, by 31 March 2019.

Police Ombudsman: Historical Cases

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice how many cases related to the Troubles the Police Ombudsman has opened in the last six years, including the number that remain ongoing.

(AQW 28320/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police Ombudsman has opened 206 historical cases since 1 November 2007. Of these, 162 are ongoing.

Prison Service: Code of Conduct

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the suggestion by Independent Arbitrators, Dr Carol Ackah and Liam Deane, contained at 13.4 of their December 2009 Report that 'the use of an officer other than the Adjudicating Governor to present the Northern Ireland Prison Service management case at disciplinary hearings may serve to reinforce the impartiality of the decision maker' is to be incorporated into disciplinary hearings under the Code of Conduct 2013, particularly in cases of gross misconduct, and if not, to provide his rationale for doing so.

(AQW 28329/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to my answer to his similar question AQW/27817/11-15.

Pro Bono Costs Orders

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the development of Pro Bono Costs Orders.

(AQW 28334/11-15)

Mr Ford: My officials met and discussed initial proposals to expand the current provision for Pro Bono Costs Orders with interested groups in July 2013. These proposals are being further considered by the interested groups.

Access to Justice

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what consideration has been given to the Law Society's proposal for a fundamental review to identify inefficiencies in the legal system prior to any further cuts in Legal Aid.

(AQW 28346/11-15)

Mr Ford: I recently announced to the Law Society my intention to commit to Phase 2 of the Access to Justice Review. The exact scope of the Review setting out precisely what issues it should address is currently being developed, and I will bring this to the Assembly in due course. It is my intention the review will not interrupt the reforms already underway but rather build on these reforms setting an agenda to shape Access to Justice in the future.

Legal Aid: Costs

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the reasons for the increase in spending on Legal Aid; (ii) how these factors were assessed; and (iii) the rationale for the proposed cuts to Legal Aid.

(AQW 28347/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) Legal Aid is demand led and there are a number of factors which contribute to the increase in spending on Legal Aid. These include changes in the volumes of disposals of cases, more prompt submission of bills and their taxation and the disposal and assessment of costs in long running cases which have an impact on the overall level of Legal Aid expenditure.
- (ii) Many of these factors are outside the direct control of the Legal Aid system and are monitored by trends and expenditure profiles. For instance, from 2008-2012 the overall volume of Children Order applications dealt with by the courts increased by 50%, which will have increased spend in civil legal aid. Similarly, in respect of criminal legal aid, expenditure has increased this year as a result of the appointment last year of an additional judge to conduct Crown Court work. The Department has established a forecasting forum to enhance Legal Aid forecasting and has also published proposals for the introduction of standard fees for legal representatives in civil cases similar to the existing standard fees for criminal cases. One of the key benefits of introducing a standardised fee is that it enhances the capacity of the Legal Services Commission to forecast civil legal aid expenditure in future years.

- (iii) Through the access to justice reform programme, the Department aims to create an effective, sustainable, affordable and accessible legal aid system. The current proposals for reform of Legal Aid are about ensuring that the people who need help receive levels of advice and representation that are appropriate and affordable.

Sexual Offences Prevention Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail how many people from outside Northern Ireland, including from Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland are currently (i) within the court system under application for Sexual Offences Prevention Orders; and/or (ii) subject to a Sexual Offences Prevention Order after it has been discovered they were convicted of a sexual offence in their native country, prior to arrival in Northern Ireland and for which, if committed locally, would have resulted in a Sexual Offences Prevention Order and/or have acted in such a way as to have an Order imposed.

(AQW 28349/11-15)

Mr Ford: Applications to the courts for Sexual Offences Prevention Orders are an operational matter for the Chief Constable who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Prison Service: Reform

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27655/11-15, to address the first part of the original question, particularly to detail the main obstacles in implementing reform to bring the Northern Ireland Prison Service facilities in question up to standard.

(AQW 28350/11-15)

Mr Ford: Reforming our prisons is a key priority and implementing the necessary change will take time and money. Reform must be delivered within the current financial restrictions; progress is dependent on securing approval of Business Cases and necessary funding.

Kenneth Douglas

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27762/11-15 (i) given it is not within the scope or power of any Department, agency, or officer to 'pre-empt' these circumstances, could instead have been prevented had due consideration to previous offending behaviour and risk combined with diligence been applied; and whether using the term 'pre-empt' is disingenuous in reviews such as this as it is unattainable and cannot be disproved.

(AQW 28351/11-15)

Mr Ford: The comprehensive Review taken forward by the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland has adequately considered all the issues in respect of this case. I do not agree that my previous response was disingenuous in respect of the outcome from that review.

Prison Service: Independent Research

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27593/11-15, whether it is within the remit of the Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service to prevent Professor Phil Scraton access for independent research or admit him only on pre-set terms of what is documented.

(AQW 28352/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison Service encourages independent research within prison establishments and accommodates research proposals which meet the requirements of the researcher and which will prove of value to the Prison Service in terms of delivery of its core objectives.

Sexual Offences Prevention Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Sexual Offences Prevention Orders, in place in each of the last three years, have been breached; and of these, how many were breached on more than one occasion, broken down per court division.

(AQW 28376/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below details the number of Sexual Offences Prevention Orders (SOPOs) breached during the period 2010 to 2012 by County Court Division and includes the number of orders breached on more than one occasion.

Number of SOPOs breached by County Court Division during 2010 to 2012

County Court Division	2010		2011		2012	
	Number of SOPOs breached on at least one occasion	Number of SOPOs breached on more than one occasion	Number of SOPOs breached on at least one occasion	Number of SOPOs breached on more than one occasion	Number of SOPOs breached on at least one occasion	Number of SOPOs breached on more than one occasion
Belfast	14	5	13	3	20	5
Londonderry	0	0	1	0	2	1
Antrim	2	0	2	0	5	1
Fermanagh and Tyrone	4	1	1	0	0	0
Armagh and South Down	0	0	2	1	3	1
Ards	1	0	7	0	2	1
Craigavon	2	0	2	0	2	0
Total	23	6	28	4	34	9

Frances McKeown

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27727/11-15, (i) given the Prisoner Ombudsman is the author of the report and that any subsequent dealings on its content fall within the remit of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) and his Department, why he is unwilling to address this matter; and (ii) whether his Department or the NIPS have input into the decision not to publish this report.

(AQW 28431/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I explained in my response to AQW/27727/11-15, the Prisoner Ombudsman is an independent office holder and the Member may wish to write to him directly about this matter. The decision on whether or not to publish the report is taken solely by him and neither I nor the Northern Ireland Prison Service has any input into whether or not the report should be published.

Prisoners: Temporary Release

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice to detail the average time spent on temporary release in the community of prisoners serving a life sentence, prior to reaching the minimum tariff period determined by the court, since 2010.

(AQW 28452/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Parole Commissioners: Victim Consultation

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice to outline the mechanism used by the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland to consult with victims prior to considering the release of prisoners serving a life sentence.

(AQW 28454/11-15)

Mr Ford: Parole Commissioners are independent office holders and the Chief Commissioner has suggested that you write to her directly on this issue. However, I can advise that the Probation Board for Northern Ireland provide Victim Impact Statements to Parole Commissioners for consideration.

PSNI: Service Medal

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department is considering a proposal to spend over £300,000 on a medal for PSNI staff, and if so, to detail how this proposal came to the Department, including the view expressed by the Policing Board.

(AQW 28464/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have received a proposal from the Chief Constable to introduce a PSNI Service Medal, the cost of which is estimated at £316,000.

The Northern Ireland Policing Board resolved to support the Chief Constable's proposal for a PSNI Service Medal.

Kenneth Douglas

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27708/11-15, why the Public Protection Arrangements in Northern Ireland has not been notified of this matter; and whether he will instruct this agency to conduct their own review into the handling of this case since the first release.

(AQW 28490/11-15)

Mr Ford: Mr Douglas was not subject to the Public Protection Arrangements in Northern Ireland because he did not receive a qualifying sentence. The Review taken forward by the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland has already comprehensively and satisfactorily considered all the issues in respect of this case.

Prison Service: Intelligence Reports

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27855/11-15, why this information cannot be provided on the grounds of personal security when information was provided in the answer to AQW 27854/11-15, which relates to personal security.

(AQW 28547/11-15)

Mr Ford: Any intelligence reports that NIPS receive, including those that relate to the personal security of staff, are confidential. The details of any such intelligence reports including how many have been received cannot be shared. I am content that information regarding the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings can be released as this will not identify any persons nor breach confidentiality.

National Crime Agency: Political Agreement

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice what his Department will do to ensure Northern Ireland is not disadvantaged by the National Crime Agency not having appropriate power.

(AQW 28552/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am continuing to work to secure political agreement for the NCA to operate in Northern Ireland in the devolved arena with all the necessary powers available to it. That operation would be subject to appropriate oversight from our policing architecture. Engagement with political parties is ongoing.

If the NCA is not empowered to operate in the devolved arena then Northern Ireland will be at a disadvantage.

Mediation: Funding

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice to detail the publicly funded assistance available for (i) family mediation cases; (ii) collaborative law cases; and (iii) the Bar Mediation Service in individual cases.

(AQW 28614/11-15)

Mr Ford: Under the Assistance by Way of Representation and Civil Legal Aid Schemes, the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission (the Commission) funds Family Mediation in applications under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 as directed by the court.

The Commission does not currently fund Collaborative Law Cases.

The Commission does not fund cases under the Bar Mediation Service.

Department for Regional Development

Roads: Cancelled Projects

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost to his Department of cancelled road projects in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 26059/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I would advise the Member that no road projects have been cancelled in the last two financial years.

Fivemiletown: Traffic Attendants

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of days, excluding Sundays, that traffic attendants were patrolling in Fivemiletown; and (ii) the (a) minimum, (b) maximum and (c) average number of attendants patrolling on these days, in the last 12 months.

(AQW 26669/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In the period from 1 October 2012 to 30 September 2013, Traffic Attendants patrolled in Fivemiletown on 120 days, Monday to Saturday.

In providing these patrols, the minimum number of Traffic Attendants deployed per visit was 1 and the maximum number was three. The overall average was 1.4.

Regional Development Strategy 2035

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what action is being taken to address the certificate of general conformity for the Regional Development Strategy 2035, which is currently delaying the publication of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

(AQW 26763/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Prevailing planning legislation requires my Department to decide whether or not a plan is in general conformity with the RDS within the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which it received the formal request from DOE. That request was submitted to my Department on 19 September 2013 and I can confirm that officials within my Department have completed the assessment within this statutory timeframe.

Vehicles: Pothole Damage

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of claims his Department has received for damage to vehicles caused by potholes, in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 26764/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of claims received by my Department for damage to vehicles caused by potholes, in the last three financial years, are set out in the table below.

Year	Claims for damage caused by potholes
2010/11	2,101
2011/12	1,777
2012/13	984

A26: Upgrade

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, following the recent announcement by the Minister for Finance and Personnel regarding the upgrading of the A26, what steps he will take in preparation for the remainder of the scheme in future years.

(AQW 27581/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am pleased, that having made the case for the A26 project, to have secured funding of around £8 million in 2014/15 for the A26 Frosses Road Dual Carriageway scheme, which will enable construction to commence in late 2014.

I have now considered the Inspector's Report into the Public Inquiry for the scheme and tasked Roads Service to progress the project, taking into account the Inspector's recommended amendments. This will enable the Statutory Orders to be made and the procurement process to be publicised. It is anticipated the scheme will take 24 months to complete at an estimated cost of £65 million.

Cycling: Transport Hub

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how cycling will be catered for in the new Integrated Transport Hub.

(AQW 27666/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised me that, although its Transport Hub project team is currently undertaking a procurement exercise to appoint an Integrated Design Team, there is no specific design for the Hub at this point. However, cycling will be recognised as an important transport mode to be catered for within the Hub facility and the design brief will be drafted to reflect this.

Railways: Waterside Station

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the potential for passenger growth on the Belfast - Coleraine - Londonderry rail line when the new Waterside passenger terminal is completed and the passing loop near Ballykelly is operational.

(AQW 27889/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The timing and scope of a new station at Waterside have not yet been finalised. A range of options are currently going through feasibility review, costing and Economic Appraisal.

Any Economic Appraisal on Waterside Station will not include passenger forecasts, as stations do not drive demand in quite the same way as service frequency.

In relation to the passing loop, the Translink 2007 New Trains Two Economic Appraisal projects a 90,000 passenger uplift once an hourly service has been delivered to Londonderry. Phase 2 of the Londonderry to Coleraine track relay which will facilitate this is currently planned to complete by the end of 2016.

Transport: Dungannon Integrated Pilot Scheme

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the Dungannon Integrated Pilot Scheme. (AQW 27925/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am pleased to be able to confirm that the pilot project in the Dungannon area is making good progress. My Department is co-ordinating the pilot, the aim of which is to prove that the concept of integrated planning and delivery of passenger transport can be achieved and offers better value for money and better services for passengers. There have been a number of notable achievements to date, including the rationalisation of a number of school services involving the Southern Education and Library Board and Translink in Dungannon and the introduction of an improved service to Craigavon Area Hospital involving Translink and community transport. The implementation of this new service has been supported by improved passenger information giving details to people living in rural areas on how they can avail of community transport to connect to the main Translink hub in Dungannon to travel to and from the hospital. This is exactly the type of integration that the pilot project is seeking to deliver and it is planned to build on this type of improvement to service delivery throughout the pilot period. The pilot will also assess other opportunities including an extended role for community transport in school transport provision in rural areas and in accessing healthcare facilities where there is a specific requirement. It is also planned to examine integration opportunities in the very complex area of special needs transport provision in the Dungannon area and to extend the analysis of school transport services to the Cookstown area and the remaining schools in Dungannon that have not been considered so far.

At the same time as planning and implementing the pilot, my Department is preparing for the development of an economic appraisal which will examine the totality of travel needs and develop proposals on how integrated planning and delivery of services could be delivered on a wider scale. The economic appraisal will consider the many issues that will need to be addressed across all the organisations involved. I am firmly of the view that a systematic and phased approach should be adopted for both the pilot and any subsequent wider implementation. This is the best approach to develop a sound evidence base for an integrated and sustainable service delivery model for the future. It will also enable participating organisations to consider the impacts on the services that they fund and enable proposals on the way forward to be agreed by Departments and the other organisations involved.

Mineral Extraction: Mobouy Road, Derry

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the extent to which Mobouy Road, Derry has been undermined by unauthorised mineral extraction; (ii) when unauthorised mineral extraction took place; (iii) whether this poses any danger to road users; and (iv) why his Department did not act to prevent this. (AQW 28016/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has no information indicating that Mobouy Road has been undermined by unauthorised mineral extraction. However, there may have been a threat to Mobouy Road some time ago and it is understood DOE Planning may have taken action to address that situation. There are no visible defects to Mobouy Road that suggests undermining and there is no perceived danger to road users.

Roads: Pothole Repairs

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development how pothole repairs are prioritised. (AQW 28021/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Article 8 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 places a duty on Roads Service to maintain all public roads in a reasonable condition. In recognition of its duty of care, Roads Service has put in place a set of Maintenance Standards for Safety. These standards, which are designed to ensure a consistent service level and a safe highway while offering value for money, are based on best practice, research and consultation with both the public and other professional bodies and Industry.

Essentially, the standards and procedures currently in operation, establish frequencies for road inspections which are dependent upon traffic volumes and specify response times for the repair of defects, including potholes. Inspection frequencies vary between daily cycles for motorways to four monthly cycles for carriageways carrying low volumes of traffic. Response times specified for the repair of defects, including potholes, are dependent upon the severity of the defect and range from one calendar day to routine inclusion in the next work programme for that particular route. If the relevant response time cannot be met, Roads Service has the option of installing signs to warn road users of a possible danger.

Moirra: Traffic Volume

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the daily volume of traffic passing through Moira. (AQW 28026/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department collects data from automatic traffic counting sites located throughout Northern Ireland. Details of the Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) flow information recorded at two locations on the main route running through Moira, the A3, are provided in the table below:

Census Point	Route	Location	Channel 1	Channel 2	Total (7 day AADT)
235	A3	Moira Road, Lisburn, West of Lissue Industrial Estate	To Lisburn - 5,512	To Moira-5,725	11,237
409	A3	Magheralin - Moira	To Magheralin - 6,579	To Moira-6,491	13,070

Toome: Traffic Volume

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the volume of traffic recorded in Toome in (i) 2003-2004; and (ii) 2004-2005.

(AQW 28027/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Traffic counts on the bridge in Toome taken during December 2003 indicated an average 7 day traffic volume of 22273 vehicles per day, whereas those in September 2004 indicated an average volume of 7121 vehicles per day.

The significant reduction in traffic volumes can be explained by the opening, in March 2004, of the Toome By-pass, which accommodated much of the through traffic.

Winter Weather: DRD Contingency Plans

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of weather indicators predicting a colder than average winter for 2013/14, what his Department is doing to (i) prepare for this; and (ii) ensure there is enough grit, sand bags and other essential materials for all eventualities.

(AQW 28029/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is well prepared for the incoming winter season and will be able to provide a high standard of service delivery for the salting of roads.

Prior to the start of each winter service period, Roads Service carries out a significant amount of planning to ensure a state of readiness for the coming season. In addition to a number of routine pre-season checks, planning includes ensuring adequate staffing arrangements are in place, including training for new staff, where required, and ensuring all winter service equipment is in working order. Every night, from the end of October 2013 until the middle of April 2014, Roads Service will have almost 300 people on standby ready to salt main roads, helping drivers across Northern Ireland cope with the wintry conditions.

At the start of this season, Roads Service salt barns were at full capacity, with stocks in excess of 70,000 tonnes. Additional salt stock resilience, totalling 38,100 tonnes, is held at six strategic locations throughout Northern Ireland. The current Winter Service salt contract also provides for the supply of a further 15,000 tonnes per month from October 2013 to April 2014, if required.

During periods of heavy rainfall, my Department's primary objective is to deal with the impact of roads-related flooding caused by blocked or overwhelmed infrastructure, such as gullies or other road drainage systems, for which it has responsibility. I am satisfied sufficient quantities of sandbags are in store for emergency purposes and, in line with current policy, my officials will continue to assist other bodies deal with flooding incidents. This includes, for example, the prompt deployment of sandbags, particularly where properties are at risk of flooding.

Members of the public with concerns about flooding can contact the Flooding Incident Line on 0300 2000 100. This service provides a single number to report serious flooding and is available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

Craigantlet Hills: Road Proposals

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on proposals for the Craigantlet crossroads.

(AQW 28076/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As you will be aware, I asked officials in my Department's Roads Service to consider all the alternative proposals put forward by local residents.

It is likely a consultation exercise will be required, to gauge the views of the local community, as well as the wider North Down travelling public, on the advantages and disadvantages of the options under consideration.

I would not, therefore, expect to be in a position to make any decision until this process is completed.

Craigantlet Hills: Crossroads

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the work that is currently being carried out at Craigantlet crossroads.

(AQW 28079/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is currently carrying out essential carriageway resurfacing to improve the structural integrity and ride quality at Craigantlet crossroads. In addition, some associated footway, kerbing and minor drainage improvement works are also being undertaken to strengthen the carriageway at the junction and the approaches to it.

Craigantlet Hills: Resurfacing Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the estimated cost of the work that is currently being carried out at Craigantlet crossroads.

(AQW 28080/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The estimated cost of the resurfacing scheme currently being completed at Craigantlet crossroads is £160k.

Spencer Street, Holywood: Resident-only Parking

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the steps his Department is taking to implement resident only car parking for Spencer Street, Holywood.

(AQW 28115/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My officials are currently pursuing the introduction of Residents' Parking schemes within the four areas of parking restraint identified in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 (BMTP).

Efforts are currently being concentrated on schemes in inner Belfast and it is hoped, in due course, that residents' parking schemes will be progressed in Bangor, Carrickfergus and Lisburn. The timing of schemes outside Belfast will be dependent upon the progress of those being developed at present and a future prioritisation of the remaining areas.

Although Holywood is not specifically identified within the BMTP in this respect, a number of requests have been received for the provision of residents' parking in residential areas of the town centre, including Spencer Street. Accordingly, officials have added these locations to its list of areas for future consideration, once all areas identified within the BMTP have been addressed.

As I have previously advised, I had asked officials to carry out an initial assessment of the eligibility of residential streets within Holywood town centre. Officials indicate that surveys of a number of the residential streets in Holywood town centre, including Spencer Street, to determine if they would benefit from the introduction of residents' parking schemes, should be completed by the end of January 2014.

Cycling Unit: Budget

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total budget of the new departmental cycling unit.

(AQW 28128/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I announced the establishment of a new cycling unit in August 2013 to deliver the effective co-ordination and management of a range of cycling initiatives. The unit was formally established in November this year.

Senior officials in my Department are currently exploring budget and resource requirements to ensure the necessary funding is secured to deliver the Department's objectives. Given that the Unit has been set up in-year, the annual budget is estimated at around £800K for staffing and promotional costs. Discussions are also underway to identify what additional resource budget is required and the capital funding required for infrastructure measures.

Bangor: Car Parking

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are plans to review car parking charges in Bangor.

(AQW 28129/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware I announced a freeze on any further increase to car parking charges in early November 2012 for the remainder of the current budget period; that is, up until 2015. This announcement also provides for a freeze on the introduction of charges in existing Roads Service operated car parks during this period.

Giro d'Italia 2014: Cycling Infrastructure

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the steps he is taking to ensure cycling infrastructure is in place ahead of the Giro d'Italia 2014.

(AQW 28131/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is represented on the Northern Ireland Local Steering Group, which is the overseeing committee organising the event. Roads Service is involved in the operational aspects of the event through the Race

Committee and officials have been liaising closely with the race organisers in agreeing the route of the 2014 Giro D'Italia in Northern Ireland.

Based on an inspection, the organisers were very content with the condition of the roads to be used for the three stages taking place in Northern Ireland. Whilst there are a small number of issues to be addressed by my Department prior to the event, no upgrades have been requested.

The delivery structure of the event has targeted 'legacy' as one of the primary objectives of the event. Whilst the Northern Ireland Tourist Board is leading this aspect of the event organisation, my Department will assist wherever possible.

NI Water: Charges Scheme

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 26977/11-15, on what basis the proposed charging scheme was calculated.

(AQW 28167/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water's annual Charges Scheme sets out the charges the Company makes for the services it provides. This includes notional household charges based on property capital values as recommended by the Independent Water Review Panel. The Executive has made a commitment that there will be no additional water charges for households during this Programme for Government period. As a result my Department pays a subsidy to NIW in lieu of domestic consumers' contributions.

NI Water: Charges

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether he is satisfied with the methodology used to determine water charges for domestic customers as published on NI Water's website; (ii) what representations he has had about that methodology; (iii) whether these representations will be made public; (iv) whether he will instruct NI Water to make changes next year; and (v) whether any consultation will take place on the charging methodology.

(AQW 28173/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Executive has made a commitment that there will be no additional water charges for households during this Programme for Government period. Therefore, the questions of the methodology for household charging does not arise.

Park and Ride: Facilities

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the Park and Ride facilities for which his Department has direct responsibility in (i) Strangford; and (ii) the rest of Northern Ireland.

(AQW 28178/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is not responsible for any Park and Ride facilities in Strangford.

The Park and Ride facilities located across the remainder of Northern Ireland, for which my Department has direct responsibility, are as follows:

- Limavady Bus Station, Station Road;
- Ballee Park and Ride, Ballymena;
- Millbrook Park and Ride, Larne;
- Paradise Walk Park and Ride, Templepatrick;
- Dunsilly Park and Ride/Share;
- Ballygroobey Park and Share;
- Toome Park and Ride;
- Drumahoe Park and Ride;
- Lough Road Park and Ride, Lurgan;
- Portadown Road Park and Ride/Share, Armagh;
- Sheepbridge Park and Share, Newry;
- Forkhill Road Park and Share, Cloghogue, Newry;
- Clough Roundabout Park and Share;
- Cairnshill Park and Ride, Saintfield Road, Belfast;
- Blacks Road Park and Ride, Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast;
- Sprucefield Park and Ride (adjacent to M1 motorway);
- Northside Park and Ride, Great Georges Street, Belfast;
- Eastside Park and Ride, Middlepath Street, Belfast;
- Hillhead Road Park and Ride, Castledawson;
- Magherafelt Road Park and Ride, Castledawson;
- Crevenagh Road Park and Ride, Omagh;
- Maghera Park and Ride; and
- Tullybryan Road Park and Ride, Ballygawley.

Planning Applications: Parking Surveys

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of parking surveys attached to planning applications that have not been validated by NI Roads service staff in the last twelve months; and (ii) how his Department will ensure that all future surveys are properly validated.

(AQW 28183/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Information on the number of parking surveys attached to planning applications that have not been validated is not readily available. It would require a lengthy and resource intensive exercise scrutinising the relevant database containing the consultation responses to obtain the information requested.

Officials are reminded of the importance of validating information received from applicants during the planning process and managers carry out a randomly 10% check of responses for quality assurance purposes.

A5 Western Transport Corridor/A32

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether any bids for funding originally made for the A5 Western Transport Corridor have been redirected for the upgrade of the A32 servicing the South West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen and the new local Enhanced Hospital in Omagh.

(AQW 28211/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Following the court ruling in April of this year which delayed the A5 Western Corridor dualling scheme, I wrote to the then Finance Minister in May, highlighting other schemes that could commence construction in 2014/15. Unfortunately, none of the A32 schemes were included as they were not sufficiently developed and were not subsequently bid for in the 2014/15 Capital Budget Exercise.

The Member will be aware three schemes have already been completed along the A32 servicing the South West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen and the new local Enhanced Hospital in Omagh. These include:

- the £2m improvement scheme at A32 Drumskinny, which was completed in early 2012;
- the £7.3m realignment scheme at A32 Shannaragh, which opened to traffic in December 2012; and
- the £17m A32 Cherrymount Link in Enniskillen, which opened in June 2013.

Together these schemes have improved the quality of the route, enhanced road safety and reduced travel times for all road users.

Development work is progressing on a number of other proposed schemes along the A32 route, including at Cornamuck and Esker Bog. Delivery of these projects will, however, be dependent upon future budget settlements.

Cycling Unit: Staff

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are plans to increase the staff complement of the departmental cycle unit.

(AQW 28218/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In order to give increased focus and priority to the needs of cyclists and to encourage greater participation in this healthy and sustainable form of transport, I established a new cycling unit early in November 2013 to ensure the effective progress of a range of cycling initiatives.

My officials are exploring how the new cycling unit can co-ordinate all cycling related matters in a coherent manner and are drawing up a work programme for the unit. The work programme will set out the staff requirements to carry out the programme.

Initially, I plan to keep the resourcing requirements of the unit under review and intend to carry out a formal review during 2014 which will consider whether it is adequately staffed or if additional resources need to be allocated to complement the new unit.

North Down: Weed Spraying

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of spraying weeds in North Down in each of the last twelve months.

(AQW 28236/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not maintain an analysis of expenditure incurred specifically on weed spraying on a Constituency area basis.

Car Parking: Limited Waiting

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 27711/11-15, if a driver parks in an area where parking is restricted to 1 hour, with no return within 2 hours, at 10:00 in the morning and leaves at 10:59 then returns at 13:00 and is observed by a traffic warden at 10:50 and 13:10, is the driver liable for a parking ticket, and if so, on what legal basis is the parking ticket issued.

(AQW 28243/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The enforcement of limited waiting is based on a Traffic Attendant's (TAs) first and subsequent observations in association with wheel valve positions. Independent Adjudicators have accepted that noting wheel valve positions is the most practical method for determining if a vehicle has moved from its original parking position.

In the situation described above, the TA will have made his/her first observation at 10:50, noted the wheel valve positions and carried on patrol. Upon returning to the vehicle which is in the same position at 13:10, the TA will note the wheel valve

positions and if they have remained in the same position then a PCN will be issued for over-staying the maximum time. If the wheel valve positions have changed, then the vehicle will have been considered as being re-parked and this will also mark the commencement of a new first observation.

Kilcooley Estate, Bangor: Fence Repairs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are plans to repair fencing along the Bangor to Belfast Road at Kilcooley Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 28274/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: You will be aware the fencing around the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor, was erected by the roads authority at the time the Belfast Road/West Circular Road, Bangor was being constructed. It was to provide accommodation works, delineation of the road boundary and to afford protection to footway users, where there is a difference in level between the footway and the adjoining property.

Responsibility for the fence would have reverted to the landowner abutting the road, namely, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, who would be best placed to advise if any repairs are planned.

North Down: Salt Bins

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how many grit boxes have been allocated in the North Down constituency, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 28285/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of salt bins provided by my Department in the North Down area, in each of the last five winter seasons, are provided in the table below:

Season	Number of Salt Bins
2009/10	Details not available
2010/11	172
2011/12	188
2012/13	184
2013/14	184

Fivemiletown: Roads Service Car Park

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the appropriateness of a publicly owned car park in Fivemiletown being used as a location to burn an effigy.

(AQW 28295/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I do not condone or support the unauthorised use of my Department's land or other property, for any purpose. The Road Traffic and Vehicles Off-Street Parking Order (NI) 2000 does not permit the lighting of fires in Roads Service car parks, however, it appears no physical damage occurred to the surface of the car park.

Roads: Surface Life Span

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Regional Development what guidance is provided by Roads Service on the life expectancy of resurfacing work carried out on A and B roads.

(AQW 28306/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department generally accepts that structural maintenance in the form of resurfacing should be carried out on all roads once every 20 to 30 years. However, actual requirements vary from location to location, dependent upon a range of factors, such as traffic volumes, openings by utilities etc. Interim treatments, such as surface dressing, are frequently used to extend the serviceable life of a road, although these are not appropriate in all circumstances.

Whilst all road surfaces have finite life spans, research and observations carried out over many years have shown that roads generally do not deteriorate in a uniform way over their serviceable life. New and properly constructed roads show little deterioration over the first half of their design life, but then deteriorate at an increased rate to a level where they are no longer fit for purpose and ultimately require reconstruction.

The most cost effective practice is to plan structural maintenance in the form of resurfacing work, towards the end of the first half of a carriageway's expected lifespan. Otherwise, additional reactive maintenance, normally in the form of patching, will become necessary.

Unfortunately, due to historical funding shortfalls, my Department has generally been unable to undertake the level of structural maintenance that has been independently assessed as necessary to maintain the integrity of the road network. Therefore, the actual lifespan for road resurfacing often far exceeds the recommended treatment frequencies.

NI Water: CEO Appointment

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the process for the appointment of a chief executive of NI Water, including whether it is a board appointment that is subject to ministerial approval; and why an advisor has been appointed, and by whom, in respect of the selection.

(AQW 28366/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: NI Water and the Department are currently working together closely to determine the way forward on this issue. A recruitment consultant had been appointed by the company to assist with the initial recruitment process, however at this stage no further advisors have been appointed.

The NI Water Chief Executive is a member of the Board of the company, a role which is subject to Ministerial approval.

Transport: Easibus

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the cost of operating the eleven Easybus services in Belfast; and (ii) the total revenue raised by the service, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 28403/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below provides (i) the operating costs and (ii) revenue in relation to Easibus services for the last five years.

Year	Operational Costs	Fare Revenue
2009	£163,354.52	£32,228.23
2010	£163,354.52	£31,770.23
2011	£163,354.52	£33,146.28
2012	£166,495.97	£31,824.66
2013*	£94,242.99	£18,215.15

* Year to date, i.e. up to end Period 7 (27.10.13)

Clogher: Car Parking

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of parking tickets issued in the vicinity of the Clogher livestock mart, Co Tyrone on each Saturday, in the last twelve months.

(AQW 28555/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The parking restrictions in place near Clogher Cattle Market are on Station Road and Tullybroom Road. The parking restriction on Saturday applies from 8.00am to 6.00pm.

In the past twelve months, a total of 65 Penalty Charge Notices have been issued in the vicinity of the market.

Translink: Christmas Contingency Plans

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he can take to tackle overcrowding on trains travelling from Ballymoney via Ballymena to Belfast, leading up to the Christmas period.

(AQW 28627/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink officials have advised me that plans have already been put in place to operate a number of additional trains and longer trains on NIR's network over weekends running up to Christmas, commencing Saturday 30 November 2013.

Having subsequently experienced unprecedented passenger numbers on Saturday 23 November, timetable plans have been further enhanced.

On the Belfast-Coleraine-Londonderry line a number of Friday evening trains and the majority of Saturday and Sunday trains will be increased from 3-car to 6-car to meet anticipated loadings. Additionally 2 spare trains and crews will be rostered to provide auxiliary services where required.

Two additional trains will operate this Saturday night, 30 November 2013, from Londonderry to Coleraine and to Belfast to facilitate those attending the Lumiere event in Londonderry.

Service enhancements will also be implemented on Friday evenings, Saturdays and Sundays over the rest of the network.

Department for Social Development

Soft Services: DSD

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 27129-11-15, to detail (i) the total number of staff currently employed in the Soft Services function; (ii) the location of each office that delivers Soft Services functions; (iii) the number of Soft Services staff in each office; and (iv) whether these staff will be redeployed within the Department after the planned outsourcing exercise.

(AQW 27641/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Soft services is a term which refers to Facilities Management activities which relate to services within a building or a business, for example security, cleaning and catering functions; as opposed to hard services which relate to services relating to the building itself; for example maintenance or engineering.

Soft services is a term which refers to Facilities Management activities which relate to services within a building or a business, for example security, cleaning and catering functions; as opposed to hard services which relate to services relating to the building itself; for example maintenance or engineering.

The soft services to be included in the current procurement exercise for the NICS Security and Ancillary Services Contract relate to messengerial services across my department. Given their nature, these functions are undertaken across the Department rather than delivered from a particular office.

The attached table contains the detailed information requested. 150 posts across 48 sites will be directly affected by the outsourcing of these functions. 138 of these posts are currently filled via temporary contracts which will expire in advance of the transfer of function to a new provider. The 12 permanent NICS staff currently in post have the option to seek

transfer to a similar role in another NICS department or to an administrative role in my department or to opt to transfer to the new contractor. Any who remain in post when the new contract becomes operational may transfer to the contractor under the terms of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE).

Business area and location	Temporary Agency Worker	Temporary NICS staff	Permanent NICS staff	Total
DSD Core, Design Centre Premises, Belfast	2		1	3
DSD Core, James House Premises, Belfast	2	4		6
DSD Core, Lighthouse Building Premises, Belfast	1	4		5
DSD Core, The Appeals Service Belfast		1		1
DSD Core, The Appeals Service Omagh	1		1	2
DSD, North West Development Office, Londonderry	1			1
SSA Antrim Jobs and Benefits Office	2	2		4
SSA Armagh Jobs and Benefits Office	1	1	1	3
SSA, Andersonstown Jobs & Benefits Office, Belfast		2		2
SSA, Ballymena Jobs and Benefits Office	1	1		2
SSA, Ballymoney Jobs and Benefits Office	1	2		3
SSA, Ballynahinch Social Security Office	2			2
SSA, Banbridge Jobs and Benefits Office	1	2		3
SSA, Bangor Social Security Office	1	1		2
SSA, BBC LPU NMT Accommodation Team, Londonderry	1	1	1	3
SSA, Benefit Training Service, Belfast		2		2
SSA, Carrickfergus Jobs and Benefits Office	2	3		5
SSA, Castle Court Services Team, Belfast	7	6		13
SSA, Coleraine Jobs and Benefits Office		2		2
SSA, Compensation Recovery Unit, Belfast	2	1		3
SSA, Cookstown Social Security Office	2			2
SSA, Corporation Street Social Security Office, Belfast		2		2

Business area and location	Temporary Agency Worker	Temporary NICS staff	Permanent NICS staff	Total
SSA, Downpatrick Social Security Office		2		2
SSA, Dungannon Jobs and Benefits Office		3		3
SSA, Enniskillen Jobs and Benefits Office	1	1	3	5
SSA, Falls Road Jobs and Benefits Office, Belfast		3		3
SSA, Foyle Jobs and Benefits Office	2	7	1	10
SSA, Holywood Road Jobs and Benefits Office, Belfast	1	2		3
SSA, Kilkeel Jobs and Benefits Office		1	1	2
SSA, Knockbreda Jobs and Benefits Office, Belfast		2		2
SSA, Larne Jobs and Benefits Office		2		2
SSA, Limavady Jobs and Benefits Office		2	1	3
SSA, Lisburn Jobs and Benefits Office	1	1		2
SSA, Lisnagelvin Jobs and Benefits Office		3		3
SSA, Lurgan Jobs and Benefits Office	1	3		4
SSA, Magherafelt Jobs and Benefits Office	1	3		4
SSA, Newcastle Social Security Office		2		2
SSA, Newry Jobs and Benefits Office		3	1	4
SSA, Newtownabbey Jobs and Benefits Office		2		2
SSA, Newtownards Social Security Office	1	1		2
SSA, Omagh Jobs and Benefits Office		3		3
SSA, Pension Centre Operations, Londonderry		4		4
SSA, Portadown Jobs and Benefits Office		3		3
SSA, Royston House Processing Centre, Belfast		2		2
SSA, Shaftesbury Square Jobs and Benefits Office, Belfast	1	1		2
SSA, Shankill Jobs and Benefits Office	1	2	1	4
SSA, Standards Assurance Unit Falls Rd		1		1
SSA, Strabane Social Security Office		2		2
Totals	40	98	12	150

Housing Executive: Internal Audit

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how many staff were in Internal Audit section of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive five years ago compared to current staffing levels; and how the resulting staff costs compare.
(AQW 28030/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that they had 14 staff in Internal Audit in 2008 and at the end of November 2013 they had 13 staff in post and a further two positions covered by Agency employees. Costs now are broadly similar to those in 2008.

Housing Executive: Community Safety and Relations

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how many Northern Ireland Housing Executive staff are engaged in community safety, community relations and good relations; and what is the annual budget for this work area.
(AQW 28031/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that there are currently twelve staff engaged in community safety, community relations and good relations and that the annual budget for this work area is £763,000.

Housing Executive: Social Housing Reform Programme

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what additional staff have been taken on by, or on behalf of, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive as part of its Social Housing Reform Programme; and at what cost.

(AQW 28032/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that a Director of Transformation has been appointed by the Strategic Investment Board to lead the Housing Executive in its change programme and to prepare for any potential changes arising from the DSD Social Housing Reform Programme. The Housing Executive has further advised that a team will be established internally to support the work of the new Director at a projected total cost of approximately £500,000 per annum, which includes the Director's salary.

Housing Executive: Applicants Registered as Homeless

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Housing Executive applicants registered as homeless in each district office.

(AQW 28143/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that at 1 November 2013 there were a total of 12,270 Full Duty applicants. The table below details this number by Housing Executive District Office: -

NIHE District Office Area	Registered as Homeless (Full Duty Applicants)
Antrim Housing	319
Armagh Housing	85
Ballycastle Housing	114
Ballymena Housing	665
Ballymoney Housing	99
Banbridge Housing	92
Bangor Housing	472
Carrickfergus Housing	280
Castlereagh Housing	302
Coleraine Housing	377
Collon Terrace Housing	670
Cookstown Housing	56
Craigavon Lurgan Housing	129
Craigavon Portadown Housing	56
Downpatrick Housing	440
Dungannon Housing	357
East Belfast Housing	331
Fermanagh Housing	104
Larne Housing	80
Limavady Housing	103
Lisburn Antrim Street Housing	534
Lisburn Dairy Farm Housing	325
Magherafelt Housing	92
Newry Housing	652
Newtownabbey 1 Housing (Rathcoole)	216
Newtownabbey 2 Housing (New Mossley)	316
Newtownards Housing	395
North Belfast Housing	921
Omagh District Housing	42

NIHE District Office Area	Registered as Homeless (Full Duty Applicants)
Shankill Housing	217
South Belfast Housing	917
Strabane Housing	92
Waterloo Place Housing	606
Waterside Housing	380
West Belfast Housing	1434
Total	12270

As regards the definition of homelessness it is important to remember the legislative context as to how it is defined. The statutory definition of homelessness and threatened homelessness is at Article 3 of the Housing (NI) Order 1988 (as amended) and reads as follows:

- 3(1) A person is homeless if he has no accommodation available for his occupation in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.
- (2) A person shall be treated as having no accommodation if there is no accommodation which he, together with any other person who normally resides with him as a member of his family or in circumstances in which it is reasonable for that person to reside with him –
- is entitled to occupy by virtue of an interest in it or by virtue of an order of a court, or
 - has an expressed or implied licence to occupy, or
 - occupies as a residence by virtue of any enactment or rule of law giving him the right to remain in occupation or restricting the right of another person to recover possession.
- (3) A person shall not be treated as having accommodation unless it is accommodation which it would be reasonable for him to continue to occupy.
- (4) Regard may be had in determining whether it would be reasonable for a person to continue to occupy accommodation, to the general circumstances prevailing in relation to housing in Northern Ireland.
- (5) A person is also homeless if he has accommodation but –
- he cannot secure entry to it, or
 - it is probable that occupation of it will lead to violence from some other person residing in it or to threats of violence from some other person residing in it and likely to carry out the threats, or
 - it consists of a movable structure, vehicle or vessel designed or adapted for human habitation and there is no place where he is entitled or permitted to place it and to reside in it.
- (6) A person is threatened with homelessness if it is likely that he will become homeless within 28 days from the day on which he gives written notice to the Executive that he is threatened with homelessness.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Housing Executive: Temporary Accommodation

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Housing Executive applicants waiting for temporary accommodation in each district office.

(AQW 28144/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that they do not maintain waiting lists for temporary accommodation. Temporary accommodation is provided in response to their statutory homelessness duties where required by homeless applicants.

Housing Executive: Temporary Accommodation

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of properties used as temporary accommodation in each Housing Executive district office.

(AQW 28147/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below provides, by Housing Executive District office, the number of properties which the Housing Executive can use in response to their homelessness duties. The Housing Executive has advised that the temporary accommodation bureau is fluid and properties can be removed and others added at any time.

NIHE District	Private Sector Accommodation Properties	Voluntary Sector Hostels	NIHE Hostels
Antrim	25		1
Armagh	5	1	
Ballycastle	14		
Ballymena	55	3	1
Ballymoney			1
Banbridge	5		
Bangor	22	2	1
Belfast East	8	1	1
Belfast North 4	12	3	2
Belfast North 6	25	5	
Belfast South	124	6	
Belfast West 1	40	2	
Belfast West 3	98	3	2
Carrickfergus		1	1
Castlereagh	38	1	
Coleraine	13	3	1
Collon Terrace	51		2
Cookstown		1	
Downpatrick	46	1	1
Dungannon	52	1	
Fermanagh	55	1	
Larne		2	
Limavady	1		
Lisburn Antrim Street	91	2	1
Lisburn Dairyfarm	45	1	1
Lurgan	8	1	
Magherafelt	4		
Newry	51	3	
Newtownabbey 2	1		1
Newtownabby 1	3		1
Newtownards	37		1
Omagh	4	1	
Portadown	15	4	
Strabane		3	
Waterloo Place	151	7	1
Waterside	19	3	1
Total	1118	62	21

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Housing Executive: Pay Increase

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development why employees of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive have not yet received the pay increase of 1 per cent that was awarded in July 2013.

(AQW 28152/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Approval for the 1% pay increase has been granted by the Finance Minister on 14 November 2013. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is making arrangements to pay the increase, backdated to April 2013, to all staff as soon as possible.

Social Security: Vehicle Purchase

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of foreign nationals who have received a cheque from a Social Security Office to purchase a vehicle, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28161/11-15)

Mr McCausland: No cheques have been issued in the last three years by Social Security Office/Jobs and Benefit Office to any benefit claimants for the purpose of purchasing a vehicle.

Social Security: Benefit Fraud

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Social Development what was the cost of welfare fraud in each of the last five years; and what these figures represent as a percentage of the total welfare bill in each year.

(AQW 28175/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The most recently published information is set out in the tables below. Table 1 shows the estimated cost of benefit fraud for benefits administered by the Social Security Agency. Table 2 shows the estimated cost of Housing Benefit fraud. The estimated levels of benefit fraud are shown in terms of losses and also expressed as a percentage of benefit expenditure.

Table 1: Social Security Benefits: - estimated cost of Benefit Fraud

	2008 £ million	2009 £ million	2010 £ million	2011 £ million	2012 £ million
Total benefit expenditure	£3789	£4176	£4352	£4456	£4681
Estimated benefit fraud	£12.6	£17.2	£20.5	£19.4	£16.9
Estimated benefit fraud %	0.3%	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%

The fraud levels reported in Table 1 in respect of Social Security Benefits are the responsibility of the Social Security Agency

Table 2: Housing Benefit: - estimated cost of Benefit Fraud

	2008 £ million	2009 £ million	2010 £ million	2011 £ million	2012 £ million
Total benefit expenditure	£467.9	£538.5	£606.8	£598.5	£653.2
Estimated benefit fraud	£3.0	£5.0	£1.7	£3.2	£10.0
Estimated benefit fraud %	0.6%	0.9%	0.3%	0.5%	1.5%

The fraud levels reported in Table 2 in respect of Housing Benefit are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Flags: DSD Buildings

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the buildings under his departmental remit on which the Union Flag has been flown in the last three years; and on which days, in each of these years, the flag has been flown.

(AQW 28223/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Arrangements for the flying of the Union flag from government buildings are contained in the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000, as amended by the Flags Regulations (NI) Amendment 2002. The designated days for hoisting the Union flag on government building are set out in the Regulations.

Annex 1 provides a list of Departmental offices where the Union flag was flown on all designated days unless otherwise noted. This information covers the financial years 2011/12 and 2012/13 and the period 1 April to 31 October 2013.

Annex 1**Departmental for Social Development Offices**

- Antrim Jobs & Benefits Office
- Armagh Jobs & Benefits Office
- Ballyclare Community Benefit Office¹
- Ballymoney Jobs & Benefits Office
- Ballynahinch Social Security Office
- Banbridge Jobs & Benefits Office
- Bangor Social Security Office
- Belfast Benefit Delivery Centre
- Carrickfergus Jobs & Benefits Office
- Coleraine Jobs & Benefits Office
- Cookstown Social Security Office
- Corporation St. Social Security Office
- Downpatrick Social Security Office
- Dungannon Jobs & Benefits Office
- Enniskillen Jobs & Benefits Office
- Foyle Jobs & Benefits Office
- Great Northern Tower
- Hollywood Rd. Jobs & Benefits Office
- James House
- Kilkeel Jobs & Benefits Office²
- Knockbreda Jobs & Benefits Office
- Larne Jobs & Benefits Office
- Limavady Jobs & Benefits Office
- Lisahally Processing Centre
- Lisburn Jobs & Benefits Office
- Lisnagelvin Jobs & Benefits Office
- Lurgan Jobs & Benefits Office
- Magherafelt Jobs & Benefits Office
- Newcastle Social Security Office
- Newtownards Social Security Office
- Omagh Jobs & Benefits Office
- Portadown Jobs & Benefits Office
- Shankill Road Jobs & Benefits Office

1 Office closed down on 31 March 2013

2 Flag was not flown on 15 August 2011 and 20 January 2012

Flags: DSD Buildings

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has personally issued a Ministerial direction that the Union Flag be flown on designated days on all buildings under his departmental remit; and if so, on what date this direction was issued. (AQW 28224/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have not issued a Ministerial direction that the Union flag be flown on designated days on all DSD buildings.

Flags: DSD Buildings

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development how the flying of the Union Flag on buildings within his departmental remit is in line with his responsibility to ensure a neutral political environment for staff working in, and customers using, these buildings.

(AQW 28225/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Arrangements for the flying of the Union flag from government buildings is contained in the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000, as amended by the Flags Regulations (NI) Amendment 2002. My Department complies with these regulations.

My Department takes its responsibilities under the NICS Dignity at Work policy seriously and fully complies with its requirements.

Flags: DSD Buildings

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development whether the practice of flying the Union Flag on buildings under his departmental control is undertaken in-house or through private contract; and if the latter, to provide a breakdown of the costs involved.

(AQW 28227/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Private contractors facilitated the flying of the Union flag at nine DSD premises during the period 1 November 2012 – 31 October 2013 at a cost of £2158.85.

Departmental staff facilitated the flying of the Union flag at 24 DSD premises.

Housing Executive: Rent and Arrears Recovery

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 27514/11-15 and given the differential in average between highest and lowest in arrears, what steps are being taken by the Housing Executive to reduce the overall arrears problem. (AQW 28229/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that they have seven specialist Accounts Units situated across Northern Ireland, who are dedicated to the collection of rent and arrears recovery. Staff in these Units apply the policy and

procedures of the organisation, which aim to ensure that prompt and appropriate action is taken when tenants fail to pay their rent and fall into arrears.

The appropriate actions taken to recover the arrears include early intervention through contact by letter and personal contact. Systems are in place to ensure that staff are prompted to take action at different levels where arrears continue to increase. At all opportunities, through various communications and personal contact, tenants are offered the services of specialist independent debt advice service, provided in partnership with Advice NI.

At all stages in the arrears recovery process, Housing Executive staff work with tenants to endeavour to come to a suitable voluntary repayment agreement. However, where arrears continue to increase and tenants continue to break agreements, it may be necessary to take legal proceedings to recover possession of the property and the debt. Repossession is taken only as an action of last resort,

Income collection and arrears recovery is a key landlord function and to ensure focus on performance, key performance indicators are reported on a monthly basis at corporate and divisional level across the Housing Executive's seven Accounts Units.

The Housing Executive is committed to continually reviewing processes to seek improvements in income collection and arrears recovery, and this involves sharing best practice and working both internally and externally with others to ensure effective service delivery.

Disability Living Allowance: Claimants

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Disability Living Allowance claimants in each Constituency.

(AQW 28237/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below shows the breakdown of Disability Living Allowance claimants by constituency at 31st May 2013.

Constituency	Number of DLA Claimants
Belfast East	9,300
Belfast North	15,340
Belfast South	8,820
Belfast West	17,800
East Antrim	7,730
East Londonderry	9,010
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	9,090
Foyle	14,230
Lagan Valley	8,120
Mid Ulster	10,700
Newry and Armagh	12,730
North Antrim	8,960
North Down	6,610
South Antrim	8,540
South Down	11,590
Strangford	7,880
Upper Bann	13,170
West Tyrone	13,300
No Constituency specified	2,110
Total	195,010

The total number in the table is slightly out due to rounding's.

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Employment and Support Allowance: Claimants

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Employment and Support Allowance claimants in each Constituency.

(AQW 28238/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The latest published statistical information for Employment and Support Allowance covers the period ending 31 May 2013.

At 31 May 2013, there were a total of 74,190 people claiming Employment and Support Allowance. The table below shows the breakdown of this total, by Constituency.

Constituency	Number of ESA Claimants
Belfast East	3,540
Belfast North	6,270
Belfast South	3,610
Belfast West	6,130
East Antrim	3,100
East Londonderry	4,390
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	3,230
Foyle	5,710
Lagan Valley	2,840
Mid Ulster	3,940
Newry and Armagh	4,730
North Antrim	4,130
North Down	2,390
South Antrim	3,120
South Down	4,190
Strangford	2,840
Upper Bann	4,980
West Tyrone	4,320
No Constituency specified	730
Total	74,190

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Housing Executive: Pay Increase

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development (i) why the 1 percent pay increase awarded to Northern Ireland Housing Executive staff in July 2013 has not been implemented; (ii) when staff will receive the pay rise; and (iii) whether it will be backdated.

(AQW 28247/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Approval for the 1% pay increase has been granted by the Finance Minister on 14 November 2013. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is making arrangements to pay the increase backdated to April 2013 to all staff as soon as possible.

Soft Services: DSD

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 26721/11-15, how many people are employed by his Department in Soft Services; and how many will be employed after the outsourcing takes place.

(AQW 28248/11-15)

Mr McCausland: 'Soft services' is a term used to refer to Facilities Management activities which relate to services within a building or a business, for example security, cleaning and catering functions; as opposed to hard services which refer to services relating to the building itself; for example maintenance or engineering.

The soft services to be included in the current procurement exercise for the NICS Security and Ancillary Services contract relate to messengerial services across my Department.

There are currently 150 messenger posts in the Department. The number of staff employed on messenger services under the outsourced contract will be a matter for the contractor to determine.

South Antrim: Housing Executive Occupancy Rates

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the occupancy rates for Northern Ireland Housing Executive houses in South Antrim, broken down by (i) Antrim; (ii) Newtownabbey 1; and (iii) Newtownabbey 2 offices.

(AQW 28256/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the current stock and the number of voids in the Housing Executive's District Office areas of Antrim; Newtownabbey 1 and Newtownabbey 2 which covers South Antrim.

District Office	Awaiting Imminent Relet	Difficult to let *	Undergoing Major repairs Improvements/ Decanting	Pending Sale	Pending Demolition	Squatters/ SPED	Total	Gross Housing stock
Antrim	6	18	19	2	1	4	50	2,364
Newtownabbey 1	1	5	84	1	13	0	104	2,160
Newtownabbey 2	7	2	4	0	0	3	16	2,134
Totals	14	25	107	3	14	7	170	6,658

* Under Rule 68 of the Housing Selection Scheme a property is deemed to be difficult to let if it meets the following criteria: -

- 1) It has been void for at least four weeks; and
- 2) No eligible Applicants have applied for it.

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Housing Executive: Rent and Arrears Recovery

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 27476/11-15, to outline the actions his Department is taking to reduce the number of Northern Ireland Housing Executive tenants that are in rent arrears.

(AQW 28264/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that they have seven specialist Accounts Units situated across Northern Ireland, who are dedicated to the collection of rent and arrears recovery. Staff in these Units apply the policy and procedures of the organisation, which aim to ensure that prompt and appropriate action is taken when tenants fail to pay their rent and fall into arrears.

The appropriate actions taken to recover the arrears include early intervention through contact by letter and personal contact. Systems are in place to ensure that staff are prompted to take action at different levels where arrears continue to increase. At all opportunities, through various communications and personal contact, tenants are offered the services of specialist independent debt advice service, provided in partnership with Advice NI.

At all stages in the arrears recovery process, Housing Executive staff work with tenants to endeavour to come to a suitable voluntary repayment agreement. However, where arrears continue to increase and tenants continue to break agreements, it may be necessary to take legal proceedings to recover possession of the property and the debt. Repossession is taken only as an action of last resort,

Income collection and arrears recovery is a key landlord function and to ensure focus on performance, key performance indicators are reported on a monthly basis at corporate and divisional level across the Housing Executive's seven Accounts Units.

The Housing Executive is committed to continually reviewing processes to seek improvements in income collection and arrears recovery, and this involves sharing best practice and working both internally and externally with others to ensure effective service delivery.

North Down: Housing Executive Gas Installations

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties in North Down that have had gas installed, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 28266/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that the number of gas installations in the last five years, through major heating schemes and Disabled Persons Adaptations heating were as follows:-

2008/09	11
2009/10	55
2010/11	186
2011/12	209
2012/13	13

North Down: Housing Executive Gas Installations

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the (i) location; and (ii) timescales of plans to install gas in Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties in North Down.

(AQW 28267/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that gas heating is being installed during 2013/14 financial year in the following estates in North Down:

Bloomfield/Rathgill	69 dwellings
Conlig	4 dwellings
Groomsport	12 dwellings
Kilcooley	88 Dwellings
Hollywood	29 dwellings
Whitehill	2 dwellings

The Housing Executive has also advised that during 2014/15 financial year a small number of gas back boiler units and 15 year old oil systems will be replaced but these have not been programmed yet.

Housing Executive: Pay Increase

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development when staff from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive will receive the one percent pay increase that was awarded in July 2013.

(AQW 28270/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Approval for the 1% pay increase has been granted by the Finance Minister on 14 November 2013. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is making arrangements to pay the increase backdated to April 2013 to all staff as soon as possible.

Citizens Advice/Advice NI

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to outline how the roles of the Citizens Advice Bureau and Advice NI differ. **(AQW 28302/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: Citizens Advice is made up of a Regional Office and 28 Citizens Advice bureaux across Northern Ireland which are affiliated to Citizens Advice NI. These local bureaux provide a holistic advice service on topics including benefits, debt, employment, consumer, money and housing issues.

Advice NI is a membership organisation that provides a range of infrastructure support and development services to independent advice and advocacy organisations across Northern Ireland. Advice NI has 70 member organisations who provide a range of generalist and specialist information, advice and advocacy services to the public in the areas of social security, debt, housing, consumer issues, employment, tax, older people, people with disabilities, ex-offenders and their families, carers and victims.

Citizens Advice NI and Advice NI regional offices both provide support services to their members including provision of accredited training courses, social policy support, ICT and communications support. To maximise potential and the skills and individual expertise of both Citizens Advice NI and Advice NI these organisations, in partnership with the Law Centre NI, have formed The Northern Ireland Advices Services Consortium. The Consortium is funded by my department to deliver a range of regional support services to frontline advice providers.

Derry: Housing Waiting List

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 27763/11-15, what actions his Department has taken to reduce the Common Waiting List in the (i) Waterloo Place; (ii) Waterside; and (iii) Collon Terrace Housing Executive District Office areas.

(AQW 28330/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that from April 2012 - March 2013, 184 units of social housing were delivered and there were 456 units of social housing under construction across their Waterloo Place, Waterside and Collon Terrace District areas. Additionally, there are 788 units in the current Social Housing Development Programme 2013/14-2015/16.

The Housing Executive carries out annual housing need assessments and each year the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) is reviewed to take account of changing trends. While the Housing Executive project over a five year period, the budget for the SHDP is set within a three year period. Housing need over and above what is listed in the SHDP is contained within the unmet housing need prospectus. The prospectus is intended to guide housing associations in their search for sites. Waterloo Place, Waterside and Collon Terrace District Office areas are among the locations identified in this prospectus.

The Housing Executive is also actively reviewing land that it owns with a view to bringing forward land with development potential into the SHDP. A Housing Association is due on site for Phase 1 of Nelson Drive (17 unit scheme in the Waterside) while another Housing Association is working Housing Executive sites at Nixon's Corner and Fahan Street (combined 20 units in Waterloo Place) and another Housing Association has submitted planning for a 17 unit scheme at Glen Court/ Cedar Court in Waterloo Place.

Additionally, the Housing Executive monitor public sector surplus land trawls to identify any opportunities for the development of social housing on surplus public sector sites. They are working with their colleagues in the City Council of Londonderry in relation to additional land at Glen Court/Cedar Court and Corrody Road, with a view to delivering additional social housing in these locations.

Village Area, Belfast: Housing Waiting List

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many people are on the housing waiting list for the Village area; and (ii) how many have been removed from the waiting list since the commencement of the decanting associated with the housing regeneration scheme.

(AQW 28336/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Waiting List for the Donegall Road Common Landlord Area is set out below.

	Singles	Couples	Families	Elderly	Total
All Applicants	116	8	71	19	214
Housing Stress	48	3	21	10	82
Allocations Year to March 2013*	22	1	14	3	40

* These figures do not include the new build properties which have been allocated since March 2013.

87 New social dwellings have been completed or are nearing completion in the Village area. To date, 73 of these have been handed over and occupied, and the remaining 14 will be occupied before Christmas 2013. All of these properties have been allocated to applicants on the Donegall Road Common Landlord Area waiting list.

This information will be reflected in the next annual waiting list analysis.

Village Area, Belfast: Regeneration

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development what efforts his Department has made to garner interest in developing private housing within the Village Regeneration area.

(AQW 28338/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Two development phases of social housing are complete or nearing completion in the Village Regeneration area, with a third phase submitted for planning approval. It is the intention to develop the remaining land for affordable private sector housing, in consultation with the local community, once planning approval for Phase 3 is granted.

A scheme has also been introduced to support owner occupiers living in redevelopment areas who wish to return to the area post regeneration. This provides the opportunity to purchase a new home with any difference in the value of their old home and new home being carried by the relevant housing association. My Department is currently developing an information leaflet for distribution by the Housing Executive and community organisations in the Village area to increase awareness of this scheme.

Village Area, Belfast: Regeneration

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any discussions his Department has had with private construction or development companies regarding the sale of land or development of private housing within the Village Regeneration area. (AQW 28339/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It was always intended that the development of social housing in the Village Regeneration area would be progressed first to meet rehousing requirements. Two development phases are complete or nearing completion with a third phase submitted for planning approval.

It is the Housing Executive's intention to develop the remaining land for affordable private sector housing and it will commence this process in consultation with the local community once planning approval for Phase 3 is granted, as this will determine the amount of land available.

At this time the Housing Executive will also continue to monitor the social waiting list demand and should this position change it will review the land use.

There have been no discussions with private construction or development companies or estate agents to date. The Housing Executive normally releases such land via an open development brief process.

Licensing (Conditions for Mixed Trading) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the timeline to amend the Licensing (Conditions for Mixed Trading) Regulations (NI) 1997. (AQW 28355/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A public consultation on "Proposed changes to the law regulating the sale and supply of alcohol in Northern Ireland" ended on 12 November 2012. The consultation sought views on a wide range of proposals, including changes to the Licensing (Conditions for Mixed Trading) Regulations (NI) 1997 which set out the conditions under which alcohol is sold in supermarkets and other premises in addition to household goods.

A large volume of responses were received which highlighted a wide range of strongly held views from a variety of key stakeholders, including the alcohol industry, health bodies and the general public.

I am currently considering the content of the final report on the outcome of the above consultation in advance of making a decision on the way forward. The challenge is finding an appropriate balance between the promotion and protection of population health while not disproportionately interfering in the market or affecting competition.

Alcohol: Online Sales

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development what measures are in place to regulate alcohol sales online. (AQW 28356/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Under the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, alcohol may only be sold by retail in Northern Ireland in certain licensed premises. Any person wishing to sell alcohol to the public for consumption off the premises, including online sales, must hold a pub or an off-sales premises licence. Any person selling alcohol online in Northern Ireland without a licence is liable to a fine of up to £5000, or imprisonment for up to 6 months, or both.

Furthermore any person who sells alcohol online in Northern Ireland to a young person under 18 is committing an offence, as is any young person under 18 who attempts to buy alcohol online.

Derry: Neighbourhood Renewal Capital Spend

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 27896/11-15, to detail the (i) capital projects financed in the (a) Triax; (b) Outer North; (c) Outer West; and (d) Waterside Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in 2012/13; and (ii) funding allocated to each project. (AQW 28391/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is provided in the attached tables.

The Member should note that the information presented for Triax Neighbourhood Renewal Area in AQW 27896/11-15 should be corrected to read as follows:

	Triax Spend	Triax Spend per Capita
Total Capital Spend	£3,693,136	£229.26
Total Spend (Revenue & Capital)	£4,833,136	£300.03

Triax Capital Spend Apr 2012 - Mar 2013

Projects	(a) TRIAX £'000
Replacement City Centre Bollards (Public Realm)	21
Castle Street (Public Realm)	65
Lighting - Water St / Whittaker St (Public Realm)	138
Foyle Expressway (Public Realm)	140
Cathedral Quarter (Public Realm)	70
Custom House Link (Public Realm)	30
Hawkin / Horace / Fountain St (Public Realm)	180
Ulster Bank building (Urban Development Grant)	476
2 Clarendon Street (Urban Development Grant)	98
9 Artillery St (Urban Development Grant)	52
Guildhall (UK City of Culture)	204
City Dressing (UK City of Culture)	145
Queens Quay (UK City of Culture)	180
Clarendon Street (UK City of Culture)	336
Patrick Street (UK City of Culture)	110
Cathedral Quarter (UK City of Culture)	50
Foyle Street at Foyleside (UK City of Culture)	35
ReStore -revitalisation projects (UK City of Culture)	50
Apprentice Boys (UK City of Culture)	89
Londonderry Theatre Trust (UK City of Culture)	60
North West Carnival (UK City of Culture)	61
Londonderry Print Workshop (UK City of Culture)	1
Nerve Centre Enhancement (UK City of Culture)	1
Aras Colmcille (UK City of Culture)	14
Creative Village Arts (UK City of Culture)	140
Context Gallery (UK City of Culture)	45
Tower Museum (UK City of Culture)	153
Creggan Enterprises (UK City of Culture)	89
Eden Place Arts Centre (UK City of Culture)	32
Inner City Trust (UK City of Culture)	247
Echo Echo (UK City of Culture)	300
Playhouse (UK City of Culture)	20
Void (UK City of Culture)	34
Gasyard (UK City of Culture)	218
Other (accounting transactions)	-191
Total Capital	3,693

Outer North Capital Spend Apr 2012 - Mar 2013

Projects	(b) Outer North £'000
Leafair Community Association (Community Arts Hub)	35
St. Columb's College (UK City of Culture)	8
Greater Shantallow (UK City of Culture)	223
Liberty (UK City of Culture)	134
Leafair Community Association (UK City of Culture)	70
Other (accounting transactions)	-1
Total Capital	469

Outer West Capital Spend from Apr 2012 - Mar 2013

Projects	(c) Outer West £'000
Brooke Park (UK City of Culture)	148
Total Capital	148

Waterside Capital Spend from Apr 2012 - Mar 2013

Projects	(d) Waterside £'000
City Council of Londonderry (Lapwing Way Park Regeneration)	160
Fountain Hill (Public Realm)	80
Duke Street (Public Realm)	234
Duke Street Railings (Public Realm)	390
Waterside Footpaths (Public Realm)	63
155 Spencer Rd (Urban Development Grant)	1
46 Spencer Rd (Urban Development Grant)	50
Churches Trust (UK City of Culture)	256
Caw Cultural Centre (UK City of Culture)	62
ReStore -revitalisation projects (UK City of Culture)	46
Total Capital	1,342

Notes:

- Figures include; Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund capital expenditure, expenditure from physical regeneration programmes (Urban Development Grants, Comprehensive Development, Environmental Improvements Schemes and Public Realm).
- Caution is advised in making comparisons of expenditure across Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. The expenditure is influenced by factors such as; the population of the area, the historic expenditure and/ or proposed capital investment in an area from other initiatives or mainstream sources, geographical location and proximity to existing services and the needs identified in Action Plans.
- Triax Neighbourhood Renewal Area encompasses the city centre and this has a significant impact on the level of expenditure reported for the area.
- 'Funding allocated' has been defined as the accrued spend based upon resource accounting principles. Figures also include monies transferred to other statutory bodies to carry out work on the Department's behalf.
- Included under the heading 'Other (accounting transactions)' are accounting adjustments arising from under-spends in previous year allocations.

Derry: Neighbourhood Renewal Revenue Spend

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 27896/11-15, to detail the (i) organisations that received revenue funding in the (a) Triax; (b) Outer North; (c) Outer West and (d) Waterside Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in 2012/13; and (ii) funding allocated to each organisation.

(AQW 28392/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

Triax Revenue Spend Apr 2012 - Mar 2013

Organisations / Projects	(a) TRIAX £'000
Bogside & Brandywell Initiative (Salaries & Running Costs)	150
Creggan Country Park Enterprises Ltd (Salaries)	63
An Gaelaras (Salaries & Running Costs)	25
Gasyard Development Trust (Salaries & Running Costs)	47
Creggan Pre-School & Training Trust (Salaries & Running Costs)	113
Bloody Sunday Trust (Salaries)	21
Dove House Community Trust (Salaries)	76
Gasyard Wall Feile (Salaries & Running Costs)	29
Old Library Trust (Salaries & Running Costs)	53
Cathedral Youth Club (Salaries & Running Costs)	36
Fountain Primary School (Transport Costs)	16
Triax Ltd (Salaries, Running & Programme Costs)	65
Dove House Community Trust (Salaries)	25
Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership (Salaries & Running Costs)	30
Cathedral Youth Club (Salaries & Running Costs)	24
Bogside & Brandywell Initiative (Salaries, Running & Programme Costs)	10
Dove House Community Trust (Salaries)	53
Other (accounting transactions)	-22
Total Revenue	814

Outer North Revenue Spend Apr 2012 - Mar 2013

Organisations / Projects	(b) Outer North £'000
Shantallow Community Residents Association (Salaries, Running & Programme Costs)	82
Galliagh Community Development Group (Salaries)	39
Liberty Consortium (Salaries & Running Costs)	33
The Resource Centre Londonderry (Salaries)	70
Resource Centre Londonderry (Salaries & Running Costs)	47
Greater Shantallow Area Partnership (Salaries & Running Costs)	85
Greater Shantallow Area Partnership (Salaries & Running Costs)	44
Greater Shantallow Community Arts (Salaries & Running Costs)	38
Greater Shantallow Area Partnership (Salaries, Running, Programme & Equipment Costs)	19
The Resource Centre Londonderry (Salaries, Running & Equipment Costs)	36
Greater Shantallow Area Partnership (Salaries, Running & Equipment Costs)	14
Galliagh Community Development Group (Salaries & Running Costs)	38

Organisations / Projects	(b) Outer North £'000
Other (accounting transactions)	-4
Total Revenue	541

Outer West Revenue Spend Apr 2012 - Mar 2013

Organisations / Projects	(c) Outer West £'000
Dunluce Family Centre Ltd (Salaries & Running Costs)	75
Ballymagroarty/Hazelbank Community Partnership (Salaries & Running Costs)	115
Rosemount & District Welfare Rights Group (Salaries & Running Costs)	88
Glen Development Initiative (Salaries & Running Costs)	84
Outer West Ltd (Salaries, Running Costs & Equipment Costs)	39
Dunluce Family Centre Ltd (Salaries, Running & Programme Costs)	30
Rosemount & District Welfare Rights Group (Salaries, Running & Programme Costs)	10
Other (accounting transactions)	-3
Total Revenue	438

Waterside Revenue Spend Apr 2012 - Mar 2013

Organisations / Projects	(d) Waterside £'000
Top of the Hill 2010 (Salaries & Running Costs)	65
Caw/Nelson Drive Action Group (Salaries & Running Costs)	59
Waterside Area Partnership (Salaries & Running Costs)	80
Curryrierin Community Association (Salaries & Running Costs)	59
Older People North West (Salaries & Running Costs)	60
Clooney Estate Residents Association (Salaries & Running Costs)	42
Irish Street Community Association (Salaries & Running Costs)	61
Hillcrest House Ltd (Salaries & Running Costs)	46
Waterside Neighbourhood Partnership (Salaries, Running Costs & Equipment Costs)	39
Clooney Estate Residents Association (Salaries & Running Costs)	22
Curryrierin Community Association (Salaries)	25
Top of the Hill 2010 (Salaries)	21
Irish Street Community Association (Salaries)	12
Curryrierin Community Association (Salaries)	26
Other (accounting transactions)	-96
Total Revenue	521

Citywide Projects Revenue Spend Apr 2012 - Mar 2013

Organisations / Projects	(a) TRIAX £'000	(b) Outer North £'000	(c) Outer West £'000	(d) Waterside £'000
Shantallow Community Residents Association (Salaries, Running & Programme Costs)	6	6	6	5

Organisations / Projects	(a) TRIAX £'000	(b) Outer North £'000	(c) Outer West £'000	(d) Waterside £'000
City Council of Londonderry (Programme Costs)	27	27	17	18
City Council of Londonderry (Salaries)	13	12	7	8
Community Restorative Justice (NI) Ltd (Salaries & Running Costs)	64	60	36	
Gingerbread NI (Salaries & Running Costs)	14	13	8	8
St Columb's Cathedral (Salaries)	10	9	5	5
An Gaeláras (Salaries & Running Costs)	12	11	6	6
Enterprise North West Ltd (Programme Costs)		9		6
The Pink Ladies Breast Cancer Support Group (Salaries, Running & Programme Costs)	7	6	4	4
Greater Shantallow Area Partnership (Salaries, Running & Equipment Costs)	2	2	1	1
Triax Ltd (Salaries, Running, Programme Costs & Professional Fees)	82	76	45	46
Western Health & Social Care Trust (Salaries, Programme, Monitoring, Evaluation & Administration Costs)	43	40	33	32
DSD Housing Division - NIHE (Salaries)	4	4	2	2
Londonderry Citizens Advice Bureau (Salaries & Running Costs)	42	39	23	23
Total Revenue	326	314	193	164

Notes

- Caution is advised in making comparisons of expenditure across Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. The expenditure is influenced by factors such as; the population of the area, the historic expenditure, the revenue investment in an area from other initiatives or mainstream sources, and the needs identified in Action Plans.
- 'Funding allocated' has been defined as the accrued spend based upon resource accounting principles. Figures also include monies transferred to other statutory bodies to carry out work on the Department's behalf.
- Included under the heading 'Other (accounting transactions)' are accounting adjustments arising from under-pends in previous year allocations. For funding to bodies spread across a number of Neighbourhood Renewal Areas, allocations have been made based upon the population as a proportion of the total area population.

Village Area, Belfast: Regeneration

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development whether he would consider further development of social housing in the Village Regeneration area, should private interest not be forthcoming.

(AQW 28400/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Based on current waiting lists, a third planned phase comprising 27 social dwellings will meet future social housing need in the Village area. Any additional social housing provision will require a review of the original Economic Appraisal as this will deviate significantly from the original approval.

It is the Housing Executive's intention to develop the remaining land for affordable private sector housing, and it will commence this process in consultation with the local community once planning approval is granted for Phase 3 the Housing Executive will also continue to monitor the social waiting list demand and should this position change it will review the land use.

North Down: Social Housing Newbuilds

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many new build homes are planned by housing associations in the North Down constituency.

(AQW 28428/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Table attached details the social housing new builds that are currently programmed to be delivered within North Down over the period 2013/14 – 2015/16.

The Social Housing Development Programme is managed on the basis of a three year rolling programme. The Housing Executive is currently in the process of formulating the new draft Social Housing Development Programme for the period 2014/15 – 2016/17 which, subject to my approval, will be published on the Housing Executive's website early in 2014.

Year	Association	Scheme/ Location	Units	Needs Group
2013/14	Clanmil	117A Donaghadee Road/ 7 Summerhill Park, Bangor	10	General Needs
	Clanmil	South Circular Road, Extension, Bangor	4	General Needs
	Helm Housing	22 Croft Road, Holywood	20	General Needs
	Oaklee	Clifton Special Care School, Old Belfast Road, Bangor	106	General Needs
	Trinity	78 Rathgael Road, Bangor	6	General Needs
		Total	146	
2014/15	Ark	North Down Older People, Ravara, Bangor	24	Elderly Housing with Care
	Clanmil	Corner of Faulkner Road/Clandeboyne Road, Bangor	54	General Needs
	Habinteg	34-36 Bangor Road, Holywood	8	General Needs
	NIHE	Rathgill Greenfield, Phase 1 Site A	100	General Needs
	NIHE	Rathgill, Phase 2, Bangor	50	General Needs
	Triangle	PSNI Site, 5 Millisle Road, Donaghadee	10	General Needs
	Trinity	West Church, Bangor	18	General Needs
		Total	264	
2015/16	Apex Housing	Killoughey Road, Donaghadee	24	General Needs
	Apex Housing	Moss Road, Millisle, Phase 2	3	General Needs
	Fold	122-124 High Street, Holywood	18	General Needs
	Fold	High Bangor Road, Donaghadee	12	General Needs
	Fold	Rathgael Road/ Clandeboyne Road, Bangor	30	General Needs
	NIHE	Kilclief Gardens, Bangor	13	General Needs
		Total	100	

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Civil Service: DSD Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 28013/11-15, whether the information requested is available by constituency; and if so, to provide the information in this format.

(AQW 28435/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information in response to AQW 28013/11-15 on the number of Civil Service posts that existed in the Department for Social Development on 1 January 2012 and 1 January 2013 at (i) Administrative Assistant; (ii) Administrative Officer; (iii) Executive Officer 2; (iv) Executive Officer 1; (v) Staff Officer; (vi) Deputy Principal; (vii) Grade 7; and (viii) Grade 6 levels, is not available by constituency.

Employment and Support Allowance: Medical Reports

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development what guidance has been issued to medical staff, including GPs and consultants, on what is required when completing reports on, or letters in support of, patients who are applying for Employment and Support Allowance, in particular the information that decision makers depend upon when considering such applications; and if there has been no such guidance, will he undertake to issue guidance.

(AQW 28438/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department published detailed guidance for healthcare professions titled “ESA Medical Reports – A guide to Completion,” at the time of the introduction of Employment Support Allowance in 2008.

The guidance provides comprehensive advice to medical professionals in relation to the provision of medical evidence requested for Employment and Support Allowance claimants and the completion of the ESA113 medical questionnaire. The guidance is maintained on the Departments internet site at:

<http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/ssa/ssa-projects-and-initiatives/ssani-esa/esa-healthcare-professionals.htm>

South Belfast: Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes benefitted from the Warm Homes Grant Scheme in the South Belfast constituency, in the last 12 months.

(AQW 28449/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive does not collect statistical information at constituency level. The parliamentary constituency of South Belfast falls within the district council areas of Belfast and Castlereagh. In the 12 months from November 2012 to October 2013, a total of 1,088 homes in those 2 council areas received help under the Warm Homes Scheme.

Mortgage Debt Advice Service

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people that have contacted the Mortgage Debt Advice Service in each month since it was established.

(AQW 28458/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The number of people who have contacted the Mortgage Debt Advice Service in each month since the establishment of the formal contract in May 2011 are as follows:

May 2011	72
June 2011	100
July 2011	73
August 2011	121
September 2011	169
October 2011	159
November 2011	123
December 2011	24
January 2012	135
February 2012	168
March 2012	98
April 2012	42
May 2012	149
June 2012	116
July 2012	134
August 2012	160
September 2012	159
October 2012	151
November 2012	164
December 2012	97
January 2013	186
February 2013	197
March 2013	140
April 2013	156
May 2013	148

June 2013	83
July 2013	148
August 2013	118
September 2013	145
October 2013	150

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development, given comments made by a departmental official at a recent meeting of the Committee for Social Development where it was indicated that the aim of the scheme was to make boiler replacement available to more households to stop them from entering fuel poverty and that the most vulnerable people should be picked up through the scheme, whether replacement boilers are available through the Warm Homes Scheme.

(AQW 28459/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Officials from the Department briefed the Social Development Committee on 14 November about the Boiler Replacement Scheme. Officials pointed out that the Boiler Replacement Scheme was targeted at low income households and was both an energy efficiency improvement scheme and a fuel poverty prevention scheme. Officials commented that households on lowest incomes could have old and inefficient boilers replaced through the Warm Homes Scheme and this was a reference to the Affordable Warmth Pilot which replaces boilers free of charge for households who receive Pension Credit.

Derry: Social Housing Development Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development whether all the new build schemes programmed for 2013/16 in the Derry District Housing Plan 2013 have planning permission.

(AQW 28466/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Housing Development Programme is subject to change. From the point of publication of the Derry District Housing Plan in June 2013 there have been some amendments to the proposed 3 year SHDP for the Derry City Council Area. The table attached shows the schemes currently proposed for delivery from 2013/14 to 2015/16 including their planning status. The delivery mechanism for a number of the supported housing schemes in later years has yet to be determined. Therefore it is possible that they may not require planning permission.

Year	Association	Location	Units	Scheme Type	Need Group	Planning Status
2013/14	Apex Housing	Londonderry Rehabs	3	RH	General Needs	Planning not required
	Apex Housing	Cedar Villa Replacement, Derry	17	NB	Mental Health	Planning application lodged
	Apex Housing	Old School Lane, Derry	12	NB	General Needs	Planning approved
	Apex Housing	ESP Acquisitions, Phase 20D, Londonderry	4	ES	General Needs	Planning not required
	Apex Housing	ESP Acquisitions, Phase 20F, Londonderry	5	ES	General Needs	Planning not required
	Clanmil	26 Beechwood Avenue, Londonderry	12	NB	General Needs	Application yet to be made
	Clanmil	Foxhill, Londonderry	17	NB	General Needs	Application yet to be made
	Oaklee	Braehead Road, Nixons Corner	8	NB	General Needs	Planning application lodged

Year	Association	Location	Units	Scheme Type	Need Group	Planning Status
2013/14	Oaklee	Fahan Street, Londonderry	11	NB	General Needs	Application yet to be made
	Trinity	Nelson Drive, Phase 1, Derry	17	NB	General Needs/Fit Elderly	Planning approved
		Total	106			
2014/15	Apex Housing	St Peter's School, Creggan	127	NB	General Needs	Planning application lodged
	Apex Housing	EMI, Foyleville, Londonderry	0	NB	Elderly Housing With Care	Application yet to be made
	Apex Housing	Glen Court/Cedar Court, Londonderry	55	NB	General Needs/ Learning Disabilities	Application yet to be made
	Habinteg	Foyle Road, Londonderry	25	NB	General Needs	Planning application lodged
	Habinteg	Springtown, Phase 6	15	NB	General Needs	Application yet to be made
	NIHE	Ballyarnett Travellers, Derry	6	NB	Travellers	Application yet to be made
	NIHE	Nelson Drive, Phase 2, Derry	20	NB	General Needs	Application yet to be made
	Oaklee	Londonderry Addictions	20	NB	Drug or Alcohol Related Problems	Application yet to be made
		Total	268			
2015/16	Habinteg	Main Street, Claudy	10	NB	General Needs	Application yet to be made
	NIHE	Corrody Road, Phase 1 (T)	30	NB	General Needs	Application yet to be made
	Selection	Western Trust LD	20	NB	Learning Disabilities	Application yet to be made
	Selection	Western Trust MH	20	NB	Mental Health	Application yet to be made
		Total	80			

Derry: Social Housing Development Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development whether finance is in place to construct all of the new build schemes programmed for 2013/16 as detailed in the Derry District Housing Plan 2013.

(AQW 28467/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The budget for the Social Housing Development Programme has been agreed for the financial years 2013/14 to 2015/16. It should however be noted that the gross programme is subject to change, e.g. in the event that planning permission is not secured for proposed sites in the programme.

Welfare Reform Bill: Ministerial Meetings

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQO 5055/11-15, to detail which parties he met with on each of the dates listed; and the attendees at each meeting.

(AQW 28505/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The political parties I and my officials met with and the attendees at each meeting are set out below:

Date	Meeting
28/01/13	Executive Sub Committee on Welfare Reform: Attendees: Sammy Wilson MLA, Jennifer McCann MLA, Stephen Farry MLA, Danny Kennedy MLA
25/02/13	Executive Sub Committee on Welfare Reform: Attendees: Jennifer McCann MLA, Stephen Farry MLA, Danny Kennedy MLA, Edwin Poots MLA
19/03/13	Meeting with Mike Nesbitt MLA and Michael Copeland MLA to discuss Welfare Reform
22/04/13	Meeting with Sammy Wilson MLA to discuss implications for NIHE/HMRC NI staff re Universal Credit
03/06/13	Meeting with Margaret Ritchie MP to discuss Housing Benefit Reform
02/07/13	Meeting with Alex Maskey MLA, Paula Bradley MLA and Michael Copeland MLA to discuss the Launch of Discussion Paper: Welfare Reform and the Value of Independent Advice

The membership of Executive Sub Committee on Welfare Reform is represented by the following political parties: DUP, SDLP, Sinn Feinn, UUP, Alliance.

Housing Executive: Valuations

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development what method is being used to calculate the value of the homes to be transferred to housing associations; and to detail the extent to which overhanging debt payments or gap funding is required.

(AQW 28526/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) use Land and Property Services to provide valuations (both market value and Existing Use Value Social Housing) for dwellings, and any associated land, in a stock transfer scheme.

In relation to debt, it is not possible to determine separately what portion of the current NIHE loan debt balance relates specifically to the properties included in the potential transfers. In the past, the NIHE raised loans on an annual basis and not for specific new build and improvement schemes. The debt, if any, will remain with the Housing Executive. The arrangement for rent arrears for any property in the stock transfer programme is that all arrears due to the Housing Executive from the tenants at the date of transfer will remain with the Housing Executive.

In terms of the economic viability of the transfer proposals, each scheme will be subject to an economic and technical appraisal and approval process to demonstrate that the proposed refurbishments deliver the necessary value for money.

Street Drinking: Prosecutions

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in each council area have been prosecuted for street drinking in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28701/11-15)

Mr McCausland: While my Department is responsible for confirming bye laws made by councils prohibiting the consumption of intoxicating liquor in designated streets and public places, prosecution of offenders is a matter for the relevant district council. My Department does not hold records of prosecutions; the relevant information may be obtained from individual councils.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Parliament Buildings: DEC Rating

Mr Flanagan asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) the Energy Performance Certificate rating of Parliament Buildings; and (ii) what action is being taken to improve this rating.

(AQW 28309/11-15)

Mr Weir: The Display Energy Certificate (DEC) rating for Parliament Buildings is currently D, which is a creditable achievement for a building of its nature. I have enclosed a copy of the certificate for your information.

Our Environmental Services Manager works closely with the DFP's Energy Unit in order to ensure that all reasonable steps are being taken to maintain and improve the energy performance of the building.

In addition, the forthcoming major roof refurbishment project will include a range of measures that will positively impact on the building's energy performance, including replacement of the roof insulation and replacing and/ or refurbishing and upgrading all of the existing roof mounted mechanical and electrical service plant.

I would be happy to provide you with further specific detail, particularly with regard to the roof project proposals, if you feel that would be helpful.

Parliament Buildings: Sustainable/Renewable Energy

Mr Flanagan asked the Assembly Commission what consideration has been given to heating Parliament Buildings using sustainable and renewable forms of energy.

(AQW 28310/11-15)

Mr Weir: The Assembly Commission will shortly undertake a major project to repair the roof of Parliament Buildings during which all the existing roof mounted mechanical and electrical services will be replaced and/ or refurbished. The opportunity has been taken to consider appropriate sustainable and renewable initiatives to be incorporated in the project and these will include solar thermal tubes and photovoltaic panels.

The boiler plant in Parliament Buildings has been converted to dual fuel and natural gas is used to supply the majority of heat to the building, with oil as a back-up. The remainder of the heating in the building is by means of electrical convection heaters.

While it is not currently possible to obtain natural gas from a sustainable source, the electricity supply to the Stormont Estate does come from 100% renewable sources.

Consideration was previously given to the installation of a biomass boiler but difficulties with storage and supply for the boilers meant that this was not deemed to be a viable option.

I hope this provides you with the information that you require. Please do not hesitate to ask if you require anything further.

Northern Ireland Assembly: Private Member's Bills

Mr Flanagan asked the Assembly Commission to detail the annual budget allocated for drafting legislation for Private Members' Bills from 2007/08 to 2015/16.

(AQW 28311/11-15)

Mrs Cochrane: The table below sets out the actual annual expenditure incurred on drafting Private Members' Bills in each of the financial years from 2007/08 to 2012/13. It also includes the budget allocation that was made available in each financial year. These costs are those associated with drafting the legislation only. It may be helpful to note that they do not include any costs incurred by Members' on consultation, etc. as these can be claimed from a Members' Office Cost Expenditure and, as such, are not recorded in a consolidated manner.

Financial Year	Actual Expenditure	Budget
2007/08	£0	£30,000
2008/09	£0	£40,000
2009/10	£20,874	£45,000
2010/11	£84,923	£84,923
2011/12	£2,925	£20,000
2012/13	£25,620	£33,850
2013/14 (to date)	£3,565	£80,000
2014/15	-	£70,000

The excess of Budget above Actual expenditure for 2007/08 to 2013/14 was largely re-allocated to other expenditure categories through the in-year monitoring processes. The figures for 2010/11 include £39,301.10 towards drafting a Committee Bill - Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Bill. Similarly, the 2012-13 figures include £1,536 towards drafter's advice in relation to a proposed Ombudsman Bill being developed by OFMdFM Committee. The budgetary allocations listed for the current and next financial years are intended to include expenditure on Committee Bills as well as PMBs also. The budget for 2014/15 corresponds to the final year of the Spending Review 2010 and the figure for 2015/16 has not yet been finalised.

The work undertaken in drafting Private Members' Bills is cyclical in nature and as such should be considered in the context of a full Assembly mandate rather than the amount of expenditure incurred in each financial year. The majority of Private Members' Bills are drafted in the second half of an Assembly mandate, due to the time required to draft proposals, conduct research and consult fully.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 6 December 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Family Support and Social Enterprise Incubation Hubs/Nurture Units

Mr Flanagan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the location of the (i) ten family support hubs; (ii) ten social enterprise incubation hubs; and (iii) twenty new and seven existing children's nurture units contained within their announcement of 10 October 2012; and who will be taking the lead in each of these projects.

(AQW 15374/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety is taking forward the establishment of ten Family Support Hubs. These Hubs are a multi-agency network of statutory, community and voluntary organisations providing co-ordinated referral services for families needing early intervention services.

Two Family Support Hubs have been established in the Northern Trust area in Coleraine/Ballymoney/Moyle and Magherafelt/Cookstown and work is ongoing to bring a third Hub online in Newtownabbey. Seven Family Support Hubs are planned for the Belfast Trust area and work is ongoing to identify potential locations. The initial four Hubs will be located in North, South, East and West Belfast.

The Department for Social Development along with the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment have been tasked with taking forward the development of ten Social Enterprise Incubation Hubs. An additional eleventh Hub has recently been identified for establishment under the Programme. These Hubs will tackle the lack of local employment in areas of multiple deprivation by encouraging social enterprise business start-up within local communities. The locations of the eleven Hubs are as follows:

- Belfast North
- Belfast South
- Belfast East
- Belfast West
- Enniskillen
- Downpatrick
- Lurgan
- Strabane
- Derry~Londonderry
- Ballymena
- Lisburn

The Department of Education and the Department for Social Development have been working together to establish an additional twenty Nurture Units within Primary School settings. These units will help address barriers to learning among children arising from social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The Primary Schools in which the new Nurture Units are located are as follows:

Blackmountain	Belfast
Currie	Belfast
Edenbrooke	Belfast
St Patrick's	Belfast*
Harmony	Belfast
Holy Trinity	Belfast
John Paul 11	Belfast**
St Clare's	Belfast
St Joseph's	Belfast
St Malachy's	Belfast

Taughmonagh	Belfast
Fountain	Derry/Londonderry
St Oliver Plunkett, Strathfoyle	Derry/Londonderry
St Paul's, Slievemore	Derry/Londonderry
Tullygally	Craigavon
St Malachy's	Newry
Ballycraigy	Antrim
Hapurs Hill	Coleraine
Harryville	Ballymena
West Winds	Newtownards

* formerly Edmund Rice Primary School. Now amalgamated with Star of the Sea Primary School

** formerly St Aidan's Primary. Now amalgamated with St Bernadette's Girls' Primary School

In October 2012, the Department for Social Development was supporting seven Nurture Units through its Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund, as follows:

Rathcoole	Newtownabbey
Kilcooley	Bangor
Ballysally	Coleraine
Good Shepherd	Belfast
St Kieran's	Belfast
St Colmcille's	Downpatrick
Tullycarnet	Belfast

Following an announcement by the Education Minister, John O'Dowd, on 14 February 2013 that nurture unit provision in these seven schools would continue until at least the 2014/15 school year, the provision of financial support to four of the Nurture Units has since transferred to DE (Rathcoole, Ballysally, Good Shepherd and St Kieran's). DSD currently continues to fund the remaining three Nurture Units. Nurture Unit provision was also extended under the Education Minister's announcement to an additional three Primary Schools, making a total of thirty Nurture Units operating in schools. The three additional Primary Schools are:

St Luke's	Belfast
St Brigid's	Derry~Londonderry
Holy Family	Derry~Londonderry

The aim under the Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes is to have interventions across all Social Investment Zones.

City of Culture 2013: Legacy

Mr Durkan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 24074/11-15, which projects their Department intends to fund in order to continue the legacy of the City of Culture; and whether they have considered assisting with the continuation of the Venue pavilion as part of any commitment made by their Department after 2013.

(AQW 24897/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The purpose of the Venue's temporary pavilion, duration of operation and removal remains the responsibility of DSD as stated in AQW 24074/11-15. Continuance or otherwise of the Venue is not part of any commitment made by our Department. An announcement was made by the Minister for Social Development on 24 October 2013, advising that due to the lack of public sector interest in retaining the Venue, the structure would be dismantled, as planned in early January 2014.

The Council is in the process of developing the North West Regional Sports Campus in St Columb's Park which will have a capacity of 2,000 people depending on layout, and will have performance capability.

In supporting the development of the One Plan, our Department is providing support through Ilex the Urban Regeneration Company to develop out the Ebrington site to house creative industry organisations and provide an open air performance venue. In addition, Ilex will monitor and report on the economic and social impact of the City of Culture programme and events to stimulate an increase in tourism, growth in the economy of the region and deliver a lasting legacy to the city.

Together: Building a United Community: Urban Villages

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the process and criteria for identifying the four urban villages identified for action within Together: Building a United Community.

(AQW 27771/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The process and criteria for identifying the four urban villages will consider a number of options. These could include, but would by no means be limited to, community readiness; area need; geographical spread; and overall cost considerations.

We are currently considering areas that could potentially become sites for the urban villages and will make decisions and announcements on those in the near future.

Shackleton Barracks: Development

Mr G Robinson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the potential uses for the former Shackleton Ministry of Defence base at Ballykelly.

(AQO 5012/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM is planning to carry out a 'soft market testing' exercise for the Shackleton Barracks site. Preparatory work is underway; the exercise started on 18 November and is due to be completed by the end of January.

When the exercise is completed and the level of interest is determined, a decision will be taken as to the potential suitability to go forward with development plans and to invite and assess applications for the future development of these areas of the Shackleton site.

Ballykelly: Expressions of Interest

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps will be taken to ensure all interested parties, including adjacent landowners, local residents and community groups are kept fully informed of any potential sale of the former army barracks at Ballykelly.

(AQW 28443/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On Monday 11 November each of the MLAs from the East Londonderry constituency and Limavady councillors were sent a letter notifying them of the 'expressions of interest' process.

All parties who have expressed an interest in the Shackleton Barracks site to OFMDFM or BTW Shiells, including local farmers and residents groups, were sent details of the 'expressions of interest' process on Thursday 14 November. In addition, local residents living adjacent to the site received a hand delivered letter, also on 14 November.

Officials have, on an ongoing, basis, met with local landowners, the local council and community groups to inform them of the position in relation to the site and to listen to their views. It would be our intention to continue with this dialogue as we move forward.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that £41.5m of the funding allocated for the Social Investment Fund has been returned to the centre, whether the Fund still has a budget of £80m.

(AQW 28470/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Whilst funding has been re-profiled, £80 million remains ring fenced for the Social Investment Fund and delivery of strategic area plans.

Victims and Survivors: Monitoring/Evaluation

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they aim to achieve a full record of victims and survivors and a comprehensive audit of their needs.

(AQW 28636/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our aim is to provide the best service possible to victims and survivors. To help achieve that aim there must be a way to assess how effective the assistance is and how well the system is working. The monitoring and evaluation system is currently being reviewed to ensure that it meets the requirements necessary to achieve this goal.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Attwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the necessity for the allocation of Social Investment Fund monies to be governed, in law and in practice, by the principle of need.

(AQO 5103/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have now agreed the allocations for the nine Social Investment Fund Zones. In coming to this decision we considered both the scale of need and identification of need in each zone, under the objectives of the Fund using the original set of criteria below as a guide:

- Areas within the top 10% most deprived Super Output Areas on the multiple Deprivation Measure 2010.
- Areas within the top 20% most deprived Super Output Areas on the key domains of income, employment, education and health.
- Areas which can provide independently verified and robust evidence of objective need linked to the 4 strategic objectives of SIF.

The approach we have set out will focus the funds we have available to meet the objectives of this Programme and clearly target the major areas of deprivation that exist in each of the zones, as well as ensuring that funding is disbursed across all areas of deprivation, regardless of scale and not just those with concentrated urban problems. This approach means that we will tackle deprivation in the areas of high and durable need but also allows us to reach into smaller, less publicised areas of smaller numerical significance but of equal importance to the people who live there.

Steering Groups have now been informed of allocation decisions.

Minority Ethnic Development Fund

Ms Lo asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a timetable for the implementation and delivery of the proposed crisis fund element of the Minority Ethnic Development Fund.
(AQW 28714/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Options are currently being considered with a view to having the crisis fund up and running in the 2014-15 financial year.

Victims and Survivors: Truth and Justice

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to victims and survivors, for their assessment of the importance of truth and justice in bringing a sense of closure for each person involved.
(AQO 5107/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is important that all Victims and Survivors feel that their need for truth and justice surrounding past events are being met and we all have a role in ensuring appropriate mechanisms are in place to help them find closure.

We look forward to the outcome of the current work of the Panel of Parties.

Over the coming months a working group, drawn from the Victims and Survivors Forum, will discuss their shared experience of dealing with and acknowledging the past. The group will also look at ways of building for the future and have already liaised with people who work directly and indirectly with victims to address complex issues. The group will ultimately provide the Commission for Victims and Survivors with an advice paper on its findings.

The process to gain closure will be different for each person but our overarching aim is to help everyone achieve this and move forward to a positive future.

North Belfast: Strategic Good Relations Programme

Mr G Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on Good Relations funding for North Belfast.
(AQO 5111/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In this financial year 2013-14, £770,000 has been allocated through the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations programme to twelve contract holders for the delivery of a range of Good Relations programmes across North Belfast.

The aim of the programme is to tackle issues that hinder the development of good community relations across adjoining interfaces. The programme is based on three core themes: citizenship, leadership and good relations. Programme delivery is through clusters of organisations and partnerships but with sufficient flexibility to take account of the needs of individual areas within the community.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Rural Development Programme: Farm Diversification

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the areas open for funding grants from applicants for farm diversification under the current Rural Development Programme.
(AQW 28393/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I interpret your question to relate to currently open calls for applications under measure 3.1. At this point in time no calls are open.

Tree Disease: ObservaTREE

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether Forest Service will work in partnership with the Woodland Trust in support of the 'Observatree' initiative.

(AQW 28406/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is committed to tackling tree disease through a collaborative approach with a wide range of interests including the general public, farmers, landowners, environmental organisations and the industry in identifying and reporting possible tree disease symptoms.

The ObservaTREE partnership includes British government bodies (Fera, Forestry Commission) the Woodland Trust and National Trust and aims to develop a Britain and north of Ireland integrated tree health warning system as a web based tree reporting tool. This is a welcome initiative and, as my priority is to address tree and plant health issues on an all-Ireland basis, DARD officials will continue to work co-operatively with the Woodland Trust and other partners, and with colleagues in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, to explore a range of web based tree health reporting mechanisms which have application on an all-Ireland basis.

Farming: Extreme Weather

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what advice and support she is offering farmers in advance of any extreme weather.

(AQW 28407/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The extremes of weather experienced over the last two years and the extended period of unfavourable growing and grazing weather last spring caused considerable difficulties for our farmers.

In order to address any potential difficulties facing livestock farmers in the forthcoming winter I established the Fodder Taskforce. This Taskforce, made up of representatives of farmers and associated industries along with DARD and AFBI, identified a wide range of issues and produced an action plan to mitigate their effects. A major concern of the industry was the availability and quality of fodder available. CAFRE and AFBI launched a comprehensive programme of training, open days, technical bulletins and press articles to help farmers ensure that they would have sufficient fodder for the winter period. The support focussed on grassland management, forage assessment, feeding efficiency and budgeting. Along with the improvement in weather over the summer, fodder stocks on most farms have recovered to levels which are in balance with projected requirements with some showing a surplus, and our assessment is that farmers are now well prepared for the winter.

There are a number of other steps farmers can take in preparation for extreme winter weather. Many of these steps are normal management practice for the vast majority of farmers but I am encouraging all farmers to reassess them now before the winter sets in. I welcome the NI Water "Beat the Freeze Campaign" and the specific advice for farmers on the NI Water website. I fully endorse their advice on preventing problems from occurring or minimising their impact if they do happen.

Farmers should also keep a close check on weather forecasts and make appropriate adjustments where severe weather is expected. Measures such as moving stock to less exposed fields and securing vulnerable buildings are basic steps that would help lessen the effects of severe weather. Farmers are also advised to check and consider the insurance cover they have for livestock and farm buildings.

CAFRE will reinforce advice to farmers on preparing for winter in the coming weeks through press articles and face to face contact.

Agri-food: Promotion of Local Products

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what work her Department is doing to encourage consumers to buy local produce.

(AQW 28408/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's Regional Food Programme enables organisations to promote quality local products produced by our farmers and processors. This allows them to send out a strong message to consumers that local food is good quality and wholesome. The 2013/14 programme offered a total of £230k supporting a variety of sectors throughout the North.

Financial support is provided in the following four key areas – regional fairs and shows, information programmes, award ceremonies, seminars and workshops.

My Department also administers the EU's Protected Food Name Scheme on behalf of applicants. This provides a system for the protection of food names on a geographical or traditional basis and can be used as a valuable promotional tool to take advantage of increased consumer interest in regional food. The quality mark symbol increases consumer awareness of the product provenance. To date three local products have achieved this status and work is on-going to attract more products to this scheme.

The Agri-Food Strategy Board identified high quality traceability systems as a major marketing tool for local produce on export markets. My Department's Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS) system for recording cattle

movements, disease and post mortem data provides consumers with assurance of the integrity of locally produced products through extensive traceability controls

My Department also works closely with Invest NI, which has the lead responsibility for marketing our food to export markets, through a range of supply chain and market intelligence initiatives to support local producers.

Equality Impact Assessments/Consultations: DARD

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department has spent on Equality Impact Assessments and consultations over the last three years.

(AQW 28493/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Section 75 statutory duties make equality and good relations central to the whole range of public policy decision-making. Therefore the cost of carrying out Equality Impact Assessments and consultations are not maintained separately and cannot readily be disaggregated.

Autism: DARD Buildings

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what provision is made within her departmental buildings to receive visitors diagnosed with autism and to cater for their needs.

(AQW 28512/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There are arrangements in place throughout the buildings occupied by my Department to treat visitors with courtesy and respect and provide assistance to those who may have specific requirements. Visitors with specific needs, such as autism, can notify staff of any additional help or support they may require, either in advance or on arrival, and every effort will be made to ensure that this is provided.

Staff involved in Reception/Customer service duties have been trained to deal with disability issues and my Department has also contributed to the development of the cross Departmental Autism Strategy and Action Plan, which contains proposals for autism awareness training for frontline staff in the NICS.

Single Farm Payment: Felling/River Fencing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the steps being taken to encourage farmers to preserve trees on their land in response to the incentive which exists for farmers to enhance their single farm payment by felling trees and increasing the amount of grazable land; and (ii) what action can be taken to encourage farmers to fence off rivers from grazing cattle, as this could lead to a reduction in their single farm payments.

(AQW 28524/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) My Department does not offer an incentive to farmers to enhance their Single Farm Payment (SFP) by felling trees. Trees are an important landscape feature and are protected by the Department's Cross-Compliance requirements. All farmers claiming direct payments such as SFP must meet the cross-compliance requirements, which protect hedgerow trees and broadleaf woodland in semi-natural habitats by limiting their removal and destruction. For example, a farmer must not cut hedgerow trees inside the hedge cutting closed period (1 March to 31 August) and if hedgerow trees are removed on rotation for timber, young saplings must be left to grow as replacements. A breach of these requirements may result in a penalty being applied to the farmer's SFP and any other area-based subsidy claims made in that year. There are exceptions to these requirements which allows for tree cutting where health and safety is an issue, for example at a roadside, unless a Tree Preservation Order is in place. Trees protected under a Tree Preservation Order must not be damaged.
- (ii) DARD encourages farmers to fence off rivers from grazing cattle through the delivery of Agri-environment (AE) Schemes. These are voluntary schemes which offer funding in return for positive habitat management such as riparian zones, which are the marginal areas along a waterway. These may be planted with native trees and when managed appropriately on farmland, riparian zones can act as a buffer, reducing pollution of water bodies by fertilisers and pesticides. Currently there are approximately 200 hectares of land under riparian zone management in Agri-environment Schemes.

DARD's rules on land eligibility for SFP do not include permanently fenced narrow strips (less than 0.1ha) along a riparian zone. However, if the fenced strip of grassland is greater than 0.1 ha in size and clear evidence exists of active management through 'eligible agricultural activity' for the full calendar year, it may still qualify for SFP. Agricultural activity is defined as the production, rearing or growing of agricultural products including harvesting, milking, breeding animals and keeping animals for farming purposes, or maintaining the land in good agricultural and environmental condition.

There is also an exception to the SFP eligibility rules, where land that was eligible and on which SFP was paid in the 2008 scheme year, may be planted in trees under an EU Agri-environment Scheme or an EU Forestry Scheme after 2008 remain and still eligible for SFP.

Bovine Animals: Ownership

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the average number of times a bovine animal changes ownership.

(AQW 28541/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS) does not record who owns a bovine animal. It does record who is the keeper of a bovine animal and in the vast majority of cases the keeper of a bovine animal is also likely to be the owner. APHIS records the movement history between keepers of individually identified cattle.

My Department has calculated that the number of changes of keepership over the average lifetime of a bovine animal is 2.3.

Lough Neagh Working Group: Report

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the report produced by the Lough Neagh Working Group.

(AQW 28618/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In December last year, I shared the Inter-Departmental Working Group report with Ministerial colleagues whose officials had contributed to the report through membership of the Working Group.

Since then, the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure has been considering the value of additional research to complement the findings in the report. I intend to meet Minister Ní Chuilín shortly to discuss the findings of this work and how they might add value to the Inter Departmental Working Group Report. I will then assess next steps, including putting recommendations to the Executive as soon as possible, probably in the early part of next year.

Lough Neagh Working Group: Research

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any additional consultancy work is being carried out following the production of the report by the Lough Neagh Working Group to further consider the issue of future ownership; and if so, to detail the (i) rationale; (ii) cost; (iii) who is carrying out this additional work; and (iv) when work will conclude.

(AQW 28619/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In December last year I shared the Inter-Departmental Working Group report with Ministerial colleagues and since then the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure has been considering the value of additional research commissioned by her Department to complement the findings in the report. (There has been no further consultancy work commissioned by my Department)

I intend to meet Minister Ní Chuilín shortly to discuss the findings of this work and how they might add value to the Inter Departmental Working Group Report. I will then assess next steps, including putting recommendations to the Executive as soon as possible probably in the early part of next year.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Exploris

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, following the decision by Ards Borough Council to defer the closure of Exploris for two months, to outline her Department's plans to assist in securing the facilities.

(AQW 26534/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I recognise that Exploris is an important tourism, educational and environmental resource Centre.

While my Department has no remit for aquariums or the marine I have asked the Council for a copy of its business plan on the future management and funding of Exploris.

I hope that a sustainable future can be secured for the Centre.

Lough Neagh Working Group: Report

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the findings of the Lough Neagh Working Group; (ii) when she received the findings; and (iii) what action has been taken in relation to these findings.

(AQW 27885/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL was a member of the Interdepartmental Lough Neagh Working Group led by DARD and contributed to the fact finding and analysis undertaken by group members.

A draft report was received on 11 December 2012.

DCAL Officials will shortly meet with the DARD Minister to take matters forward.

Kevin Lynch's Hurling Club, Dungiven: Grants

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the grants, or other assistance, that have been offered to the Kevin Lynch Hurling Club, Dungiven in the last two years.

(AQW 27890/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department, has not offered any grants or other assistance to Kevin Lynch Hurling Club in the last two years.

Equality Impact Assessments/Consultations: DCAL

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much her Department has spent on Equality Impact Assessments and consultations over the last three years.

(AQW 28495/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have provided at Annex A the details of spend on Equality Impact Assessments and consultations over the last three years.

In relation to the cost of each consultation it is not possible to disaggregate staff costs from the overall policy development process.

Annex A

DCAL Equality Impact Assessments & Consultations April 2010 to date

Date of consultation (i.e. month)	Name of consultation	Cost
June 2010	Museums Policy for Northern Ireland	£1209.62
June 2010	DCAL Disability Action Plan 2010-2013	£1612.98
December 2010	DCAL Draft Budget Consultation 2011-2015	Nil
January 2011	Cultural Awareness Strategy	£1970
February 2011	Revised Equality Scheme	£1636.84
May 2012	Salmon Conservation Measures in DCAL Jurisdiction.	£1,143.40
July 2012	Draft Strategy for Protecting and Enhancing the Development of the Irish Language	£18,910
July 2012	Draft Strategy for Ulster Scots Language, Heritage and Culture	£1,694
November 2012	Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) – Ulster Scots Academy development and research strategy and associated grant scheme	£1,595
August 2013	Consultation on DCAL Draft Disability Action Plan 2013-15 & Five year Review	£1840.08
Aug/Sept 2013	Salmon Conservation Regulations Consultation	£1,931.53

Lough Neagh/River Bann: Fish Stocks

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether an assessment has been carried out to ascertain whether commercial fishing in Lough Neagh and the River Bann has had a detrimental impact on fish stock.

(AQW 28521/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The long term sustainability of the Lough Neagh fishery is a key priority for my Department and to that end I have commissioned the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to undertake research throughout the catchment. AFBI's work provides an important scientific basis to my Department's role in the conservation and protection of the fishery and will inform the development of the Lough Neagh Fishery Management Plan.

Conservation measures are in place in respect of eels and further measures are proposed in respect of salmon.

There is currently no scientific evidence on other fish stocks that would confirm that any factors, including commercial fishing, are having a detrimental effect on stocks.

AFBI is currently carrying out a research project on Lough Neagh that will provide information on the location and population levels of all fish species in the Lough. AFBI is also undertaking genetic studies on brown trout stocks in the Lough Neagh catchment. These reports will be completed by the end of this year.

In addition, AFBI is undertaking important research on stock status of salmon and brown trout across the DCAL area, which includes the Lough Neagh catchment.

The habitat in and around Lough Neagh is important and DCAL is undertaking habitat survey work on the tributaries flowing into Lough Neagh. This will identify areas where poor habitat is limiting fish stock levels and where further remedial work is required. DCAL officials will meet with stakeholders in considering how best to progress this work.

With the exception of the eel weirs at Toome and Portna, commercial fishing is not permitted in the River Bann.

Foras na Gaeilge: Religious Monitoring

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of staff employed by Foras na Gaeilge, broken down by religion.

(AQW 28566/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The total number of staff employed by Foras na Gaeilge is 57 of which 8 are based in the North.

There is no legal requirement to monitor the religion of the 49 staff working in the South.

There are only 8 staff based in the North and as this is less than 10 staff it would not be appropriate to provide a breakdown by religion in this case.

Ulster-Scots Academy: Ministerial Advisory Group

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the linguistic qualifications of the people advising the Ministerial Advisory Group on the Ulster-Scots Academy.

(AQW 28584/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) – Ulster Scots Academy has appointed a panel of expert language advisors on 1 November 2013 following a public appointment process. This panel, called the Advisory Panel on Ulster-Scots Orthography, will assist the (MAG) – Ulster Scots Academy and DCAL by advising on the next steps of the implementation and development of an orthography for Ulster-Scots, considering the responses to the Ulster-Scots “Spelling and Pronunciation Guide” and “Word Glossary”, collaborating with key stakeholders in the development of knowledge and skills concerning Ulster-Scots orthography and helping to give effect to Ulster-Scots policy objectives in the public interest.

Applicants were required to meet the following criteria;

Essential Criteria

- The applicant must be professionally qualified in a relevant discipline or have made an outstanding contribution to research or practice in one or more of the required subject areas. The subject areas are linguistics, orthography, phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicology and editorial expertise.
- Demonstrable interests in orthography including;
 - Practical interests/experience in issues of orthography such as devising or drawing up an orthography for a language and/or editorial work on dictionaries;

OR

 - Theoretical interests in issues of orthography such as a linguistic background of orthographic systems, an interest in phonology, morphology, syntax and/or an interest in lexicology.
- Evidence of working in the arena of publications, including evidence of publications in relevant areas of lexicography, dialectology and linguistics.

Desirable Criteria

- Evidence of academic contributions, including publications, conference contributions and editorial work relating to Ulster Scots.

The selection panel recommended the appointment of three members to the Advisory Panel on Ulster-Scots Orthography based on a structured assessment against the selection criteria. However as the selection criteria did not require applicants to list their formal linguistic qualifications, DCAL does not hold complete lists of this information for the successful applicants.

North/South Language Body: Accounts

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the discussions she has held with her counterpart in the Republic of Ireland in relation to the publication of the accounts of the North South Language body within one year from when they are agreed.

(AQW 28585/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The North South Language Body is made up of the Ulster Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge. It is a statutory requirement that the annual reports and accounts of both the Ulster Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge are consolidated and published together as the North South Language Body annual reports and accounts.

As the original accounts for 2000 were not signed off and laid in the respective Houses until 2005, this created a backlog in clearing and approving the subsequent annual accounts, as both the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Comptroller and Auditor General will only audit accounts in chronological order.

At each NSMC language meeting, Ministers have emphasised the need to clear the outstanding accounts as soon as practicable and have instructed both Agencies to make this one of their strategic priorities. This was reiterated by Ministers at the NSMC Language Body meetings held on 6 March, 19 June and 20 November 2013.

To date the accounts for the Language Body have been laid and published up to 2010. It is anticipated that the 2011 accounts will be laid by the end of 2013 and the 2012 accounts will be laid by Spring 2014. From then on, the Language Body will be up to date and in a position to meet its annual statutory requirement. NSMC Ministers will continue to monitor the situation at each meeting.

Autism: DCAL Buildings

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what provision is made within his departmental buildings to receive visitors diagnosed with autism; and to cater for their needs.

(AQW 28631/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: All visitors to DCAL offices are treated with courtesy and respect by staff. Where possible, visitor details are notified to building reception staff in advance of their arrival. For visitors with disabilities, including those with autism spectrum conditions, every effort is made to ensure help and support is provided to them during their visit. DCAL staff especially those who are responsible for front-line services are encouraged to avail of Disability Awareness training, which includes information on autism.

Sport: Student Funding

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding opportunities that are available to students studying Sports related subjects at university level that need to complete coaching courses in areas such as athletics, gymnastics, swimming and games.

(AQW 28677/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for third level education, including funding opportunities, rests with the Department of Employment and Learning.

However, Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department, has advised that a number of district councils offer grant assistance to individuals or local clubs to support the completion of coach education courses. Therefore, any student wishing to complete a coach education course may wish to contact their local councils' Sports Development Unit for further information on what grant assistance that may be available to them.

City of Culture 2013: Legacy

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the consultations that have been held, and with whom, in advance of the announcement of the three year legacy plan for Londonderry following the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 28717/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My officials have been working closely with stakeholders in the North West to prepare outline plans which I announced on 20th November.

My officials will continue to work with these stakeholders as these plans are finalised.

City of Culture 2013: Legacy

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the estimated salary and other overhead costs associated with the company she announced would take forward the three year legacy plan for Londonderry following the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 28718/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My officials are currently preparing detailed plans and costings for the establishment of the City of Culture Legacy body and DCAL North West Office during this financial year. Further details will be released in due course.

Angling: Strategic Review

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the outcomes of the strategic review of angling.

(AQW 28785/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: A strategic review of angling has been taken forward by Sport NI and advised by a Steering Group comprising the Loughs Agency, NITB, DCAL, Ulster Angling Federation, Irish Federation of Sea Anglers Ulster Provincial Council and the Ulster Coarse Fishing Federation.

The review provides information on the scale and characteristics of angling and the potential that exists to promote the development of the sport, to contribute to the economy through angling tourism and to promote equality, tackle poverty and social exclusion.

The review looks at the current challenges and opportunities and the role that the various Departments, agencies and angling interests can play in realising these benefits.

I welcome the completion of the review and the Steering Group's work in informing the development of a new angling strategy for the North of Ireland.

It is proposed that the review will be published in early 2014.

Irish: DCAL Languages and Waterways Ireland Branch

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many fluent Irish speakers are employed in her Department's Language Diversity Unit.

(AQW 28929/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Within Languages and Waterways Ireland Branch there are two fluent Irish speakers who work on the DCAL Líofoa Campaign.

Department of Education

St Columbanus' College, Bangor: Newbuild

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Education for an update on the timescale and issues inhibiting the delivery of a new school building for St Columbanus' College, Bangor.

(AQW 27816/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): No timescale has been set for the delivery of a new school building for St Columbanus' College, Bangor. My officials have been in liaison with the Trustees, CCMS and representatives from the school to discuss the current accommodation needs at the school. Full clarity is required on the final pattern of Maintained provision for the Bangor and Ards Peninsula area, including how St Columbanus' College would contribute to a pattern of viable and sustainable education provision in the area going forward, before any decision on a new build could be made.

I will continue to examine the case for capital investment across the estate and, subject to the structure of maintained provision in the area being clear, any proposal for St Columbanus will be considered alongside other priorities as part of any future capital announcement.

Education Bill: School Ethos

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how the Education Bill will make it easier for a school to transform its ethos.[R]

(AQW 27878/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The ethos of a school is not something that is prescribed in law. However, in developing the Education Bill, the representatives of many schools expressed a strong desire to reflect the ethos of their schools formally in the governance and employment arrangements. The Education Bill will provide a means to do so in the form of Schemes of Management and Employment Schemes. These will be prepared by schools, and submitted to the Education and Skills Authority for approval. A school wishing to change its ethos is free to do so at any time, and can have this recognised formally by submitting revised schemes.

Teachers: Flu Vaccinations

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education, in the event of a flu pandemic, (i) what provisions are in place to help school teachers avoid the flu; (ii) what consideration has been given to providing standardised vaccinations for teachers to mitigate the disproportionate cost of providing substitute staff to cover periods of illness, and the resultant disruption to pupils; and (iii) what level of consultation he has had with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety regarding these issues.

(AQW 28197/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has no specific role in the avoidance of illness (including pandemic or seasonal flu) for teachers as a group. These are considerations for the employing authorities, i.e. the Education and Library Boards and Council for Catholic Maintained Schools. These organisations are represented on the Flu Vaccine Co-ordinating Group, which meets annually.

In the event of a flu pandemic, the department would work closely with colleagues in DHSSPS to ensure any and all measures are put in place subject to advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) guidance.

Bloomfield Road, Bangor: Football Pitches

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to outline any plans he has for the football pitches, owned by the Department, on the Bloomfield Road, Bangor.

(AQW 28425/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The football pitches on the Bloomfield Road, Bangor are the responsibility of the South Eastern Education and Library Board. At present the SEELB lease the pitches to North Down Borough Council. This lease has recently expired and the Council has asked the Board to enter into a new 5 year lease. The SEELB is currently progressing this request, with the terms being set by Land and Property Services.

Kilcooley Estate, Bangor: Educational Needs

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to address educational needs in the Kilcooley Housing Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 28430/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since coming to office I have continued to implement policies to raise standards and tackle underachievement. These policies are realising improvements at Key Stage 2, GCSE and A Level. However, we still have room for improvement, in particular to close the gap in achievement that exists between our most and least disadvantaged young people.

Alongside the implementation of these policies, additional funding is being made available to specific programmes to target educational underachievement in areas of social deprivation such as the Kilcooley housing estate.

These programmes include the Delivering Social Change (DSC) literacy and numeracy project to employ additional teachers, a community education initiatives programme and a literacy and numeracy Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Key stage 2/3 project. Kilcooley Primary School (PS) is entitled to an additional 0.2 of a full-time equivalent teacher under the DE expansion of the DSC literacy and numeracy and all the non-selective post-primary schools in the North Down area are entitled to additional teaching support through the DSC project. The SEELB Curriculum and Advisory Support Service (CASS) works with Kilcooley PS to support the development, implementation and evaluation of the school's post-inspection action plan including support for numeracy linked to the DSC project.

Kilcooley PS currently qualifies for the funding through the Department's Extended Schools programme and has been allocated funding totalling £23,237 in 2013/14.

The SEELB's Education Welfare Service (EWS), which has a satellite office based in Kilcooley PS, will continue to provide a support service to children, families and schools in Kilcooley and across North Down. This includes working with local schools to improve levels of attendance. In addition, the SEELB Youth Service works with a range of youth providers in the area to provide educational services for the young people.

Kilcooley PS also provides a nurture room to support a child's social, emotional and behavioural development and to help the child become more receptive to learning and be reintegrated with their mainstream class. DSD currently funds this resource however this funding is due to end in March 2015. DE has committed to sustain the nurture provision to June 2015 to enable Kilcooley and other primary schools with established nurture units to be involved in research which will inform DE's future policy position on this form of intervention.

A SEELB CASS officer works with the local community on Neighbourhood Renewal projects. Recent projects in Kilcooley PS include the provision of additional IT equipment for the school and the provision of additional support to pupils transferring from the primary school into Year 8 at local post-primary schools.

Parents have an important role to play in supporting their child's education. I launched the Education Works campaign in September 2012. The campaign is intended to impact upon attitudes within the home by providing parents with consistent, authoritative information on the importance of education and the steps they can take to support their child in achieving good educational outcomes. Year 2 of the campaign launched on 1 October continues the focus of Year 1 on children in Early Years, Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 with a widening of the target audience to those with an influence on parents, for example grandparent, the wider family circle and those with influence in local communities.

As regards area planning for primary schools, the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) draft Area Plan for Primary Schools (March 2013) states that a local area solution is to be explored for Kilcooley PS and that a number of issues in the school and/or local area have been identified and need to be addressed.

- Pattern of increasing enrolment
- Number of unfilled places in the local area

The SEELB published a Development Proposal (DP) on 12 September 2013 proposing the decrease of Kilcooley Primary School's approved enrolment number from 567 to 205 and admissions number from 81 to 29 pupils with effect from 31 August 2014 or as soon as possible thereafter. The consultation period for the DP ended on 12 November 2013. Officials are currently considering the proposal.

Common Funding Scheme: Consultation

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, in the light of the concern over the proposals for the revision of the Common Funding Formula, whether he will consult on any revised proposals.

(AQW 28478/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The consultation exercise on the reform of the Common Funding Scheme which ran for nearly four months ended on 25 October 2013 and received almost 15,000 responses.

A full analysis of all responses is currently underway and until this process has been completed I will not be making any decisions on the way forward.

Towerview Primary School, Bangor: 3G Pitch

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education what support his Department will provide towards a proposed new 3G sports facility at Towerview Primary School, Bangor.

(AQW 28551/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As Towerview Primary School is a controlled primary school in Bangor, the South Eastern Education & Library Board (SEELB) is responsible for capital works at the school. There is no provision in the Department of Education (DE) Building Handbook for any pitches (including 3G pitches) at primary schools. The school is, however, welcome to make a minor works application to the SEELB for a 3G sports facility.

I understand that the minor works application process is currently open for 2014/15, with a closing date for applications of 13 December 2013. The SEELB has advised that all applications received by the closing date will be assessed and prioritised using the published criteria in the 'General Guidelines on Applications for Minor Capital Projects' document.

Common Funding Scheme: Educational Outcomes

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education how changing the Common Funding Formula will improve overall educational outcomes. **(AQW 28589/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: Since coming to office I have continued to implement policies to raise standards and tackle educational underachievement. These policies are realising improvements for all our young people as evidenced by improved outcomes at Key Stage 2, GCSE and A Level. However, despite these improvements, there still remains too large a gap in performance between pupils from socially disadvantaged areas and those from more affluent areas. We need to tackle this inequality.

Local and international studies show that socio-economic background is the single greatest determining factor on a child's educational outcome. Our GCSE outcomes show that pupils entitled to free school meals are twice as likely to leave school not having achieved at least five GCSEs A*-C (inc equivalents) including GCSEs in English and mathematics.

The PAC report on Improving Literacy and Numeracy Achievement in Schools stated that the large gap in attainment between pupils who receive Free School Meals and those who don't cannot continue. As a result, they strongly recommended that DE undertake a full review of the current Common Funding Scheme (CFS). I couldn't agree more which is why I commissioned an independent review of the CFS in June 2012, the findings of which I received in a report in January 2013.

The review of the CFS is designed to tackle this inequality and to ensure that the pupils who stand to benefit most from education receive the support they need. My proposed change to direct additional funding towards targeting social need is fully supportive of the Programme for Government's target to focus on growing the economy and tackling disadvantage.

It should be remembered that investment in schools is on the way up rather than on the way down. The aggregated schools' budget is set to increase by £15.8m next year, and I have already announced my intention to inject an additional £30m into it over the next two years, targeted at social deprivation.

City of Culture 2013: DE Tenders/Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) tenders awarded; and (ii) funding provided to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 28673/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education has not awarded any tenders or provided any funding to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013.

Universities: Pupil Grants for Open Days

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education whether any grants are available for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend university open days outside Northern Ireland.

(AQW 28684/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department does not make grants available to pupils to attend university open days outside or inside the north of Ireland. Under the Local Management of Schools arrangements, every grant-aided school receives a fully delegated budget. It is for the Board of Governors of each school to determine expenditure priorities incurred in the delivery of the curriculum for all pupils enrolled in their school.

South Antrim: Preschool Availability

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Education how many free pre-school funded places there are in South Antrim.

(AQW 28710/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Under the 2011-15 Programme for Government my Department is committed to ensuring that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it.

For admission to pre-school in September 2013, 99.8% of children, whose parents engaged with the pre-school admissions process to the end, obtained a funded pre-school place. This included all of the parents in the South Antrim constituency .

In the 2013/14 school year there are 1198 funded pre-school places in the South Antrim constituency, broken down as follows:

Statutory nursery school / nursery unit	(full time)	260
Statutory nursery school / nursery unit	(part time)	468
Voluntary / Private Pre-School Settings		470

There are still a number of places available in voluntary/private settings if additional children in their final pre-school year apply.

Officials will continue to work with colleagues in the North Eastern Education and Library Board to maintain sufficient provision in the area.

Children: Failure to Send to School

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education how many cases of parents or guardians failing to send children to school in the 2012/13 academic year were prosecuted in each Education and Library Board.

(AQW 28720/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that the number of cases of parents or guardians failing to send children to school in the 2012/13 academic year that were prosecuted in each ELB is as set out below.

ELB	Number of Prosecutions
Belfast ELB	*
Western ELB	33
North-Eastern ELB	68
South-Eastern ELB	*
Southern ELB	67

* denotes fewer than 5 cases, figure suppressed to avoid possible identification of individuals

Kilrea/Garvagh: Youth Clubs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail his Department's spend on (i) youth club; and (ii) after school club activities in (a) Kilrea; and (b) Garvagh, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28741/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: During the last three years the Department of Education, via the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB), has supported one controlled youth club and five voluntary youth clubs in Garvagh and two voluntary youth clubs in Kilrea.

In 2011/2012 NEELB allocated a total of £1,380 to youth clubs in Kilrea and £20,700 to youth clubs in Garvagh. In 2012/2013 the total figure for Kilrea was £3,292 and for Garvagh was £20,365. So far in 2013/2014 £1,080 and £4,463 has been provided to clubs in Kilrea and Garvagh respectively.

DE does not have responsibility for funding after school activities which operate outside the Extended Schools (ES) programme. Information is therefore only held on after school activities which are funded through the ES programme.

Schools qualify for ES funding if they have 51% or more pupils drawn from an area of social disadvantage or 37% or more of pupils with a Free School Meal Entitlement. During the past 3 years no school located in either the Kilrea or Garvagh Ward areas have met the ES eligibility criteria.

Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance: Funding

Mr Lytle asked the Minister of Education whether he is considering ring fencing funding for Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance in schools.

(AQW 28753/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I consider high quality, timely Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) to be essential for all our young people, particularly in the fast changing world in which we live and work.

That is why it is part of the statutory curriculum, with an explicit minimum content at Key Stage 3 and 4. That is why I welcome both the planned review of my department's joint strategy with the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) "Preparing for Success", and the DEL Committee's Inquiry on the structure and effectiveness of CEIAG here.

Under the Local Management of Schools arrangements, every grant-aided school receives a fully delegated budget. It is for the Board of Governors of each school to determine expenditure priorities, including staffing and other day-to-day running costs, incurred in the delivery of the curriculum for all pupils enrolled in their school. Ring fenced funding is time bound and, in the challenging context of restricted budgets, not necessarily realistic. This is the context in which future resources must be considered and this will be done as part of the Preparing for Success review process.

Holocaust: Teaching

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what plans there are to increase teaching about the Holocaust.
(AQW 28776/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education has no plans to increase teaching about the Holocaust. There are opportunities for schools to explore the Holocaust and related issues through a number of Areas of Learning within the revised curriculum.

The revised curriculum provides teachers with greater flexibility over how they deliver the curriculum to meet pupils' needs. The minimum content to be taught in each Area of Learning is set out in legislation. In line with the flexibility provided by the revised curriculum, the specifics of what is taught, and how it is taught under each Area of Learning, is a matter for each teacher and school.

Shared Education: Funding

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of Shared Education funding in (i) 2009; (ii) 2010; (iii) 2011; (iv) 2012; and (v) 2013; and to list the recipient organisations. [R]
(AQW 28806/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Recent surveys indicate that over 70 % of respondents reported that they had been involved in shared education with another school during the last academic year. Survey results indicate that this work has been funded through department funding streams (such as CRED and Entitlement Framework funding), external funding sources or from within their own school budget.

In addition, the Extended School policy encourages schools to partner or cluster with one or more other schools for the delivery of extended services.

'Transformation: An Information Pack for Schools'

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 27877/11-15, whether he intends to update the Department's Transformation – An Information Pack for Schools document. [R]
(AQW 28807/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The current version of the "Transformation- An Information Pack for Schools" document continues to provide accurate and relevant information and advice, and sets out the necessary procedures and requirements for schools to achieve successful transformation to integrated status.

The Department is keen to ensure that the information provided, in terms of details of the integrated schools, reflects the current position and I have asked the appropriate Team within my Department to ensure that the details are fully up-to-date.

Sex Offenders: Accommodation Location

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what steps his Department can take to help ensure that people charged and convicted of serious sexual offences are not housed in close proximity to schools.
(AQW 28817/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The management of the risk to children and young people presented by a person convicted of a serious sexual offence is dealt with under the Public Protection Arrangements for NI (PPANI). I am advised that risk management plans are individually tailored to address the specific risks identified on a case by case basis. All relevant factors, including location, are taken into consideration in the approval of suitable accommodation. Where it is assessed that the accommodation best suited to managing the risk presented by an individual happens to be in the vicinity of a school, the school authorities are advised by the local Public Protection Unit and given advice on how pupils, parents and staff might be informed about keeping safe.

After-school Clubs: Funding

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Education what funding is available for after-schools clubs.
(AQW 28858/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department (DE) does not have responsibility for funding after school clubs which operate outside the Extended Schools (ES) programme.

The ES programme provides additional funding, £12m in 2013/14, for those schools serving the most disadvantaged areas to provide for a wide range of services and activities outside of the normal school day. Where assessed as needed by schools, this may include after school clubs.

Education Bill: School Ethos

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education how the Education Bill will facilitate school transformation from one ethos type to another. (AQW 28874/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 27878/11-15 tabled by Steven Agnew and published in the Official Report on 2 December 2013.

Holocaust Educational Trust

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether he received any requests to meet with the Holocaust Educational Trust; and if so, to provide further details. (AQW 28928/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have not received any direct requests to meet with the Holocaust Education Trust (HET).

In January 2013, Sammy Wilson MP MLA asked me to consider a funding request for the "Lessons from Auschwitz" Project, and at that time suggested a meeting with the Holocaust Educational Trust's Head of Public Affairs. My reply to him explained that the Department of Education no longer receives an allocation from the Treasury to fund participation in the project by schools in the north of Ireland. In view of the lack of funding for the project I did not consider it appropriate to engage in a meeting with the Trust.

The curriculum in place in all schools in the north of Ireland provides opportunities to explore the Holocaust and related issues. In line with the flexibility provided by the revised curriculum, it is a matter for individual schools to decide on their involvement with outside organisations, such as the Holocaust Educational Trust, to assist in their delivery of the curriculum.

Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance: Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what funding is provided to schools for careers education information, advice and guidance. (AQW 28938/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) arrangements, the Board of Governors of every school receives a delegated budget to enable them to deliver all aspects of the curriculum including careers provision. It is a matter for each school to determine how best to utilise their delegated funding in delivering their statutory requirements, which includes careers. Careers teachers also work in partnership with the Department for Employment and Learning's careers advisers to offer advice to young people.

In addition to funding under LMS, the Department provides funding to the Education & Library Boards for specific programmes that are a priority for the economy such as the STEM Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) programme. The focus of this programme is to promote and raise pupils' awareness and aspirations in STEM-related careers through focused projects, activities and resources, capacity development, and embedding STEM CEIAG within the school curriculum.

Schools: Boards of Governors

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education when the re-constituted Boards of Governors will be brought into operation. (AQW 28967/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I expect the reconstituted Boards of Governors to be in operation in the 2014/15 school year.

Schools: Mentoring of Head Teachers

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education what opportunities exist for the mentoring or coaching of new head teachers by current head teachers, or those who have recently retired. (AQW 28980/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As a key element of Every School a Good School, the Regional Training Unit (RTU) has revised its induction programme for newly appointed head teachers to include mentoring for each of them by a high quality serving head teacher, ie one of RTU's Leadership Development Partners (LDPs). All LDPs will within the last three years have received an inspection grade in relation to their leadership of either outstanding or very good and, they are trained and accredited by RTU as formal mentor/coaches using the European Charter on Coaching Competences framework.

LDPs undertake a number of roles for the RTU including mentoring of newly appointed head teachers and trainee head teachers, (ie those undertaking the Professional Qualification for Headship), and mentoring of head teachers working in challenging circumstances, as part of the RTU's support for schools in formal intervention.

Recently retired teachers are not used by the RTU in the delivery of its induction programme for newly appointed head teachers.

Omagh High School: Lisanelly

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Education to give an indication of a time frame when Omagh High School will receive its new build on the Lisanelly campus site.

(AQO 5135/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Based on the latest procurement timetable for the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus Phase 2 of construction, which includes Omagh High School, is due to commence in the summer of 2016 and complete in 2019.

There are five schools and a number of shared education centres included in Phase 2 of the project and at this stage of planning no decision has yet been taken on the order in which they will be constructed.

I am meeting with Omagh High School in the coming weeks and will discuss the plans for Lisanelly with the School's representatives at that time.

Common Funding Scheme: Reform

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Education whether he has included the £15.8 million rise in school budgets, and the premises factor, into any new revised Common Funding Formula Scheme.

(AQO 5136/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My proposals on the reform of the Common Funding Scheme have been the subject of a widespread consultation. I will not be making any final decisions until a full analysis of all consultation responses has been carried out.

Indeed I would be criticised if I made these decisions in advance of considering the nearly 15,000 responses my Department received.

I cannot therefore say what the actual detail of the revised Common Funding Scheme and Formula will be but, as I have already stated on several occasions, they will reflect the increased £15.8m added to the ASB for next year.

Actual allocations for the 2014/15 financial year will be notified to schools early in 2014.

Schools: Examination Proposals in England

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the proposed changes to the English proposals to measure schools' examination results by awarding each grade achieved an individual score, rather than assessments based on the number of pupils achieving A*-C grades.

(AQO 5137/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are fundamental differences between the approach taken here and the approach taken in England given that we do not use league tables.

The Department for Education in England is at liberty to take forward changes to its performance measures and there may be lessons that we can draw upon from its research.

The English proposals will continue to be based on exam results and we have a number of questions about the impact the proposed measures may have on decisions relating to pupils' subject choices and examination entries.

I agree that the range and nature of accountability measures should be under continual review.

My Department is currently considering a number of options in this area and it is likely that I will wish to consult on these in due course.

Common Funding Scheme: Implementation of Changes

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Education when he will announce his final decision on changes to the Common Funding Formula.

(AQO 5138/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The changes to the Common Funding Scheme (CFS) for schools remain on track for delivery for the new financial year.

The consultation generated huge interest, with nearly 15,000 responses received by the closing date.

It has always been my intention to implement the changes in time for next year and I want to ensure that everyone's views are taken into account before I make my final decisions on the way forward.

Indeed the Education Committee has asked for an assurance that the outcome of the CFS review is not pre-determined and that I will take account of the views of all those who responded to the consultation before coming to my final decisions.

I can give an assurance today that I intend to do just that.

I intend to announce my final decisions and advise schools early in 2014. Crucially, I want to ensure there is no unnecessary delay in reforming the CFS and in directing additional support to those schools that need it most.

A Levels: National Standards

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education what steps he is taking to ensure local students seeking places in English universities are not disadvantaged by his decision not to conform to national standards in A-level specifications.

(AQO 5139/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Education is a devolved matter and this Assembly expects me to take decisions that are in the best interests of pupils here. I am determined to ensure that our A level standards are maintained through challenging content and robust assessment.

In terms of the steps I am taking, Michael Gove announced a number of changes to A levels in England. In advance of making any changes here, I wanted to consult widely with stakeholders, particularly with school leaders.

Following consultation, I concluded that it is appropriate that A levels should continue to include both an AS and A2 element.

It came through strongly in consultation that the AS level has an important role in providing a bridge between GCSE and A level.

I also decided that the number of assessment opportunities should be reduced. This was again supported in consultation because schools indicated that mid-year assessments disrupted teaching and learning.

These decisions will ensure that our A Level qualifications remain fit for purpose and are equitable, robust and portable, and, most importantly, credible in the eyes of Higher Education Institutions and employers.

Following the current consultation on the Fundamental Review of GCSEs and A levels, I will make further decisions on the way forward in the New Year.

Education: Optimising Achievement

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education, in light of the pilot of the Regional Training Unit's Emotional Health and Well Being project last year, whether his Department has any plans to make this available to all schools.

(AQO 5140/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has no immediate plans to make the 'Optimising Achievement' materials developed by Barnardo's and the Regional Training Unit available to all schools.

The report on the evaluation of a pilot training course about the 'Optimising Achievement' materials has only recently been forwarded to my Department. The report reflects the feedback from staff from 15 schools immediately following the 3 days of training completed in early March. Until I have had an opportunity to consider the evaluation report and its wider implications, there will be no decision on the place which the 'Optimising Achievement' approach to pupils' emotional health and wellbeing has within the Department's overall 'iMatter' Programme.

The priority at this time within the 'iMatter' Programme is the development and piloting of an audit tool for use by schools to assess their current approach to promoting pupils' emotional health and wellbeing and how that might be improved.

Youth Services: Investment

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Education to outline the steps he has taken to invest in local Youth Services in the last 12 months.

(AQO 5141/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: During 2013-2014, I invested £33 million in frontline youth services to support a wide range of generic and targeted youth activities. This included an additional £4million to support those within disadvantaged areas who may be at greater risk of social exclusion, marginalisation or isolation because they experience a combination of barriers to learning.

Capital budget allocations for 2013-14 were £6.4 million across the youth sector, which included commencement of a new £1.4 million stand alone controlled youth facility in Belvoir.

As you will be aware, I recently announced a further £12 million capital investment in the voluntary youth sector for 53 projects.

Rathfriland High School: Newbuild

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has any plans for a new build for Rathfriland High School.

(AQO 5142/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At present, there are no specific plans for a new build project for Rathfriland High School.

The Southern Education & Library Board remains committed to supporting Rathfriland High School, as confirmed in the SELB Post Primary Area Plan, however the school is not its highest priority for new capital build at this time.

While the school will be disappointed that it has not been included in my capital investment announcements, this in no way implies that it will not be considered for funding at a later stage within the on-going area planning process. The reality is that many schools are in need of investment and competing for limited capital funding.

I will continue to examine the case for capital investment across the estate and any proposals for Rathfriland High School will be considered with other priorities as part of any future capital announcement.

Education: North and West Belfast

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education what support his Department provides to the North and West Full Service Community Network approach to education provision.

(AQO 5143/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In 2013-14, my Department provided funding of £376k to support both the Full Service Schools programme operating in North Belfast and the Full Service Community Network in West Belfast.

Youth Sector: Funding

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education what criteria were used when determining the projects that received funding in the recently announced £12 million voluntary youth sector investment.

(AQO 5144/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Under the Youth Service (NI) Order 1989 the Department may pay grants to voluntary youth organisations towards approved expenses in providing facilities for the Youth Service.

To be eligible to apply for funding an organisation must be registered with the local Education and Library Board or receive funding from the Youth Council for NI and must also be able to demonstrate the operation of Youth Service Programmes for at least 9 hours per week for a minimum of 30 weeks per annum.

All eligible applications which met the above criteria were then scored and weighted against: creating access and facilities for the disabled; carrying out essential Health & Safety work; fire safety; child protection; meeting the needs of young people within section 75; collaboration, partnership, sharing facilities/resources; existing use by youth; and cost effectiveness/value for money.

All schemes scored met the pass mark and are being taken forward by the Department.

Gifts and Hospitality: DE Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how many entries his Special Adviser has made in the Department's Register of Gifts and Hospitality since they were appointed; and what is the total value of such entries.

(AQW 29009/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Special Adviser has made no entries in the Department's Register of Gifts and Hospitality.

Department for Employment and Learning

Mental Health/Learning Disability: Definition

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 26916/11-15, whether these definitions are adopted by Further Education Colleges; and if not, will he ensure this is actioned at the earliest possible opportunity.

(AQW 28188/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The definitions identified in answer AQW 26916/11-15 are legal definitions (from the Mental Health Order 1986) and may be used by clinical and social care practitioners. However, they will always be used on occasions when compulsory admission to hospital for assessment and/or treatment is being considered for an individual patient. In such circumstances, the individual is more likely than not, to have a significant and possibly severe clinical condition which warrants detention in hospital for further investigation and/or treatment. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) has advised that the provision of clinical and social care is not based on definitions, but rather on the assessed needs of the individual, their family and carer.

As I have mentioned in previous answers, further education (FE) colleges are bound by the definitions stipulated within the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and more particularly, the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 (SENDO). This Order makes it unlawful for institutions of further and higher education to treat students with disabilities less favourably, without justification, for a reason which relates to their disability. It also places a duty on institutions to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that people who have a disability are not put at a substantial disadvantage (compared to people who do not have a disability) in accessing further and higher education.

In doing so, these institutions adhere to a pan disability approach, which ensures that support for students is based on need, rather than category of disability. This is in alignment with the approach taken by DHSSPS, in their provision of clinical and social care, as outlined above. I remain confident that this approach, operated by colleges, is the most fair and equitable way of meeting the additional educational support needs of all students, irrespective of the category of their disability. Therefore I do not consider it appropriate to make any changes.

University of Ulster: Campuses

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether there are plans in place to relocate any schools from Magee to any other University of Ulster campuses.

(AQW 28279/11-15)

Dr Farry: This is not information that my Department would normally hold. However, the University of Ulster has informed me that in the academic session 2010/11 the University conducted a restructuring exercise the principal aims of which were to: achieve efficiency savings following a reduction in the core teaching and research grants received from DEL; increase full-time undergraduate places at the Magee campus whilst maintaining full-time undergraduate places at the University's other campuses (this net increase in places was made possible by the additional MaSN places allocated to the University by DEL); and, increase full-time undergraduate places in the STEM areas.

In the context of the Magee campus this entailed: an increase in student places in computing; an increase in student places in creative technology; the transfer of pre-registration nursing places from Coleraine to Magee; the transfer of Irish from Coleraine to Magee; the transfer of History from Magee to Coleraine; and, the establishment of a new Centre for Engineering and Renewable Energy at Magee.

This has resulted in a net transfer of staff to Magee and the establishment of new academic posts at Magee. Staff transfers associated with the above transfer of student places are being phased as courses are phased out on one campus and established/increased at another campus.

Further to the above, the University has no plans to relocate any schools from Magee to any other University of Ulster campus.

Education Maintenance Allowance: Fraud

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail in each of the last five years (i) the number of prosecutions there have been for fraudulent Education Maintenance Allowance claims; and (ii) the amount overpaid.

(AQW 28358/11-15)

Dr Farry: There have been no fraud prosecutions in relation to the means tested Education Maintenance Allowance in the last five years and therefore no associated overpayments.

Adult Apprenticeships: Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the rationale in only providing fully funded QCF/NVQ Diplomas in Health and Social Care to those up to the age of 25 and restricting access to qualifications that will produce care workers, particularly in light of Transforming Your Care.

(AQW 28527/11-15)

Dr Farry: Apprenticeships

In September 2011 and August 2012 I initiated changes to the provision and funding arrangements for adult apprenticeships. This was to ensure resources were targeted more effectively on the priority skill needs of the local economy, the specific needs of adults, and that a proportionate balance was achieved in contributions to adult training by Government, employers and the individual.

My priorities are clear. Funding for apprenticeships must be focused primarily on our young people to enable them to acquire the new knowledge and skills needed to make a difference to their lives and to the NI economy. This position is supported by research conducted by IFF Research on behalf of the Department for Business Innovation and Skills in 2012. The research shows that younger apprentices are more likely to report positive impacts on their skills levels than their adult counterparts. Unfortunately, the previous funding of adult apprenticeships was not sustainable.

As the member will be aware, back in February I announced a major review of my Department's apprenticeship policy. This review, which is all-encompassing in nature, is progressing as planned, and I will be reporting its findings shortly.

Further Education Provision

My Department's further education curriculum policy has been developed to ensure that colleges have a strong focus on provision that supports the economy, strengthens workforce development and advances an individual's skills and learning.

Individual colleges design and deliver a curriculum offering that meets the needs of learners and employers in their areas. Colleges do not restrict access to qualifications that produce care workers and they do not impose age restrictions other than the school leaving age requirement.

The specific needs of adult health and social care workers will continue to be met through the Department's programmes and services ensuring they have the right skills to support our journey in transforming the health and social care service.

Working Group

As a result of the "Task and Finish" Group's recommendations, my Department has joined a group exploring the skills development needs of the domiciliary social care sector. This group includes representatives from DHSSPS, Invest NI, Health and Social Care Council and Belfast Metropolitan College as well as representatives from my Department's Skills

and Industry Division. Its first meeting was on 5 October when it established a sub group to examine the detail and devise recommendations.

Research Excellence Framework: Submissions

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 27940/11-15, given his Department's responsibility overseeing the Research Excellence Framework and should Prof Gallagher be included, what action does he intend to take.

(AQW 28528/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is up to each institution to determine which research they put forward as part of their submission to the Research Excellence Framework.

South West Regional College: Questions Referred to Director

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 27225/11-15, AQW 26532/11-15, AQW 26467/11-15 and AQW 26381/11-15, to clarify in what format and the date each question was referred to the Director of South West Regional College; and if confirmation of each correspondence was received.

(AQW 28530/11-15)

Dr Farry: AQW 27225/11-15

My Department issued a letter, via email, to the Director of South West College (SWC) on 31 October 2013. This letter provided details of the question tabled and asked the Director of the College to respond to the Member, directly. My Department received a copy of the response, from SWC to the Member, on 6 November 2013.

AQW 26532/11-15, AQW 26467/11-15, and AQW 26381/11-15

My Department issued a letter, via email, to the Director of SWC on 11 October 2013. This letter provided details of all three questions tabled and asked that the Director of the College respond to the Member, directly, with the information sought in the three questions. The College received the e-mail on 11 October 2013.

My Department has contacted SWC to ascertain if a reply has been issued by the College. SWC have advised that the request had been overlooked due to a misunderstanding. However, the College has now issued a response to the Member and my Department has received a copy of this reply.

Autism: DEL Buildings

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what provision is made within his departmental buildings to receive visitors diagnosed with autism and to cater for their needs.

(AQW 28544/11-15)

Dr Farry: Staff who regularly meet the public such as Employment Service staff, Careers Officers and Tribunal staff have received specific training about autism to enable them to communicate appropriately and positively with customers and visitors. If having previously made officials aware that they have been diagnosed with autism, customers attending the Department's Jobcentres and Careers Resource Centres can have arrangements made to be accompanied by an advocate or request access to private interview room facilities where their specific environmental needs can be addressed. The pace of the interview and journey towards employment will be tailored to individual customer needs where possible. Customers with autism who are in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance are contacted by Departmental staff in advance of their first work focused interview in order to discuss accommodation needs and to ensure that the engagement with Employment Service staff is appropriate and effective.

For the purposes of tribunal proceedings at Killymeal House, a party with autism will be afforded any reasonable adjustment required to facilitate participation. Customer Service training and equality training is available to reception staff in Adelaide House and Gloucester House which focuses on meeting the needs of the customer including those with a disability.

Universities: Protestant Students

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail what his Department is doing to ensure Queen's University and the University of Ulster are welcoming protestant students.

(AQW 28554/11-15)

Dr Farry: As I advised in my responses to both your Oral Assembly question and subsequent Written Assembly question in May.

The research evidence presented on participation in Higher Education by Northern Ireland students indicates that there were very few negative perceptions of Northern Ireland institutions among school leavers. In fact, most respondents reported that Northern Ireland institutions were very welcoming to all groups in terms of religion, disability, ethnicity and socio-economic status.

I continue to be delighted that our Universities offer a genuine option for integrated education.

Higher Education: Law Graduates

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of law graduates, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28572/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of law graduates from Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions, in each of the last three academic years is detailed in the table below:

Year	Total
2011-12	814
2010-11	729
2009-10	755

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

- 1) The latest available data on Higher Education qualifications are for 2011/12.

Employment: Law Graduates

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of law graduates that are unable to find employment.

(AQW 28573/11-15)

Dr Farry: In 2011/12, of the law graduates from Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions whose destinations were known, 42 indicated they were unemployed.

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

- 2) The latest available data on graduate destinations are for 2011/12.
- 3) This information comes from the Destination of Leavers Survey. It provides details of the destinations of leavers from HE who obtained qualifications in HEIs during the 2011/12 academic year. The survey was carried out approximately six months after graduation and had a 78% response rate.

Southern Regional College: Poppies

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline any investigation being conducted into a direction from staff in the Regional College in Armagh that students should remove their poppies and whether the Department is satisfied that equality policies are being properly applied in the college.

(AQW 28598/11-15)

Dr Farry: Southern Regional College has confirmed that it has received a number of enquiries regarding the alleged direction given to students at its Armagh Campus that it was not permissible to wear the poppy.

Southern Regional College permits the wearing of non-political marks of remembrance, celebration or commemoration such as poppies or shamrocks during specified periods in the year. In response to these enquiries, it requested the names of students who had allegedly received such an instruction and the details of any staff members who issued such an instruction. No such information has been received in relation to complaints pertaining to the Armagh campus. Without this information Southern Regional College cannot proceed to investigate further.

Southern Regional College, like all colleges in the further education sector, is required to promote good relations between members of categories set out in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and it is monitored by the Equality Commission in its discharging of this duty.

Education Maintenance Allowance: Fraud

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 28158/11-15, what scale of fraud has been detected.

(AQW 28599/11-15)

Dr Farry: No fraud has been detected in relation to the means tested Education Maintenance Allowance.

Higher Education: Strengthening the All-island Research Base Programme

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide an update on “Strengthening The All-Island Research Base” programme; and to detail the areas of research taking place currently under this programme.

(AQW 28676/11-15)

Dr Farry: With a strategic investment of £17.2 million from late 2008 / early 2009 to March 2011, the Strengthening the all-Island Research Base programme enabled the two universities to establish twelve major projects to build additional and sustainable research capacity and capability that would contribute to the development of the “All Island Research Infrastructure”.

The twelve projects were supported to the end of Financial Year 2010/11 after which they aimed to become self-sustaining, per the requirement in the Department’s “Call for Proposals”.

An independent evaluation of the Programme has recently been published, and it concluded that all twelve projects have been able to secure funding to pursue further research as a direct result of work funded through, and building on the outcomes of, the DEL-funded programme.

The areas of research continuing to be pursued as a result of this programme are mobile wireless systems, transport sustainability, agri-food, cancer research, diet and obesity, novel therapeutics for infections and chronic diseases, biomedical informatics, energy storage, sensors and nanotechnology, functional biomaterials, computational neuroscience, and nutrition and bone health.

Sport: Student Funding

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the funding opportunities available to students studying Sports Studies at University level that need to undertake coaching courses in fields such as athletics, gymnastics, swimming and games.

(AQW 28678/11-15)

Dr Farry: The eligibility of higher education students for financial support in terms of tuition fees, grants and loans is determined under the Education (Student Support) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2009 (as amended). I can advise that students studying higher education courses in Sports Studies are determined for financial support in the same way as other undergraduate students under the Regulations.

There is no additional higher education funding specifically aimed at students undertaking coaching courses.

Apprenticeships: Skills Areas

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the skills areas of all apprentices currently under training in all establishments funded by his Department.

(AQW 28722/11-15)

Dr Farry: The most recent edition of my Department’s ApprenticeshipsNI Statistical Bulletin provides key information on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme and contains data to July 2013. The Bulletin is published on a quarterly basis with the statistics presented covering a range of topics including starts, occupancy, leavers and outcomes for participants on ApprenticeshipsNI.

An extract from the bulletin, detailing programme participation, aligned to apprenticeships frameworks, has been placed in the Assembly Library and on the DEL website on [http:// www.delni.gov.uk/](http://www.delni.gov.uk/). A full copy of the Statistical Bulletin can be viewed by following the link below.

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/publications/r-and-s-stats/apprenticeshipsni-statistical-bulletins.htm>

As the member will be aware, back in February I announced a major review of my Department’s apprenticeship policy. This review, which is all-encompassing in nature, is progressing as planned, and I will be reporting its findings shortly.

Apprenticeships: Allocation

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail by skills area, the basis on which the numbers in apprentice training are allocated.

(AQW 28724/11-15)

Dr Farry: The ApprenticeshipsNI programme is an employer-led provision, with employers creating apprenticeship positions in line with their future business needs. It is therefore individual businesses in each “skills area” who determine the number of apprentices in that business sector.

My Department funds the ‘off-the-job’ training element of an apprenticeship through the ApprenticeshipsNI programme.

As the member will be aware, back in February I announced a major review of my Department’s apprenticeship policy. This review, which is all-encompassing in nature, is progressing as planned, and I will be reporting its findings shortly.

Apprenticeships: Employment

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail by skills area, how many apprentices, have progressed into employment in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28726/11-15)

Dr Farry: The ApprenticeshipsNI programme is an employer-led provision, with employers creating apprenticeship positions in line with their future business needs. Apprentices are employed “from day one”.

My Department funds the ‘off-the-job’ training element of an apprenticeship through the ApprenticeshipsNI programme.

Over 23,000 individuals have started ApprenticeshipsNI funded training over the past three years. A full breakdown of starts, aligned to Apprenticeship Frameworks, has been placed in the Assembly Library and on the DEL website on <http://www.delni.gov.uk/>.

As the member will be aware, back in February I announced a major review of my Department’s apprenticeship policy. This review, which is all-encompassing in nature, is progressing as planned, and I will be reporting its findings shortly.

Apprenticeships: Insurance/Small Firms

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail any assistance his Department gives small firms in relation to the insurance costs of taking on apprentices.

(AQW 28781/11-15)

Dr Farry: Responsibility for the payment of insurance costs for apprentices lies with the employer in line with the employer’s obligations to all of their employees.

My Department funds the ‘off-the-job’ training element of an apprenticeship through the ApprenticeshipsNI programme. An apprentice should be covered by both the employer’s and training supplier’s public liability insurance when availing of directed training.

Apprenticeships: Female Participation

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail how many female apprentice trainees are currently on apprenticeship courses, broken down by skills area.

(AQW 28786/11-15)

Dr Farry: As of July 2013 (the most recent published data) female occupancy on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme stood at 3,377. A full breakdown of gender occupancy, aligned to apprenticeship frameworks has been placed in the Assembly Library and on the DEL website on <http://www.delni.gov.uk/>.

As the member will be aware, back in February I announced a major review of my Department’s apprenticeship policy. This review, which is all-encompassing in nature, is progressing as planned, and I will be reporting its findings shortly.

Apprenticeships: Food Engineering Pilot Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the Food Engineering Apprenticeship program.

(AQW 28847/11-15)

Dr Farry: I launched the Food Engineering Apprenticeship Pilot Programme in September 2013 in response to concerns raised by local food manufacturing and processing businesses that they were finding it difficult to recruit engineers to work in this sector.

Officials in my Department have worked closely with industry and their counterparts in Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and Southern Regional College to develop a flexible programme in line with industry requirements.

Eight local food manufacturing and processing employers are committed to the pilot offering a maximum of 21 apprenticeships. These companies are geographically spread out, thereby offering the opportunities presented to young people from across Northern Ireland. The employers involved have developed the content of the qualification and made key decisions affecting how it will be delivered.

Applicants completed two psychometric tests to assess their capability to achieve an engineering qualification. At present, the participating companies are interviewing the applicants who have successfully completed both tests and those recruited will begin the initiative on 6th January 2014 with an intensive orientation programme at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise.

Apprenticeships: Figures

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people have entered apprenticeships in each of the last 3 years.

(AQW 28848/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department funds the 'off-the-job' training element of an apprenticeship through the ApprenticeshipsNI programme.

Over the past three academic years, the numbers of individuals entering ApprenticeshipsNI provision are:

- 2010/11 - 8,948;
- 2011/12 - 7,884; and
- 2012/13 - 6,345 (up to July 2013).

My Department's ApprenticeshipsNI Statistical Bulletin provides key information on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme and contains data to July 2013. The Bulletin is published on a quarterly basis with the statistics presented covering a range of topics including starts, occupancy, leavers and outcomes for participants on ApprenticeshipsNI.

A full copy of the Statistical Bulletin can be viewed by following the link below.

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/publications/r-and-s-stats/apprenticeshipsni-statistical-bulletins.htm>

As the member will be aware, back in February I announced a major review of my Department's apprenticeship policy. This review, which is all-encompassing in nature, is progressing as planned, and I will be reporting its findings shortly.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Economy: Impact of British GDP/Irish Economy

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) how she plans to ensure that the local economy benefits from the recent increase in Britain's Gross Domestic Product ; (ii) how she plans to ensure that the local economy benefits from recent improvements in the southern economy; (iii) how the impact of the increase in Britain's Gross Domestic Product on the local economy is measured; and (iv) how the impact of the increase in the economy of Ireland on the local economy is measured.

(AQW 27983/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):

(i) & (ii) I welcome the recent improvements in UK Gross Domestic Product and the improvements in the economy of the Republic of Ireland, both of which are key markets for external sales and tourism.

The Executive's Economic Strategy is outward-looking, with a focus on export-led economic growth, and one of the key themes relates to competing in the global economy. The improvements in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland will therefore be captured through the continued implementation of the Strategy.

The Economic Strategy identifies a range of commitments, expected to deliver job creation and growing employment levels in Northern Ireland. The Executive has made considerable progress towards delivery of commitments made for this budget period. An update on the implementation of the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy Action Plan was published on 25 October and can be accessed on the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy website at: www.northernireland.gov.uk/economic-strategy.

The delivery of these actions is establishing the foundations for future economic growth.

(iii) & (iv) The published GDP figures for the UK include Northern Ireland. We do not specifically measure the impact of growth in Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland on the Northern Ireland economy, as this would be extremely difficult to quantify.

There are four main areas which contribute to growth in the economy, these are: consumer spending; investment; net trade; and, government spending. As the Republic of Ireland receives over a third of our exports it has a significant impact on our net trade. Given the way Northern Ireland is funded, changes to government spending in Whitehall has a significant impact on level of government spending locally. Other factors from both economies have influence on all of these areas.

However, it is important that the Northern Ireland economy diversifies, so that it is not as reliant upon growth in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, given that growth in these regions is forecast to be lower than in other economies, such as emerging economies. This is another important aspect of the Executive's Economic Strategy.

Craigavon/Banbridge/Armagh Councils: DETI Work

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the work between her Department and (i) Craigavon Borough Council; (ii) Banbridge District Council; and (iii) Armagh City Council, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28298/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested is set out in the attached table:

Year	Council	Detail
2011	Craigavon Borough Council	<p>HSENI</p> <p>Joint Working with District Councils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Safe Maintenance initiative – Joint HSENI/ Local Authority (LA) initiative. 50% of all health and safety inspections to look at Safe maintenance. <p>Public Sector Inspection/ Enforcement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 13 interactions in total comprising 5 site inspections, 4 complaint investigations and 4 advisory contacts. <p>GCCNI</p> <p>Project</p> <p>Transport Matters - Young Peoples Experiences, Attitudes and Ideas for Improving Public Transport (January 2011) - In partnership with Youth Action. http://www.consumer council.org.uk/publications/?id=612</p> <p>ENERGY</p> <p>The Department has continued to work with Craigavon Borough Council in the last three years to recoup outstanding monies in respect of an Interreg IIIA project on biomass boilers.</p> <p>NITB</p> <p>One Tourism Development Scheme (TDS) application was received from the Craigavon Borough Council area, application was placed on the reserve list.</p>
2011	Banbridge District Council	<p>HSENI</p> <p>Joint Working with District Councils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Safe Maintenance initiative – Joint HSENI/ LA initiative. 50% of all health and safety inspections to look at Safe maintenance. <p>Public Sector Inspection/ Enforcement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 4 interactions in total comprising 2 site inspections and 1 advisory contact. <p>NITB</p> <p>Banbridge Tourist Information Centre Relocation and Fit-out under the 2011-2013 Signature Projects Programme.</p> <p>2007-13 ERDF Sustainable Competitiveness Programme - Local Economic Development Measure £27,392.61.</p>
2011	Armagh City Council	<p>HSENI</p> <p>Joint Working with District Councils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Safe Maintenance initiative – Joint HSENI/ LA initiative. 50% of all health and safety inspections to look at Safe maintenance. <p>Public Sector Inspection/ Enforcement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 1 complaint investigation. <p>GCCNI</p> <p>Project</p> <p>Ferry Travel - Perceptions and Experiences of ferry passengers in Northern Ireland (December 2011). http://www.consumer council.org.uk/publications/?id=802</p> <p>Project</p> <p>“Left High and Dry” (February 2011) - Consumers’ stories and experiences of the water crisis. http://www.consumer council.org.uk/publications/?id=633</p>

Year	Council	Detail
2011		<p>Tourism Ireland Limited (TIL)</p> <p>TIL attended a meeting with local tourism industry partners in Armagh which was facilitated by the Tourism Development Officer in Armagh City Council during a TIL market staff familiarisation trip to Armagh in summer 2011. TIL shared recommendations on promoting Armagh City overseas with the industry partners.</p> <p>TIL's overseas Publicity team also met with the Tourism Development Officer in Armagh City Council as part of ongoing collaboration between Tourism Ireland and the Council.</p>
2012	Craigavon Borough Council	<p>HSENI</p> <p>Joint Working with District Councils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Safe Maintenance initiative – Joint HSENI/ LA initiative. 50% of all health and safety inspections to look at Safe maintenance. <p>Public Sector Inspection/ Enforcement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 9 interactions in total comprising 5 site inspections and 4 complaint investigations. <p>GCCNI</p> <p>Project</p> <p>The Financial Capability Partnership led by Consumer Council held Money Week 2012 in conjunction with Craigavon Borough Council.</p> <p>ENERGY</p> <p>The Department has continued to work with Craigavon Borough Council in the last three years to recoup outstanding monies in respect of an Interreg IIIA project on biomass boilers.</p> <p>NITB</p> <p>Craigavon Borough Council submitted a TDS application in 2011, which progressed to the shortlist following a successful bid to the Northern Ireland Executive's Economy and Jobs Initiative.</p>
2012	Craigavon Borough Council	<p>Offers of assistance were made to Craigavon Borough Council to install 3 Interpretation panels at Craigavon Museum, Seagoe Parish Church (Portadown) and St Patrick's Stone, Coney Island. This offer of assistance was subsequently withdrawn.</p> <p>EUROPEAN SUPPORT UNIT</p> <p>2007-13 European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Sustainable Competitiveness Programme - Local Economic Development Measure £27,392.61.</p> <p>INVEST NI</p> <p>Craigavon Council is included within the South East Economic Development (SEED) group and collaboratively have been involved with the approval of 8 projects with total investment of £1.7 million and assistance of £1.2 million in 2012.</p>

Year	Council	Detail
2012	Banbridge District Council	<p>HSENI</p> <p>Joint Working with District Councils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Safe Maintenance initiative – Joint HSENI/ LA initiative. 50% of all health and safety inspections to look at Safe maintenance. ■ Gas Safety Regulators group – Banbridge Council staff member attended quarterly Gas safety meetings. <p>Public Sector Inspection/ Enforcement</p> <p>2 interactions in total comprising 1 complaint investigation and 1 accident investigation.</p> <p>NITB</p> <p>Work has progressed with Banbridge District Council to deliver the St. Patrick's/ Christian Heritage Signature Project and the Mourne Signature Project. More recently, Banbridge District Council has been working with Down and Newry & Mourne District Councils to develop a Tourism Destination Plan for the Mourne Mountains. The Plan is now in place and supported by a Tourism Forum comprising local public and private sector tourism bodies and businesses. NITB has facilitated, advised and supported the development and delivery of this Plan.</p> <p>EUROPEAN SUPPORT UNIT</p> <p>2007-13 ERDF Sustainable Competitiveness Programme - Local Economic Development Measure £16,829.77.</p> <p>INVEST NI</p> <p>Banbridge Council is included within the SEED group and collaboratively have been involved with the approval of 9 projects with total investment of £1.8 million and assistance of £1.3 million in 2012.</p>
2012	Armagh City Council	<p>HSENI</p> <p>Joint Working with District Councils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Safe Maintenance initiative – Joint HSENI/ LA initiative. 50% of all health and safety inspections to look at Safe maintenance. <p>Public Sector Inspection/ Enforcement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 4 interactions comprising 1 site inspection, 1 complaint investigation and 2 accident investigations. <p>NITB</p> <p>Armagh City & District Council received £15,000 for Georgian Day 2012 and £30,000 for St Patricks Festival Armagh 2013. Both events were funded through the NITB National Tourism Events Fund.</p> <p>Offers were made to 3 projects submitted by Armagh City Council under the Tourism Development Scheme 2011-13 in 2012, two of these projects were subsequently withdrawn. The remaining project, Navan Centre and Fort – Ecology for Families, is under implementation, this project received an offer of financial assistance of £36,700 against total project costs of £73,400.</p> <p>Offers were made to 4 projects submitted by Armagh City Council under the 2011-2013 Signature Projects Programme. One project, Armagh St Patrick's Trail 2 Interpretation was subsequently withdrawn.</p> <p>The remaining 3 projects, St Patrick's Trail Abbey Street Link, Palace Demesne Armagh Christian Heritage Project and St Patrick's Way – The Pilgrim's Walk received a total amount of £269,264.</p>

Year	Council	Detail
2012		<p>TOURISM IRELAND</p> <p>Has partnered with Armagh City Council to promote Armagh and Northern Ireland at Celtic Connections, the largest winter music festival in Glasgow.</p> <p>Discussions have also taken place with the Council's Tourism Development Officer to discuss Tourism Ireland's global Saint Patrick's campaign.</p> <p>INVEST NI</p> <p>Armagh Council is included within the SEED group and collaboratively have been involved with the approval of 8 projects with total investment of £1.7 million and assistance of £1.2 million in 2012.</p>
2013	Craigavon Borough Council	<p>HSENI</p> <p>Joint Working with District Councils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Safe Maintenance initiative – Joint HSENI/ LA initiative. 50% of all health and safety inspections to look at Safe maintenance. ■ Workplace Transport initiative – Council carrying out targeted workplace transport inspections as part of joint HSENI local authority initiative. ■ Legionella seminar – Council representatives attended Legionella seminar with HSENI and Council staff. ■ Specialist skills register – Council environmental health staff submitted specialism to appear on joint HSENI/ Local Authority register. <p>Public Sector Inspection/ Enforcement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 5 interactions in total comprising 3 site inspections, 1 complaint investigation and 1 advisory contact. <p>GCCNI</p> <p>Project</p> <p>Transport Issues in Accessing Health and Social Care Services (March 13) - In partnership with the Patient Client Council. http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/publications/?id=1009</p> <p>Project</p> <p>Door to Door and Community Transport Research (July 13). http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/publications/?id=1039</p> <p>Project</p> <p>Consumers' priorities for NI Water's third Price Control, PC15, for 2015-2021.</p> <p>ENERGY</p> <p>The Department has continued to work with Craigavon Borough Council in the last three years to recoup outstanding monies in respect of an Interreg IIIA project on biomass boilers.</p> <p>NITB</p> <p>Craigavon Borough Council is one of the seven councils leading on the development of the Lough Neagh & Its Waterways. NITB has provided on-going facilitation including workshops and an envisioning day to support destination development.</p> <p>One TDS project within the Craigavon Borough Council area is currently under assessment.</p>

Year	Council	Detail
2013	Craigavon Borough Council	<p>EUROPEAN SUPPORT UNIT</p> <p>The role of local government across the suite of 2014-20 EU Programmes is currently being considered. This exercise is being led by DFP and commenced with a workshop back in February 2013. Since the summer, a number of government departments and local authority organisations have continued to work together to identify potential areas of funding which might be delivered by reformed local government under Community Plans. This has included the initial consideration of proposals put forward by Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon through the SEED council cluster.</p> <p>INVEST NI</p> <p>Craigavon Council is included within the SEED group and collaboratively have been involved with the approval of 5 projects with total investment of £1.0 million and assistance of £0.7 million in 2013.</p> <p>Also they have obtained approval for 2 LED projects with total investment of £312,000 and assistance of £234,000 in 2013.</p>
2013	Banbridge District Council	<p>HSENI</p> <p>Joint Working with District Councils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Safe Maintenance initiative – Joint HSENI/ LA initiative. 50% of all health and safety inspections to look at Safe maintenance. ■ Gas Safety Regulators group – Banbridge Council staff member attended quarterly Gas safety meetings. ■ Workplace Transport initiative – Council carrying out targeted workplace transport inspections as part of joint HSENI local authority initiative. ■ Specialist skills register – Council environmental health staff submitted specialism to appear on joint HSENI Local Authority register. <p>Public Sector Inspection/ Enforcement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nil to date. <p>NITB</p> <p>Work has progressed with Banbridge District Council to deliver the St. Patrick's/ Christian Heritage Signature Project and the Mourne Signature Project.</p> <p>More recently, Banbridge District Council has been working with Down and Newry & Mourne District Councils to develop a Tourism Destination Plan for the Mourne Mountains.</p> <p>The Plan is now in place and supported by a Tourism Forum comprising local public and private sector tourism bodies and businesses. NITB has facilitated, advised and supported the development and delivery of the Plan.</p> <p>EUROPEAN SUPPORT UNIT</p> <p>The role of local government across the suite of 2014-20 EU Programmes is currently being considered. This exercise is being led by DFP and commenced with a workshop back in February 2013. Since the summer, a number of government departments and local authority organisations have continued to work together to identify potential areas of funding which might be delivered by reformed local government under Community Plans. This has included the initial consideration of proposals put forward by Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon through the SEED council cluster.</p>
		<p>INVEST NI</p> <p>Banbridge Council is included within the SEED group and collaboratively have been involved with the approval of 5 projects with total investment of £1.0 million and assistance of £0.7 million in 2013.</p> <p>Also they have obtained approval for 1 LED projects with total investment of £19,000 and assistance of £14,000 in 2013.</p>

Year	Council	Detail
2013	Armagh City Council	<p>HSENI</p> <p>Joint Working with District Councils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Safe Maintenance initiative – Joint HSENI/ LA initiative. 50% of all health and safety inspections to look at Safe maintenance. ■ Workplace Transport initiative – Council carrying out targeted workplace transport inspections as part of joint HSENI local authority initiative. ■ Specialist skills register – Council environmental health staff submitted specialism to appear on joint HSENI Local Authority register. <p>Public Sector Inspection/ Enforcement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 2 interactions comprising 1 site inspection and 1 advisory contact. <p>GCCNI</p> <p>Project</p> <p>Transport Issues in Accessing Health and Social Care Services (March 13) - In partnership with the Patient Client Council (AS ABOVE). http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/publications/?id=1009</p> <p>Project</p> <p>Passenger Information and Modal Shift (August 2013). http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/publications/?id=1048</p> <p>Throughout 2013 CCNI has been working with all Councils through the Regional Community Resilience Group.</p>
2013		<p>It should also be noted that during the period 2011-2013 GCCNI have conducted various research activities such as omnibus surveys that will have sought the views of consumers across Northern Ireland which will have included the three specified areas.</p> <p>NITB</p> <p>Armagh City Council has accepted Letters of Offer for Georgian Day 2013 - £10,000 and St Patricks Festival Armagh 2014 - £20,000. Offers were awarded through the NITB National Tourism Events Fund.</p> <p>Work has progressed with Armagh City Council to deliver St. Patrick's/Christian Heritage Signature Project.</p> <p>More recently, NITB has facilitated, advised and supported the development and delivery of a Tourism Destination Plan for Armagh. A draft Plan is now in place which will be supported by a Tourism Forum comprising local public and private sector tourism bodies and businesses.</p> <p>TOURISM IRELAND</p> <p>TIL's overseas publicity team met with the Tourism Development Officer in Armagh City Council during a familiarisation trip for Tourism Ireland's Publicity Officers overseas in November 2013.</p> <p>In February, July and November of this year, Tourism Ireland met with representatives of Armagh City Council to discuss Battle of Clontarf celebrations in 2014.</p>

Year	Council	Detail
2013	Armagh City Council	<p>TOURISM POLICY</p> <p>Met with the CEO and Tourism Officer of Armagh City Council on 13 November to discuss the progress made in developing Armagh as a tourism destination.</p> <p>EUROPEAN SUPPORT UNIT</p> <p>The role of local government across the suite of 2014-20 EU Programmes is currently being considered. This exercise is being led by DFP and commenced with a workshop back in February 2013. Since the summer, a number of government departments and local authority organisations have continued to work together to identify potential areas of funding which might be delivered by reformed local government under Community Plans. This has included the initial consideration of proposals put forward by Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon through the SEED council cluster.</p> <p>INVEST NI</p> <p>Armagh Council is included within the SEED group and collaboratively have been involved with the approval of 5 projects with total investment of £1.0 million and assistance of £0.7 million in 2013.</p> <p>Also they have obtained approval for 1 LED projects with total investment of £184,000 and assistance of £92,000 in 2013.</p>

Economy: Promotion of Shopping

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what work her Department is doing to encourage shopper numbers.

(AQW 28409/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In 2012, NISRA carried out the Northern Ireland Passenger Survey which surveys outbound passengers through the Northern Ireland airports and ports. Of the spend by these GB and overseas passengers (£346 million), an estimated 15% was on shopping. In addition, domestic overnight shopping trips contributed a further £2 million to the local economy.

My Department, through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and Tourism Ireland, continues to explore and develop opportunities to encourage visitors to Northern Ireland with shopping identified as a potential activity of interest.

NITB has undertaken a series of annual marketing campaigns in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; to increase the number of short breaks taken; with the NITB Autumn/Christmas 2013 campaign specifically promoting shopping at the Christmas market.

Tourism Ireland's Autumn 2013 campaign is further targeting late season bookings to Northern Ireland. The campaign is well underway in Great Britain, United States of America, mainland Europe, Australia and other key emerging markets; focussing on attracting visitors to Northern Ireland where they can enjoy a variety of short breaks.

North Down: Invest NI

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many businesses have been assisted by InvestNI in the North Down constituency, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28413/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Table 1 below shows the number of businesses which have been assisted by Invest NI in the North Down Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) in each of the years between 2010-11 and 2012-13.

Table 1: Number of Businesses Offered Support in North Down PCA (2010-11 to 2012-13)

Year	Number
2010-11	65
2011-12	101
2012-13	100

In addition, Invest NI offered support and guidance to individuals wishing to start a business through the Regional Start Initiative (RSI), formerly known as the Enterprise Development Programme, delivered in conjunction with Enterprise Northern Ireland. These are detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Number of Individuals in North Down PCA Offered Support Through RSI (2010-11 to 2012-13)

Year	Number
2010-11	111
2011-12	80
2012-13	38

Note: A number of individuals receiving RSI offers went on to avail of further Invest NI support. These individuals are removed from Table 1 and counted in Table 2 above.

In addition, Invest NI launched its Boosting Business initiative on 14th November 2011. This initiative identifies the range of support and advice available to local businesses and provides accessible contact points, via telephone, email and social media. Invest NI now has a dedicated full time Business Support Team in place to deal with enquiries from businesses across Northern Ireland. Since its inception there have been 538 additional enquiries from the North Down area.

Business: Female Entrepreneurship

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the action that her Department has taken to encourage women in business and female entrepreneurship to realise the potential for the economy.

(AQW 28434/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Women remain the largest under-represented group when it comes to enterprise in Northern Ireland and represent a huge pool of untapped potential.

Invest NI currently supports female entrepreneurship through a variety of targeted marketing initiatives, sponsorship of business networks and business awards. Through this activity Invest NI aims to support more women to set up and run their own business successfully and to promote opportunities for business growth in export markets.

Alongside sponsorship support to Women's business networks, Invest NI is a sponsor of the International Women's Business Conference scheduled for May 2014. With the theme of "Creating a New Economy", the conference presents an opportunity to showcase Northern Ireland's business potential as well as celebrate and promote the potential of business women on a local and global scale.

Health and Safety: Fire-rated Glass

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the actions the Health and Safety Executive has taken to protect people in the workplace regarding the claim that Glassworks Ireland Ltd was installing fire-rated glass, which was not recognised, approved or certified as fire-rated.

(AQW 28456/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Other than in Crown Premises, enforcement of issues relating to workplace fire safety falls under the jurisdiction of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.

In relation to Crown Premises, HSENI is in discussion with the Department of Finance and Personnel in relation to this matter.

InterTradelreland: Religious Background of Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of staff employed by InterTradelreland, broken down by religion.

(AQW 28529/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As at 22 November, 2013, the number of staff employed by InterTradelreland broken down by religion is:-

Protestants	8
Roman Catholics	31
Non-Determined	1

National Dairy Council: Loss of Business

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and whether she is aware of any local agri-food company that has lost a contract in the Republic of Ireland due to the stance taken by the National Dairy Council.

(AQW 28540/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am well aware that a number of local dairy companies have been affected by the National Dairy Council campaign.

I have brought the campaign to the attention of the North South Ministerial Council, the European Commission and retailers based in the Republic of Ireland. I will continue to work in an effort to minimise any potential losses to our local economy.

Electricity: Security of Supply

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the surplus electricity that is required to ensure security of supply.

(AQW 28558/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has been liaising with the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the electricity system operator SONI to consider the post 2015 security of electricity supply margin for Northern Ireland, including if there is likely to be a requirement for any additional conventional generation, and these discussions remain ongoing.

Moyle Interconnector: Mutual Energy

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether Mutual Energy require permission from (i) the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation or (ii) her Department before carrying out extensive repair or replacement works to the Moyle Interconnector.

(AQW 28560/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Mutual Energy proposals for interim and permanent repairs to the Moyle Interconnector have been endorsed by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and discussed with my Department.

As work to restore the Moyle to full capacity is advanced by Mutual Energy, their further engagement with the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and my Department may be necessary in relation to particular aspects of the proposed works.

Lough Neagh: Oil/Gas Exploration

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the advice on which she based her claims during her evidence to the Committee for Enterprise, Trade Investment on 9 May 2013 when she stated that the licence will state what type of exploration is foreseen in the Lough Neagh basin area. I am not an expert in geology and I do not pretend to be, but I am told by my officials from the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland that the geology does not lend itself to hydraulic fracturing, and, therefore, it will be conventional exploration.

(AQW 28561/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My comments were in relation to Petroleum Licence Application PLA1/13 by CHx LLC. The advice was based on the applicants proposed exploration work programme which is directed towards identifying conventional oil or gas targets.

A work programme forms an integral part of any Petroleum Licence and significant changes to the programme cannot be made without my Department's consent.

The Geological Survey Northern Ireland has also advised that, from a geological perspective, the presence of significant unconventional oil or gas resources in the Lough Neagh and Larne sedimentary basins remains hypothetical at best.

E-Synergy: Update

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the work of E-Synergy.

(AQW 28586/11-15)

Mrs Foster: E-Synergy has been managing the NISPO suite of Funds since April 2009 and the active investment period will end on 31 March 2014. The Funds have a ten year life and E-Synergy will continue to manage the Funds until 2019; this will enable follow on investments to be made and investments to be realized. All of the money invested through the Funds has been provided by Invest NI, and over the life of the Funds this will amount to £14million.

Circa £8.8million of Invest NI money has been invested to date as follows:

Fund	Amount invested (£'000)	SMEs supported
Invest Growth Fund	3,500	26
University Funds	1,300	7
Proof of Concept Grant Fund	4,000	175
Total	8,800	208

All figures above are provisional.

The Investment Readiness Programme, a training and support programme, continues to provide a broad range of events to help young companies to become investment ready. The workshops, including the most recent CEO Leadership programme, are aimed at management teams in high growth potential companies. This programme is well received in the market place.

DETI Press Releases/Photographs: DUP Website

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of press releases drafted, or photographs taken, by departmental officials that have subsequently been published on the Democratic Unionist Party website or social media sites; (ii) the estimated time it took departmental staff to do this; and (iii) the total cost to her Department. **(AQW 28587/11-15)**

Mrs Foster:

- (i) Press releases are drafted by DETI officials to communicate departmental key messages and achievements. Once issued by the Executive Information Service, press releases and photographs are free and available to use by print and online outlets, including social media sites.
- (ii) None.
- (iii) Zero.

St Patrick's Trail: Irish-language Signage

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, with regards to point 5 (iii) of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) minutes of the meeting on 14 March 2013, (i) whether a reply has been provided by her Department to the NITB; and (ii) whether Down District Council can add the Irish language to signage for St. Patrick's Trail at their own expense. **(AQW 28592/11-15)**

Mrs Foster:

- (i) A reply was provided by My Department to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board on 17th April 2013.
- (ii) That is a matter for Down District Council.

City of Culture 2013: DETI Tenders/Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) tenders awarded; and (ii) funding provided to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013. **(AQW 28675/11-15)**

Mrs Foster:

- (i) The Northern Ireland Tourist Board did not award any tenders to organisations in Londonderry to deliver the UK City of Culture 2013. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) was responsible for the delivery of the UK City of Culture 2013 and hence was the main funder and responsible for any tenders.
- (ii) The Northern Ireland Tourist Board provided £750,000 of funding to The Culture Company 2013 in Londonderry to deliver five UK City of Culture 2013 tourism events, namely:

The Return of Colmcille	£166,500
Fleadh Cheoil 2013	£167,000
The Walled City Tattoo	£ 50,000
The Turner Prize	£166,500
Lumiere	£200,000
Total	£750,000

In addition, The Northern Ireland Tourist Board provided £60,000 of funding to 5 other organisations in Londonderry who applied for support under the NITB Tourism Event Funding Programme 2013/14 towards tourism events taking place during the UK City of Culture year 2013.

Power NI

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the current value per annum being derived by the consumer from the remaining contracts in place between Power NI Energy Ltd and electricity generators. **(AQW 28757/11-15)**

Mrs Foster: This is a matter that falls under the remit of the Utility Regulator. The Regulator has advised that for the tariff year 2013-14 these contracts are estimated to be worth £2.6 million to consumers. The figure is calculated each year.

Power NI

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she is taking, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Utility Regulator, to ensure that the remaining contracts in place between Power NI Energy Ltd and electricity generators continue to deliver best value for money for energy consumers.

(AQW 28758/11-15)

Mrs Foster: This is a matter that falls under the remit of the Utility Regulator. The Regulator carries out a regular review of the forecast value of these contracts to consumers. If these contracts are forecast to become a cost to consumers at some stage in the future, they can be cancelled. As part of any cancellation process the Utility Regulator will issue a public consultation on the matter.

Carbon Trust Loan Scheme: Renewable Heat Incentive

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why people in receipt of a Carbon Trust loan are unable to access the Renewable Heat Incentive.

(AQW 28803/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The issue of whether the Carbon Trust Loan Scheme is compatible with the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive is currently being considered by my Department under the RHI dispute resolution procedures. The outcome of the review will be published on the DETI website in due course.

Renewable Heat Incentive: Grants

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that regulations published for the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive prohibits grant aid but not loans, why applications are being refused from people who have taken out loans.

(AQW 28863/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer the Member to the answer previously given to AQW 28127/11-15.

In addition, Regulation 23 of the Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 states that systems cannot be accredited under the scheme where a grant from public funds has been paid (or will be paid) or other public support has been provided. Under the regulation "public support" is defined as a financial advantage provided by a public authority.

Moyle Interconnector: Update

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the current status of the Moyle Interconnector.

(AQO 5157/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As a result of a cable fault, the Moyle Interconnector is currently operating at 250 Mega Watts, providing 50% of its normal transfer capacity.

Mutual Energy, owners of the Moyle, are taking forward interim and permanent repair options for the interconnector, and these will be subject to consideration of environmental impacts and other consenting requirements.

It is expected that the Moyle will be restored to full transfer capacity through completion of the interim repair during 2014, with the permanent repair to be completed in 2017.

Fuel Pricing: Groceries Code Adjudicator

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to confirm whether she had any engagements with the Groceries Code Adjudicator regarding the issue of supermarket fuel pricing, including how it impacts customers locally.

(AQO 5153/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Groceries Code Adjudicator's remit extends to Northern Ireland, however, petrol is one of the products excluded from the provisions of the Groceries Code.

I have written to the Groceries Code Adjudicator seeking a meeting but have not yet had a reply.

Energy: Tariff Increases

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she will take to help mitigate the effects of the recently announced increase in energy prices on vulnerable households.

(AQO 5154/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am, of course, concerned about any increases in energy tariffs and particularly the impact these have on our business, domestic and vulnerable consumers. Hence my Department works with the Regulator and the energy sector to improve competition and provide options for consumers to reduce bills by, for example, switching supplier.

There are now a number of active suppliers in the domestic electricity market in Northern Ireland, and there is competition in the domestic gas market within Greater Belfast. From April 2015, the domestic gas market outside Greater Belfast will also be open to competition.

It is also my intention to give consumers additional energy choice by extending the availability of natural gas to towns in the West and North-West, and to other areas where gas extension is economically viable.

Furthermore, I am working to extend the Renewable Heat Incentive to the domestic sector before Spring of next year and already have a premium payment scheme in place to assist with the capital cost of the transition to renewable forms of heat.

Tourism: European Visitors

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the steps her Department is taking to attract more European visitors.

(AQO 5155/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Mainland Europe is a key market for us.

In order to grow our visitor revenue we need to increase the focus on key European markets and maximize promotion around events and emerging stories in 2014 such as the Giro d'Italia, the Game of Thrones and the Clipper Yacht race as well as our iconic products such as Titanic Belfast and the Giant's Causeway.

In addition we continue to lobby for increased air access from Europe, fund co-operative marketing campaigns with carriers and have agreed a new programme with Tourism Ireland for 2014-2016 to encourage more tour operators to include Northern Ireland in their itineraries.

Going for Growth: Implementation

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on how her Department plans to implement the Food Strategy Board Report: Going for Growth.

(AQO 5156/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Going for Growth contains over one hundred recommendations with responsibility falling to many Executive Departments and associated Agencies, as well as the industry itself.

A draft response to Going for Growth has been prepared for consideration by the Executive. The draft response sets out the actions required by Government to deliver the aims and objectives of Going for Growth, timescales for delivery and potential funding sources.

Subject to Executive endorsement, the actions in the draft response will become fully integrated within the relevant Departments' Strategic and Business Plans. In addition, it is envisaged that the Agri-Food Strategy Board will remain in place until at least early 2015 to advise on implementation of Going for Growth.

DARD and DETI will monitor progress and ensure that the Agri-Food Strategy Board receives regular reports on progress against actions and targets to assist the Board in its oversight role.

Tourist Board: Review

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when the final Tourism Strategy will be published.

(AQO 5158/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A review of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and wider tourism structures is underway to ensure we have the right structures in place to deliver on my and the industry's aspiration to grow tourism into a £1 billion industry by 2020. I await the outcome of the review to inform future plans.

My focus to date has been on action. 2012 and 2013 have been crucial years for Northern Ireland tourism and my priority has been to deliver on the tourism product, key events and global marketing campaigns to ensure success and bring maximum economic benefit to the local economy.

Green Investment Bank: DETI Funding

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the funding her Department has assisted in drawing down from the Green Investment Bank.

(AQO 5159/11-15)

Mrs Foster: To date the Green Investment Bank (GIB) has committed £20 million funding towards Evermore Renewable Energy to develop a combined heat and power plant in the Port of Londonderry.

Invest NI has been working with the Green Investment Bank to raise awareness and earlier this year held an information session and round table discussion between Green Investment Bank and Northern Ireland companies which may seek to access Green Investment Bank funds.

Any company seeking funding should approach the Green Investment Bank directly.

In addition it has been highlighted that the funding threshold being used by Green Investment Bank may be too high for some of the emerging projects in Northern Ireland. This issue has been raised with senior officials of Green Investment Bank and they have committed to review this situation and to revert to us with possible solutions which may include aggregation and local management of smaller projects to enable them to be funded by Green Investment Bank.

Department of the Environment

South Belfast: Area of Special Advertisement Control

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment whether he would consider implementing 'areas of special advertising control' in locations such as the University area of Belfast, to curtail the widespread misuse of 'to let' signage, whereby letting agents would be required to erect signage that is sympathetic to the character of the area.

(AQW 27967/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): Implementation of 'Areas of Special Advertising Control' is something I have asked my Department to look at.

While areas of this nature have yet to be introduced in Northern Ireland, the Department currently possesses powers to restrict the display of estate agents' advertisements which otherwise would be granted "deemed consent" by the Regulations. However, before exercising these powers, I would need to be satisfied that removing the "deemed consent" currently available for estate agent signage would not inhibit legitimate commercial activity and would not place unnecessary costs and bureaucratic burdens on businesses and householders.

I am fully aware that there is a proliferation of this type of signage in the University Area and acknowledge that this can have a detrimental impact on amenity. However, in the current economic climate, I wish to be cautious and not unduly undermine support for the business community.

In the Department's experience the majority of estate agents display "for sale" and "to let" boards within the parameters set out in the Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992. However, difficulties arise, particularly in areas where properties are in multiple occupation or in flats. In these situations signage can remain in place for a considerable period of time, as boards do not have to be removed until 14 days after all units/rooms are let.

In relation to enforcement, the Planning Office undertook a survey of signage in the Stranmillis Area in April 2013, with follow up action by enforcement staff who wrote to almost 40 estate agents and property owners in April 2013, reminding them of the Regulations and advising them of their responsibilities to remove all signs which were in breach of the regulations. This resulted in the removal of a number of signs.

An extended survey, covering the wider University Area, as defined in the Belfast HMO Subject Plan is currently underway and letters have already issued to estate agents and property owners.

I have asked my officials to update me at regular intervals and also to explore the possibility of co-operative working on this matter with Belfast City Council, ahead of the transfer of planning functions (including the control of advertising) to local authorities.

I will however continue to pursue appropriate enforcement action to reduce the amount of signage and will monitor the situation closely.

Planning Applications: Fair Road, Greencastle, County Down

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on a planning application for an Activity Centre at Fair Road, Greencastle, Kilkeel.

(AQW 28242/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I have had the opportunity to visit the site in the company of planning officials. I have taken the time to ensure that all of the issues have been fully considered. and I have concluded that the proposal is acceptable in planning terms. Planning permission has now issued.

Carbon Reduction: Funding for Councils

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what funding options are available for councils wishing to invest in carbon reduction measures.

(AQW 28305/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I, like my predecessor, am fully committed to ensuring that Northern Ireland plays its full part in minimising greenhouse gas emissions and will explore all options which will help us to achieve that aim. However, my Department alone cannot deliver these aims, and I am looking to Executive colleagues and other stakeholders, including local government, to contribute to these objectives.

My Department currently offers a number of funding streams to councils to provide assistance in meeting sustainability and carbon reduction obligations.

Two Rethink Waste funds were launched in May 2010, providing funding to Councils, amongst others, for initiatives which boost waste prevention and recycling in order to meet EU targets. The Rethink Waste (Capital) Fund assists councils to increase levels of recycling by providing funding to cover the capital costs of improving or extending their existing waste collection, re-use and recycling infrastructure. Only Councils and Waste Management Groups can apply for the capital element of the Fund. In the last 4 years nearly £8.9 million has been allocated to capital projects. The Post Project Evaluation (PPE) for 2010/11 shows 6,900 tonnes of carbon savings achieved. PPEs are not available for other years as yet. The Fund will run to 31 March 2015.

Councils may also apply for funding under the Rethink Waste (Revenue) Fund. Applicants can apply for revenue funding for initiatives which will improve resource efficiency and boost waste prevention, recycling and re-use activity. In the last 4 years nearly £1.5 million has been allocated to revenue projects. PPEs are not available yet. The Fund will run to 31 March 2015.

My Department also provides access to a range of EU funding options available to councils wishing to invest in carbon reduction measures through the Barroso Team. Structural funds such as the INTERREG 4A programme are currently being used by a significant number of Northern Ireland councils to support projects such as: Smart Eco Hub, a cross border cluster organisation for the sustainable energy sector; the STEM Project, supporting businesses wishing to implement environmental management systems; and East Border Region, which promotes innovative, cross border economic development in the areas of agriculture, industry, commerce and tourism. Although full details are not yet available, the INTERREG 5A programme is due to commence in 2014 and is expected to continue in the same vein.

Councils may also access a number of EU competitive funding streams which provide grants or loans to eligible projects. An example of this type of funding is the RENEW project, funded through the INTERREG 4B North West Europe programme, whose aim is to deliver innovations for the waste supply chain by promoting the recovery of valuable materials from waste. Belfast City Council and DOE are full partners in this project.

I have been advised by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment that Councils can reduce overall energy costs and carbon emissions by generating their own power and heat from renewable sources. Renewable electricity is incentivised through the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) which provides a revenue stream for electricity generated by a range of technologies in the form of Renewables Obligation Certificates (ROCs). In addition to receiving support under the NIRO for all the electricity generated, generators can also sell any unused electricity to the grid.

The Renewable Heat Incentive is a scheme that provides financial incentives for non-domestic generators of renewable heat. Payments are for the lifetime of the technology (to a maximum of 20 years) and are dependent on the amount of heat generated and the size and type of technology. Technologies supported include solar thermal, biomass boilers and ground source heat pumps.

Both incentive mechanisms are designed to cover the additional costs involved in renewable energy technologies as well as providing a rate of return on the investment.

South Antrim: Planning Appeals Commission

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment, in each of the last five years, (i) how many planning applications within South Antrim have had to be reviewed after going to the Planning Appeals Commission; (ii) the total cost; and (iii) the outcome of these decisions.

(AQW 28373/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department routinely reviews all decisions made by the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC).

The Department is currently judicially reviewing the PAC decision on the Easi Park enforcement appeal at Crooked Stone Road, Antrim. This case is currently ongoing and therefore the total cost and outcome are not yet known although it is estimated these will not exceed £10,000.

No other decisions made by the PAC on planning applications or enforcement notices within South Antrim have been judicially reviewed in the last five years.

Easi Park, Crooked Stone Road, Antrim: Planning Appeals Commission

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment how much public money has been spent defending the planning application for Easi Park, Crooked Stone Road, Antrim.

(AQW 28374/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There are no planning applications at this site. The legal costs associated with defending a recent appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) against the Department's Enforcement Notice at Crooked Stone Road (Easi Park), were approximately £7,000.

The other cost to the Department would be in relation to staff costs. However, it is not possible to gauge the number of man hours that can be attributed to an individual case such as this.

Easi Park, Crooked Stone Road, Antrim: Judicial Review

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the estimated cost to his Department of taking a judicial review case against the Planning Appeals Commission's decision on a planning application for the Easi Park, Crooked Stone Road, Antrim.

(AQW 28375/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department is currently judicially reviewing the decision of the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) on an enforcement notice at Easi Park, Crooked Stone Road, Antrim, not on a decision associated with a planning application.

It is estimated that the legal costs associated with the action of the Department to judicially review the decision of the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) in this case should not exceed £10,000.

Taxis: Taxi Act Team/Private Hire Taxi Companies Meetings

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the (i) number of meetings held between the Taxi Act Team and Private Hire Taxi companies, excluding the two largest companies; (ii) dates and times of same; (iii) agenda for each meeting; (iv) attendees, either individually or as representatives; and to place the minutes of the meetings in the Assembly library.

(AQW 28379/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Taxi Act Team has attended 24 meetings with Private Hire Taxi companies, excluding the two largest companies (denoted by number of drivers on respective operator licences) since March 2009. These meetings are in addition to ongoing engagement with taxi operators and other industry stakeholders via phone calls, emails and a number of formal public consultations, as well as supporting the Minister in engagement with industry representatives who asked to meet him.

The table below shows the dates and times of the meetings along with attendees. For data protection reasons it is not possible to list the names of individual industry attendees. In the main, these meetings did not have formal agendas, nor were minutes taken. However, where possible, I have outlined the nature of the topic to be discussed as contained in the industry request to meet. There are two meetings which have formal minutes and these will be placed, as requested, in the Assembly Library.

(ii) Dates and Times	(iii) Attendees	(iii) Agenda	(iv) Formal Minutes
10 March 2009 11am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Representatives from Eagle Taxis ■ Departmental Officials 	Meeting requested to discuss a number of issues including roof signs	No
28 April 2009 1pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Three representatives from North West Taxi Proprietors Association ■ Departmental Officials ■ Martina Anderson MLA 	Enforcement issues / problems, recruitment of staff, and enforcement team for the North West	No
26 March 2010 10.30am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Representatives from Coleraine Taxi Industry (unknown if public or private hire) ■ Departmental Officials ■ Mr McClarty MLA 	None	No
29 July 2010 11am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Representatives from Belfast Taxi Association ■ Departmental Officials 	Implementation timeline for Taxis Act	No
24 November 2010 10.30am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Representatives from Belfast Taxi Association ■ Alex Boyle ■ Sharon Clements ■ Claire McMillen ■ Richard Lee ■ Stephen Spratt ■ Ken Ramsey 	Update on timeline for Taxis Act and enforcement proposals	Yes
16 December 2010 2pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Two representatives from Swift Taxis ■ Claire Aldridge ■ Alex Boyle ■ Helen McIlwaine 	To discuss taximeters, non-company taxis picking up outside their depot premises	No

(ii) Dates and Times	(iii) Attendees	(iii) Agenda	(iv) Formal Minutes
20 January 2011 4pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Representatives from Armagh taxi industry (unknown if public or private hire) ■ Armagh Councillors (organisers of meeting) – nine invited to meeting ■ Sharon Clements ■ Claire Aldridge ■ Alex Boyle ■ Helen Mcllwaine 		No
25 January 2011 3pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Representatives from Taxi firms across East Belfast ■ Alex Boyle ■ Sharon Clement ■ Claire Aldridge ■ Helen Mcllwaine ■ Philip Robinson MLA 	Issue of recent consultation	No
3 March 2011 9am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Two Representatives from the American Stretched Limousine Industry ■ One Representative from the Wedding Car industry ■ Stephen Spratt ■ Sharon Clements ■ Claire Aldridge ■ Helen Mcllwaine ■ Elaine Colgan 	Wedding car regulation within new regime	No
7 March 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Three representatives from the National Association of Funeral Directors ■ Officials 	Funeral Cars regulation within new regime.	No
9 March 2011 10.30am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Two representatives from Belfast Taxis CIC ■ Trevor McCullough ■ Elaine Colgan ■ Sharon Clements ■ Alex Boyle ■ Claire Aldridge ■ Helen Mcllwaine 		No
23 March 2011 10am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Representatives from Newry Taxi Industry (unknown if public or private hire, but given the issues discussed it is most likely to have been public hire) ■ Sharon Clements ■ Claire Aldridge ■ Alex Boyle ■ Elaine Colgan 	Taxi issues in Newry including rank issues	No
14 April 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Representatives from the Wedding Car Industry ■ Alex Boyle 		No

(ii) Dates and Times	(iii) Attendees	(iii) Agenda	(iv) Formal Minutes
21 April 2011 10am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Representatives from Swift Taxis ■ Claire Aldridge ■ Elaine Colgan ■ Alex Boyle ■ Helen Mcllwaine 	Fee structure for Taxi Operator Licensing	No
22 June 2011 10am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nine representatives from Belfast Taxi Association ■ Three representatives from PSNI ■ Stephen Spratt ■ Richard Lee ■ Gerald Devine ■ Alex Boyle ■ Sharon Clements ■ Claire Aldridge ■ Helen Mcllwaine ■ Jim Dumigan ■ Elaine Colgan 	To voice frustration with delays in legislation, and to discuss enforcement issues	No
23 June 2011 1.30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Environment Committee MLAs ■ Representatives from public and private hire taxi industries from across Northern Ireland ■ Claire Aldridge ■ Elaine Colgan ■ Helen Mcllwaine ■ Sharon Clements ■ Deirdre Kenny 	To discuss Taxis Act implementation	See Hansard
29 June 2011 10am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Representative from the Chauffeur Industry ■ Alex Boyle ■ Elaine Colgan ■ Sharon Clements ■ Claire Aldridge 	Chauffeur Industry regulation within new regime.	No
1 Feb 2012 10.30am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nine representatives from Belfast Taxi Association ■ Sharon Clements ■ Elaine Colgan ■ Brenda McGilligan 	To discuss delay to Taxi Operator Licensing and associated fees and taximeters.	No
6 February 2012 10.30am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Two representatives from Swift Taxis ■ Sharon Clements ■ Elaine Colgan ■ Richard Lee 	To discuss proposals for taximeters and maximum fares	No
28 February 2012 10.30am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Representatives from Shankill Taxis (unknown if public or private hire) ■ Sharon Clements ■ Alex Boyle ■ Kyle Crutchley DRD ■ Trevor McCullough ■ Grace Hull 		No

(ii) Dates and Times	(iii) Attendees	(iii) Agenda	(iv) Formal Minutes
27 March 2012 10.30am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ One representative from the North West Taxi Association ■ Sharon Clements ■ Brenda McGilligan ■ Elaine Colgan 	To discuss taxi industry issues relating to Derry and City of Culture	No
8 May 2012 10.30am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Three representatives from Eagle Taxis ■ Brenda McGilligan ■ Elaine Colgan ■ Sharon Clements ■ Alex Boyle 	To discuss implications of taxi operator regulations and fee calculations	No
21 August 2012 2pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Four representatives from Belfast Taxi Association ■ Iain Greenway ■ Trevor Evans ■ Alex Boyle ■ Sharon Clements ■ Jeremy Logan ■ Richard Lee ■ Gerald Devine ■ Nigel McCandless 	None	Yes
21 May 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Four representatives from National Funeral Directors Association ■ Alex Boyle ■ Susan Stewart ■ Mark Allison ■ Elaine Colgan 	To discuss recent Special Occasion and Novelty Vehicle consultation and how the proposals would affect funeral industry	No
20 June 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Two representatives from Belfast CIC ■ Susan Stewart ■ Mark Allison ■ Elaine Colgan 	To discuss assistance being provided to Belfast Public Hire drivers	No
9 July 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Four representatives from Belfast Taxi Association ■ Alex Boyle ■ Mark Allison ■ Elaine Colgan 	To discuss postponement of single tier, enforcement and taximeter regulations	No
17 July 2013 10.30am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Three representatives from the Wedding Car Industry ■ Alex Boyle ■ Susan Stewart ■ Mark Allison 	To discuss an exemption for Wedding Cars	No

Councils: Judicial Reviews

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the (i) number of Judicial Reviews applied for by each council, in each of the last two years; (ii) number granted; and (iii) costs per council to date.

(AQW 28380/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The information requested is not held by the Department, and was obtained from individual councils.

The information received from 23 of the 26 councils indicates that there have not been any judicial reviews applied for by any council in each of the last two years. No response was received from North Down Borough Council, Newry and Mourne District Council or Armagh City and District Council.

Taxis: Revoked Licences

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27815/11-15, how many individual taxi depots or depot licence operators these figures represent in each year.

(AQW 28414/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Taxi Operator Licensing was introduced in September 2012. Transitional arrangements provided for the issue of Temporary Licences initially to enable taxi companies to continue to operate their business while the influx of applications for taxi operator licences was processed. Under these transitional arrangements, temporary licences did not include the affiliation of drivers or taxis. Full licences issued subsequently and included these affiliation details.

Therefore, it is not possible to associate revoked taxi driver licences with operators before March 2013.

Environment Agency: Woodland Trust/ObservaTREE

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department's Environment Agency will work in partnership with the Woodland Trust in support of their 'Observatree' initiative.

(AQW 28415/11-15)

Mr Durkan: NIEA works closely with the Woodland Trust to deliver woodland nature conservation across Northern Ireland and regards the Observatree initiative as an important means to engage the public with emerging plant health issues through the mechanism of citizen science.

NIEA will continue to support the Woodland Trust in order that it can deliver the Observatree initiative. In this regard Mr Patrick Cregg, the Woodland Trust Director for Northern Ireland, gave a presentation to Agency staff on 30th September 2013 in which he described the Observatree initiative as a key future priority for his organisation.

A meeting took place between Government Officials and the Woodland Trust on 9th October 2013 at which the Observatree initiative was discussed. An official from the Woodland Trust briefed those present on how they intended to implement the initiative in Northern Ireland and asked for the support of all present.

NIEA will continue to work with DARD Forest Service, DARD Plant Health, The Woodland Trust and other NGOs involved in the initiative to further all aspects of tree health in Northern Ireland.

Road Safety: Driving and Mobile Phones

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment what his Department is doing to highlight the dangers of mobile phone use whilst driving.

(AQW 28417/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department has a statutory duty to promote road safety, and within the context of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy, does this through a wide range of road safety education activities, including road safety public information campaigns and education programmes.

My Department has a number of on-going activities to highlight the dangers of using a mobile phone whilst driving. Action Measure 104 in the Road Safety Strategy sets out: "We will educate and inform people about the dangers of using any mobile phone while driving, including hands free kits."

DOE's hard-hitting campaign addressing driver carelessness and inattention, entitled "Moment", dramatises several circumstances where the driver is distracted; with the final scenario showing a driver checking his text, with fatal consequences. The core message is "One Lapse Can Last a Lifetime" and is underpinned by the law: "If you kill someone through careless driving, you could go to prison for up to five years." This campaign runs regularly and was recently aired in September.

This "Moment" campaign was recently re-edited to concentrate solely on the dangers of using a mobile phone whilst driving; with the added warning "You are one call away from being a killer." This first ran during the summer and has been incorporated into my Department's portfolio of road safety campaigns.

My Department has a suite of messages that make up its 'Crashed Lives' campaign. These consist of real-life accounts and include the story of 'Shannan' as told by her bereaved parents. Shannan died just a few months after passing her driving test and her story refers to speeding and mobile phone use. Shannan's story will run on television again during December, alongside other real-life accounts in the 'Crashed Lives' suite of ads.

Shannan's story has also recently been developed into an education pack, part of a 'Crashed Futures' package, for post-primary schools and youth organisations. This education pack focuses heavily on the consequences of using a mobile phone

and speeding while driving, and is both poignant and hard-hitting. This pack is also aimed at pre-drivers or those who have recently past their test.

My Department has also developed the "Moment" campaign into an education pack which focuses on the dangers and consequences of using a mobile phone whilst driving. The message here highlights the real danger of killing someone whilst distracted by a mobile phone, and explains the vigorous police investigation which follows a serious collision. Subsequently, the audience is also provided with a glimpse of life in a Young Offenders Centre, where young drivers would end up should they be found guilty of causing death by careless driving through the use of a mobile phone. This education pack is currently being piloted and will be ready to roll out to schools Northern Ireland wide in the coming months.

In DOE's recent advertisement, 'Excuses', launched last year, the need for wider road user responsibility is highlighted. The key message is that over 95% of crashes where someone is killed or seriously injured are due to human error. The ad depicts several tragic scenarios along with common excuses used by drivers and riders. In one scene the danger of using a mobile phone is referenced when the seriously injured victim recalls the driver's excuse as "The driver said he thought the text was important." This campaign is underpinned by the strap line "Kill the Excuses. It's no Accident!"

In early November, a new leaflet was completed which explains the dangers of using a mobile phone whilst driving and the consequences. The messages contained in the advertisements are supported by the advice in the Highway Code and clearly explain the dangers of such a distraction. The leaflet is available on request from DOE and to download online from NI Direct.

DOE also continues to support Allstate NI's 'X the Txt' programme which is delivered in over 30 schools across Northern Ireland each year. Supported by DOE and PSNI, 'X the Txt' is one of Allstate's Corporate Responsibility initiatives and the messages delivered are consistent DOE's messaging.

Advice on the use of mobile phones and in-vehicle technology is provided in the Highway Code under rule 149.

Research shows that driver carelessness and inattention is the biggest cause of road casualties in Northern Ireland; this includes using a mobile phone whilst driving. With this in mind, these activities play a part in our ambition of working towards zero road deaths in Northern Ireland.

This aspiration means that we do not accept that anyone should ever die on our roads; and the above initiatives support this by encouraging the community to adopt safer behaviours on the roads by not using a mobile phone whilst driving. All road users can sign up to a pledge supporting this at www.sharetheroadtozero.com

I recognise the continuing challenges of mobile phone use whilst driving and as such my Department will continue to address the issue through various activities.

Councils: Minority Groups

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will make local councils aware, prior to the new councils becoming operational, of the need to take account of minority groups when taking controversial or sensitive decisions which will be subject to a minority threshold vote in the new councils.

(AQW 28418/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Local Government Bill contains provisions for the protection of minority interests. It introduces a call-in procedure whereby 15% of the members of a council can request the reconsideration of a decision, or committee recommendation, either on the grounds of alleged procedural deficiencies, or that it would have a disproportionate adverse impact on a section of the community in the local government district. The Bill also introduces qualified majority voting whereby certain council decisions, to be specified in subordinate legislation, will have to be passed by 80% of the members present and voting – this will include where the adverse impact call-in has been used.

I intend, subject to the agreement of the Assembly, to apply these provisions to the incoming councils, during the shadow period. I am also ensuring that training on the operation of the new governance arrangements, including the call-in procedures, is provided to elected members, council officers and staff transferring from Executive departments and all other organisations, is provided to during the shadow period prior to the councils taking up their full range of responsibilities on 1 April 2015.

This will ensure that the ability to request the reconsideration of a decision, on the grounds of adverse impact on a minority community, and the qualified majority vote mechanism will be available to the new councils in advance of them becoming fully operational on 1 April 2015.

Taxis: Ravenhill Rugby Ground

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27856/11-15, how many test cases took place in this particular instance, including any issues of touting or plying for trade by private hire taxis.

(AQW 28436/11-15)

Mr Durkan: On 23 August, four private hire taxis were used by Driver and Vehicle Agency staff in order to gain a better understanding of the issues raised by Belfast public hire taxi representatives in respect of the provision of taxi services at Ravenhill rugby ground.

The purpose of the test purchases was to assess the manner in which taxi services were being delivered to inform the Department's consideration as to whether the services provided were compliant with the current tax legislation. The issue of touting or plying for trade was considered and legal clarification and advice sought from the Departmental Solicitors' Office. It was determined that the arrangements at that time at Ravenhill rugby ground did not constitute touting or plying for trade.

Taxis: Wheelchair Users

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27214/11-15, and in respect of service users with a disability and their representative organisations, (i) what concerns were expressed regarding Private Hire taxis operators charging enhanced fares for wheelchair access passengers compared to non-wheelchair access passengers; and (ii) whether this practice is a breach the Disability Discrimination Act.

(AQW 28439/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Since the outset of the review of the Northern Ireland taxi industry in 2005 representative groups for wheelchair users have raised the issue of the over-charging of the people they represent. This has also been an issue that the Equality Commission has raised with the Department and addressed with taxi operators.

The Equality Commission has advised that DDA legislation makes it unlawful for organisations such as transport service providers, including taxi operators, to discriminate against disabled people in the way in which they provide or do not provide their services. For instance, a taxi operator is not permitted to charge a wheelchair user more than a non-wheelchair user for the use of an accessible 7-seat taxi. However, if the operator charges more for the use of a 7-seat taxi regardless of whether the person is a wheelchair user, then this would not be deemed as less favourable treatment and is, therefore, not discriminatory.

You will wish to note that, upon the introduction of Regulations around the maximum taxi fare and taximeters in Northern Ireland, this position will improve. Firstly, the Regulations will make it an offence to charge more than the maximum fare, irrespective of what type of vehicle is being used. Secondly, given the requirement for all taxis in Northern Ireland to provide the customer with a printed receipt, all wheelchair users will be in a much better position to challenge instances of over-charging as they will have first hand evidence of the total price being levied.

It is intended that these measures will help reduce the likelihood of the overcharging of all users and allow action to be taken against the driver and their operator if this were to occur.

Planning Applications: Wind Turbines/Farms

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 22405/11-15, (i) how many of the applications in North Antrim have been approved; (ii) how this compares with the percentage passed in Northern Ireland; and (iii) to explain the rationale for any differential in these approval rates.

(AQW 28445/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Table 1 below provides figures for the number of approved applications between 2008/09 and 31 August 2013 in the North Antrim parliamentary constituency and for Northern Ireland as a whole, broken down to single wind turbines and wind farms.

While approval rates between the two areas are broadly similar, percentages based on a small number of cases, as in the case of North Antrim approval rates, are prone to significant random fluctuations. This makes it difficult to reach any firm conclusions when comparing with other more robust rates, such as at the approval rates at Northern Ireland level.

The number of single wind turbine and wind farm applications approved¹ between 2008/09 and 31st August 2013, on agricultural land², in North Antrim and the whole of Northern Ireland

		2008/2009		2009/2010		2010/2011		2011/2012		2012/2013		2013/2014 (to 31/08/2013)	
		Approved applications	Approval Rate	Approved applications	Approval Rate	Approved applications	Approval Rate	Approved applications	Approval Rate	Approved applications	Approval Rate	Approved applications	Approval Rate
North Antrim	Single wind turbine	11	79%	5	100%	11	100%	38	86%	47	94%	26	96%
	Wind farm	1	100%	1	100%	0	-	1	100%	3	100%	0	-
	Total	12	80%	6	100%	11	100%	39	87%	50	94%	26	96%
Northern Ireland	Single wind turbine	150	93%	52	80%	93	81%	238	80%	476	87%	157	91%
	Wind farm	8	89%	10	83%	10	100%	10	91%	10	67%	2	100%

	2008/2009		2009/2010		2010/2011		2011/2012		2012/2013		2013/2014 (to 31/08/2013)	
	Approved applications	Approval Rate	Approved applications	Approval Rate	Approved applications	Approval Rate	Approved applications	Approval Rate	Approved applications	Approval Rate	Approved applications	Approval Rate
Total	158	92%	62	81%	103	82%	248	81%	486	86%	159	91%

Notes:

- Decided applications may not have been received in the same time period. Therefore direct comparisons between these figures can not be made. Applications decided do not include withdrawn applications.
- The dataset was arrived at by taking the relevant applications from the Renewable energy database and then selecting those which intersect DARD farm polygons. British Oxygen Company: Waste

Mineral Extraction/Waste Disposal: Derry

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the news of the dumping of toxic waste from the British Oxygen Company around Lettershandoney village, County Londonderry, whether (i) any such sites exist in the (a) Mobuoy Road; (b) Fincairn Road; or (c) Rosstown Road areas; (ii) whether the mineral extraction and dumping which has taken place at Mobuoy Road has impacted on, or disturbed, any such sites; and (iii) whether he intends to order an assessment of the health risks to local residents and the wider population of Derry whose water supply is abstracted downstream of this area. (AQW 28461/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In 1996, a very detailed survey and assessment was carried out on behalf of the Department by an environmental consultancy group, ENTEC, on all known and potential BOC (British Oxygen Company) tarry waste disposal sites, comprising 29 sites in total. Of these 29 suspected sites, the presence of waste was confirmed at ten sites. This included two confirmed sites at Mobuoy Road and one confirmed site at Rosstown Road. There is one unconfirmed site at Fincairn Road (referred to as Fincairn Glen in the report). These sites are at the specific locations highlighted in the question.

Two tarry waste disposal sites are confirmed to be present on the Mobuoy Road, one is located at a waste management facility (closed landfill) and the other at a sandpit area. This material will have been disposed at these locations during the period of 1967 – 1973 when acetylene was produced by BOC at its Maydown plant.

My Department has no evidence to suggest that the mineral extraction and waste disposal activities have impacted or disturbed either of the Mobuoy Road tarry waste sites.

On the third point in this question, I have asked Derry City Council, as the statutory body for Environmental Health to undertake a review of the tarry waste disposal sites within its jurisdiction including site inspections to detect any statutory nuisances prejudicial to health.

This review will take account of the risk assessments and recommendations for each site in the 1996 ENTEC report and provide information regarding potential risks and the risk management actions taken and/or required. It will consider the water supplies for the area taking into account any potential contaminant pathways from the tarry waste pits. My Department, through NIEA, is committed to working with the Council, the Public Health Agency and others to determine if there any current risks to health and the wider environment.

Mineral Extraction: Environmental Impact Assessment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27976/11-15, whether subsequent enforcement proceedings initiated against the site affected by withdrawn retrospective planning application A/2009/0400/F, included an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening, as required by Regulation 22 of the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999; and whether that EIA screening was positive or negative. (AQW 28462/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Subsequent enforcement proceedings initiated against the site affected by A/2009/0400/F, in accordance with Regulation 22 of The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 1999 were subject to an EIA determination before an Enforcement Notice was issued and it was determined that the unauthorised development was EIA Development (Positive).

Pursuant to Regulation 22(2) the Enforcement Notice was accompanied by a Notice, referred to as a Regulation 22 Notice.

Planning Permission: Extant

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to define, in regard to the extraction and processing of minerals, what his Department considers an extant planning permission. (AQW 28465/11-15)

Mr Durkan: An extant planning permission is any planning permission which is still in existence ie has not expired.

Taxis: Ravenhill Rugby Ground

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27856/11-15, and in view of his Department's legal position on the provision of taxis prior and subsequent to the specified date and location deeming it compliant, to provide (i) the dates and times of all meetings, correspondence and communication with legal advisors; and (ii) copies of all legal advice requested and received.

(AQW 28485/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As a result of Departmental operational activity, officials sought and received legal advice on the operation of taxi services around Ravenhill Rugby Ground. As a result, it was determined that those services fell within the relevant legislation and therefore no offences were being committed.

The concept of legal professional privilege safeguards the rights of a person or organisation, including the Department, to obtain legal advice on a confidential basis and not to disclose such information in the interests of the wider administration of justice. It has been the settled view that in this context, legal advice is not disclosed and that privilege applies to the information sought in parts (i) and (ii) of the questions. The Department is, therefore, unwilling to waive the legal professional privilege vested in it, and provide the information sought.

Taxis: Fixed Penalty Notices

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27263/11-15, whether there is a cap on the number of Fixed Penalty Notices any one Private Hire Taxi driver or operative can receive before enhanced penalties are imposed, or court action instigated.

(AQW 28486/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Driver and Vehicle Agency's operational policy and guidance determines that a maximum of three Fixed Penalty Notices can be issued to a driver per encounter but only one of those can be for an endorsable offence. However, there is no cap on the number of Fixed Penalty Notices that can be issued to any one driver based on multiple encounters with enforcement staff. Prosecution files are generally reserved for more serious offences which cannot be dealt with by means of a Fixed Penalty Notice.

A holder of a taxi driver licence is required to be a fit and proper person to hold such a licence. While this requirement is not defined in law, the Department can review a taxi driver's conduct at any time and does so when a first application or application to renew a taxi driver licence is received. The imposition of an excessive number of fixed penalties would be one factor that could be taken into account when assessing fitness to hold a licence.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Advanced Certificate in Investigative Practice

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27716/11-15, to provide a copy of the relevant training module in respect of Driver and Vehicle Agency enforcement staff carrying out duties to detect illegal activities of taxi operators.

(AQW 28487/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The accredited 'Advanced Certificate in Investigative Practice' is designed to give staff, with an investigative role, the necessary knowledge and skills to competently carrying out their duties.

The certificate is modular based and the modules entitled 'Law, Evidence, Procedure and Best Practice' and 'Advanced Statement/Report writing' provide formal training to enforcement officers in gathering and submitting evidence to support investigations.

A copy of the brochure detailing the 'Advanced Certificate in Investigative Practice' has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008: Phased Implementation

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment on what evidence he based his decision to bring forward a staggered implementation of the Taxis Act.

(AQW 28499/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In June 2013 the Environment Committee indicated that they shared my predecessor's desire to implement in September 2014 the remaining elements of the Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, with the suite of changes coming into operation together, as a cohesive and coordinated package.

I asked for a series of meetings with industry representatives and consumer organisations in October, during which I was able to explore the issues surrounding implementation of the legislation on the various elements of the taxi industry.

Whilst keenly aware of the concerns of the industry, I am also conscious of the need to modernise and streamline the Northern Ireland taxi industry and the Environment Committee's expressed desire to see the new legislation operative as soon as possible.

Having listened to key stakeholders and taken the views of the Committee, I decided that a partially phased approach strikes the correct balance, being mindful of the benefits the changes will bring, alongside the additional costs being placed on taxi

operators. This decision will effectively stagger the cost impacts over an 18 month period whilst still creating the overarching legislative framework on time.

Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008: Implementation Costs

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department has taken to inform the taxi industry of the cost implications of the Taxis Act, since work began on the legislation.

(AQW 28500/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My officials have undertaken extensive engagement with taxi industry stakeholders since the initial review in 2005, including hosting roadshows around Northern Ireland, as it was recognised that the proposed changes would result in significant changes for the industry. Each consultation on the various aspects of the taxi reform programme contained, and sought comments on, a partial Regulatory Impact Assessment of the impact of the policy options in terms of the costs, benefits and risks of the proposals. Each of the consultations has been publicised widely in the taxi industry.

As the detailed outworkings of the new suite of Regulations have become clearer in the last 12 months, the Department has been working to mitigate the impact of these costs to the industry.

I acknowledge the importance of continued effective communication within the industry around all aspects of the implementation of the Act. The communication group which the Department has established as part of the implementation of the Taxis Act programme has been charged with planning the key messages required to be delivered to both the taxi industry and to the general public. The timing of all communication will be determined to ensure all stakeholders have the information they need in time to prepare for the changes.

Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008: Phased Implementation

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment what assurances he can give that Single Tier Licensing will not be included in the staggered implementation of the Taxis Act and that it will come into effect in September 2014.

(AQW 28501/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Since taking office, I have met with a range of taxi industry stakeholders and from those discussions, and engagement with the Environment Committee, decided on the staggered implementation of a number of specific elements in the taxi reform programme with the aim of spreading the financial impact of the measures on the taxi industry in the prevailing economic climate.

The key change from a system with two regulatory frameworks, private hire and public hire, to a system with a single regulatory framework in which all taxis will be included, and which allows all taxis to ply for hire, is a core strand of the programme and, as such, the timing of its introduction will not be affected.

My Department is working to ensure that the necessary legislation will be made and operative in September 2014 as planned.

Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008: Phased Implementation

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment, given that the full implementation of the Taxis Act seeks to provide a safe, fair and fit for purpose taxi industry, what investigations have been undertaken to discover the detrimental impact on consumers of further delays due to staggered implementation of the Act.

(AQW 28502/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I fully acknowledge that prompt implementation of the remainder of the provisions of the Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 will help provide a safe, fair and fit for purpose taxi industry and that is why I have continued with my predecessor's commitment to have the legislation in place in September 2014.

However, having listened to stakeholders since taking office, I have decided that a partially phased approach strikes the correct balance, being mindful of the benefits the changes will bring, alongside the additional costs being placed on taxi operators. I have listened carefully to representatives of consumer and disability groups in determining how to bring forward a timetable that strikes an appropriate balance; the representatives indicated to me that they understand the need for a balance, and are content with the proposals I have brought forward.

Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008: Communication

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department will take to inform the public when sections of the Taxis Act will be implemented, in order to avoid confusion among consumers.

(AQW 28503/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I acknowledge the importance of continued effective communication within the industry and to the public around all aspects of the implementation of the Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

As part of the implementation of the Taxis Act programme, a communication group has been established within my Department. This group has been charged with planning the key messages required to be delivered to both the taxi industry and to the general public. The timing of all communications will be determined so as to ensure all stakeholders have the information they need in time to prepare for the changes and to avoid confusion.

Taxis: Bus Lanes

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the Minister for Regional Development on the (i) implementation of Single Tier Licensing; and (ii) necessity of an 'all in or all out' policy for taxis in bus lanes to ensure the avoidance of confusion among consumers.

(AQW 28504/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I have not yet had the opportunity to discuss issues around taxis and bus lanes with Minister Kennedy since taking office. I have, however, requested a meeting and expect it to take place within the next few weeks, and the issues you have raised are likely to be on the agenda.

Taxis: Roof Signs

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment why some self-employed taxi drivers who have a valid operator licence, but sub-contract to larger firms, cannot operate unless they remove the illuminated roof signs of the sub-contracted company.

(AQW 28548/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Public Service Vehicles (Conditions and Fitness, Equipment and Use) Regulations 1995, Regulation 51, prescribes the requirements for Taxi Roof Signs.

The licensee or driver of every taxi used in standing or plying for hire or carrying passengers for hire must display a compliant roof sign on the roof of the taxi.

One of the aims of Taxi Operator Licensing is to make the link between the consumer's experience and the responsible operator stronger and more visible. To ensure that this link is realised it is important that we do not expect consumers to travel in a taxi with a roof-sign that does not reflect the operator with whom the journey is being taken.

It could be construed as misleading if a self-employed taxi driver carries a passenger under their own operator's licence whilst displaying the roof-sign of a different operator.

Therefore, where a person is trading under their own Taxi Operators Licence they must display their own trading name or the word taxi on the front of the sign and a phone number or the word taxi on the rear of the sign.

Where DVA Enforcement detect a taxi with a non compliant roof sign a number of sanctions are available ranging from advice and warning for a first minor non compliance to issuing a defect notice or a fixed penalty for repeated or blatant non compliance.

Planning Applications: Letters of Withdrawal

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27976/11-15, whether his Department acted lawfully in issuing formal letters of withdrawal on retrospective planning application A/2009/0400/F on 28 June 2010.

(AQW 28600/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As I confirmed in my previous answer the legal status of the application is that it is deemed refused. The withdrawal letters issued in June 2010 have no effect on that status.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Service: DFP Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many Civil Service posts existed in his Department on 1 January 2012 and 1 January 2013 at (i) Administrative Assistant; (ii) Administrative Officer; (iii) Executive Officer 2; (iv) Executive Officer 1; (v) Staff Officer; (vi) Deputy Principal; (vii) Grade 7; and (viii) Grade 6 levels, broken down by local council area.

(AQW 27954/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The table below details the information as at 1 January 2012 and excludes staff on a career break.

		Analogous Grade							
		(vii) Grade 7	(vi) Deputy Principal	(v) Staff Officer	(iv) Executive Officer 1	(iii) Executive Officer 2	(ii) Admin Officer	(i) Admin Assistant	
1 January 2012 (viii) Grade 6									
Local council area	Ballymena	2	2	5	6	8	5	33	2
	Ballymoney	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
	Belfast	68	182	385	421	428	367	656	188
	Carrickfergus	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0
	Craigavon	0	2	6	10	12	7	33	2
	Derry	1	6	13	12	22	27	85	11
Local council area	Down	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
	Lisburn	0	1	5	9	6	1	8	4
	North Down	1	30	55	41	18	32	33	9
	Omagh	0	1	7	8	27	6	25	2
Total		72	224	476	510	525	445	874	218

The table below details the information as at 1 January 2013 and excludes staff on a career break.

		Analogous Grade							
		(vii) Grade 7	(vi) Deputy Principal	(v) Staff Officer	(iv) Executive Officer 1	(iii) Executive Officer 2	(ii) Admin Officer	(i) Admin Assistant	
1 January 2013 (viii) Grade 6									
Local Council Area	Ballymena	0	2	4	6	8	6	34	5
	Belfast	66	182	397	435	394	351	658	201
	Carrickfergus	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Coleraine	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
	Craigavon	0	2	7	9	17	7	36	5
	Derry	1	7	14	14	22	25	76	17
	Down	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0
	Lisburn	0	1	5	8	7	1	8	4
	North Down	1	29	58	46	16	32	31	8
	Omagh	0	1	7	9	26	7	25	4
Total		68	225	492	527	497	431	868	244

Peace III: Pettigo/Tullyhommon/Termon Project

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel in relation to the PEACE III Pettigo Tullyhommon Termon Project, to detail (i) the total amount spent on the project; (ii) whether any of the work commissioned remains unfinished; and to provide (iii) an itemised breakdown of how the funds were allocated.

(AQW 28054/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The total PEACE III funding allocated to the Pettigo Tullyhommon Termon project is €8,123,841, as broken down in the following table:

Budget Item	Total Grant (€)
Capital costs	7,066,813

Budget Item	Total Grant (€)
Salaries and Wages	338,633
Goods and Services	76,538
Programme Costs	641,857

The total amount spent on the project to 31 October 2013 is €4,122,610. A number of elements supported in the allocated funding are yet to be completed.

Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal: Complaints

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel who has authority to investigate a complaint made against the Secretary to the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal.

(AQW 28179/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department of Finance and Personnel does not have a direct role in complaints made against any member of the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal. The Law Society of Northern Ireland has authority to consider a complaint against the Secretary if the complaint relates to conduct which as a solicitor is alleged to bring the solicitors' profession into disrepute. The Department also understands that a complaint in relation to how the Secretary discharges his or her duties can be made to the President of the Tribunal.

Law Society: Complaints

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel who has authority to investigate a formal complaint made by a solicitor and member of the Law Society against the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive of the Law Society,

(AQW 28180/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department understands that the Chief Executive of the Law Society has the authority to determine a formal complaint made by a solicitor and member of the Law Society about a member of the senior management team, including the Deputy Chief Executive.

In relation to a complaint made against the Chief Executive, the Department also understands that the Law Society has in place a process under which the President of the Society investigates and determines any complaint made against the Chief Executive.

Legal Profession: Complaints

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of whether the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive of the Law Society as well as the Secretariat to the Solicitors' Disciplinary Tribunal not being accountable to investigation, following formal complaints identified by their membership, undermines transparency and is not in the interest of continued self-regulation of the legal profession.

(AQW 28181/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department understands that both the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive of the Law Society are accountable to investigation by the Law Society by way of internal processes governed ultimately by the Law Society Council.

The Department further understands that the Secretary to the Tribunal is accountable to that Tribunal and may also be accountable to the Law Society as a member of the solicitors' branch of the legal profession in relation to his or her conduct.

In relation to the broader question of self-regulation of the legal profession, the Department is now consulting on a draft Legal Complaints and Regulation Bill with a view to bringing legislation for consideration by the Assembly. The Department will consider carefully all submissions regarding the regulatory framework for the legal profession.

Public Contracts: Zero Hours

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of employees that are on zero hour contracts arising from public contracts and public expenditure.

(AQW 28192/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I am unable to answer this question as DFP does not hold the information.

Economic Inactivity: Constituencies

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the economic inactivity rate for those aged 16-64, broken down by constituency area.

(AQW 28245/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Estimates of the numbers of economically inactive by Northern Ireland (NI) Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) are sourced from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) Local Area Database, with the most recent data available for January – December 2012. These estimates are based on the residency of an individual.

Please note that LFS estimates at PCA level are based on relatively small sample sizes and are subject to a higher degree of sampling variability than for NI level results.

The requested breakdown of economic inactivity by PCA is shown in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1: Economic Inactivity Rate by Parliamentary Constituency Area, January – December 2012

Parliamentary Constituency Area	Economic Inactivity Rate % of 16-64 Population
Belfast East	26.3%
Belfast North	30.0%
Belfast South	30.9%
Belfast West	37.3%
East Antrim	21.2%
East Londonderry	33.0%
Fermanagh South Tyrone	27.6%
Foyle	28.9%
Lagan Valley	23.2%
Mid Ulster	28.2%
Newry & Armagh	27.7%
North Antrim	26.5%
North Down	21.6%
South Antrim	19.3%
South Down	29.3%
Strangford	30.1%
Upper Bann	29.5%
West Tyrone	28.4%
Total (Northern Ireland)	27.6%

Source: Labour Force Survey, Local Area Database 2012

Ballymena/Ballymoney/Ballycastle: Vacant Non-domestic Properties

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) how many business premises are currently vacant in (a) Ballymena; (b) Ballymoney; and (c) Ballycastle; and (ii) how many premises in each of these towns are occupied by charities with rates exemption.

(AQW 28281/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Information is collated at district council and ward area level.

The numbers of vacant non-domestic properties in (a) Ballymena, (b) Ballymoney and (c) Moyle District Council areas at 31st October 2013 are (a) 495, (b) 212 and (c) 109 respectively.

Information for part (ii) is not available in the form requested. The numbers of non-domestic properties granted some element of rate exemption in (a) Ballymena, (b) Ballymoney and (c) Moyle District Council areas at 31st October 2013 are (a) 380, (b) 190, and (c) 176 respectively. These include churches, halls and some local authority properties which are for public use.

Ballymena/Ballymoney/Moyle Councils: Vacant Domestic Properties

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of vacant domestic properties, based on rating records, in the (i) Ballymena Borough Council; (ii) Ballymoney Borough Council; and (iii) Moyle District Council areas.

(AQW 28283/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: At 30th September 2013 a total of (i) 708, (ii) 396 and (iii) 460 domestic dwellings in the respective council areas of Ballymena Borough, Ballymoney Borough and Moyle District were recorded as vacant.

Public Sector Jobs: Constituencies

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of public sector jobs broken down by constituency. (AQW 28286/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The table attached details the total number of employee jobs in the public sector, broken down by each Parliamentary Constituency. The figures refer to the number of employee jobs at the 3rd September 2012.

Table 1: Northern Ireland Employee Jobs by Parliamentary Constituency Area

Parliamentary Constituency	Public Sector Employee Jobs
Belfast East	17,153
Belfast North	14,759
Belfast South	35,662
Belfast West	15,272
East Antrim	5,029
East Londonderry	8,877
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	9,335
Foyle	15,357
Lagan Valley	8,265
Mid Ulster	6,159
Newry And Armagh	12,899
North Antrim	9,585
North Down	5,623
South Antrim	13,294
South Down	6,989
Strangford	5,449
Upper Bann	13,525
West Tyrone	8,568
Total	211,800

Source: NI Business Register and Employment Survey, September 2012

Government Properties: Energy Performance Operational Rating

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of properties within the government estate that fall within each category of the Energy Performance Operational Rating from A-G; and (ii) the properties that are rated (a) G, (b) F and (c) E.

(AQW 28308/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department of Finance and Personnel manages 88 office accommodation properties which have Energy Performance Operational Rating.

Other NICS Departments manage their own specialised accommodation. I would advise the Member to contact each Department for relevant energy ratings.

In response to (i), the number of properties within each category is given in brackets after each rating: B(3), C(22), D(46), E(13), F(4) and G(0).

In response to (ii), the properties rated in categories E, F and G are named below:

E rating

- Banbridge Crown Building;
- Boaz House, Omagh;
- Castle Court (SSA), Belfast;
- Clare House, Belfast;
- Coleraine County Hall;
- Dungannon Crown Buildings;
- Falls Road SSA;
- Goodwood House, Belfast;
- Kilkeel Crown Building;
- Omagh County Hall;
- Omagh Crown Building;
- Rosepark House; and

- Strabane Crown Building.

F rating

- Craigantlet Buildings, Belfast;
- Marlborough House, Craigavon;
- Road Transport Licensing Division, Belfast; and
- Roads Service Office (Enniskillen at Castle Barracks)

Business: Turnover less than £500,000

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of businesses that have an annual turnover of less than £500,000 and/or employ fewer than fifty people; and (ii) the location of the sales and exports of these businesses, including the value and proportion of trade.

(AQW 28312/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: At March 2012 there were 69,275 Northern Ireland businesses which were either VAT registered or operating a PAYE scheme, with an annual turnover of less than £500,000 and/or employed fewer than fifty people.

Comprehensive information relating to the location of the sales and exports of these businesses is not available. However, information relating to the estimated value and location of sales for such businesses in the manufacturing sector only is provided in Table 1.

Information on the total value of tradable services exports from such companies in (i) Construction (ii) Manufacturing and (iii) a "High Export Potential" group is provided in Table 2. Broad destination data is available for the latter group only.

Table 1: Broad destination sales and percentage of total sales from Northern Ireland manufacturing businesses with fewer than 50 employees or with turnover less than £500,000 in 2011/12

	Value of Sales (£m)	% of sales
Total Sales	2,841	100.0
NI Sales	1,500	52.8
GB Sales	576	20.3
Export Sales	765	26.9
ROI Sales	444	15.6
Rest of Europe Sales	139	4.9
Rest of World Sales	182	6.4

Source: Manufacturing Sales and Exports Survey 2011/12, Economic & Labour Market Statistics Branch, NISRA

Footnotes:

- 1 Total sales includes all sales regardless of destination.
- 2 Exports include all sales outside the United Kingdom.

Table 2: 2011 NI tradable Services exports in the Construction and Manufacturing Sectors and High Export Potential businesses for companies with fewer than 50 employees and/or with turnover less than £500,000

	Value of Sales (£m)	% of sales
Construction	118.3	100.0
Manufacturing	13.8	100.0
High Export Potential Group:		
Export Sales	80.7	100.0
ROI Sales	32.1	39.8
Rest of Europe Sales	8.2	10.2
Rest of World Sales	40.4	50.1

Source: Exporting Northern Ireland Services 2011 (NISRA)

Employment: EU Nationals

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people currently employed are EU Nationals, excluding British Nationals.

(AQW 28335/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There were an estimated 1 39,000 EU nationals (excluding British Nationals) aged 16 and over in employment in Northern Ireland, based on respondents' reported nationality in the July - September 2013 Labour Force Survey (LFS), conducted by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

1 Since the LFS is a sample survey, these estimates are subject to sampling variation.

Forensic Science Northern Ireland: Procurement

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the requirements placed on Forensic Service Northern Ireland for open and competitive tendering for external service provision, post-devolution of Policing and Justice powers.

(AQW 28383/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Forensic Science Northern Ireland is subject to the Executive's Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy. It is required to carry out all procurement in line with this policy which is based on twelve guiding principles. These include Competitive Supply, which provides that procurement should be carried out by competition unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary, and Transparency which requires public bodies to ensure openness and clarity on procurement policy and its delivery.

The policy also requires departments and their sponsored bodies to carry out their procurement activities by means of a documented service level agreement (SLA) with a Centre of Procurement Expertise. The Department of Justice has an SLA with Central Procurement Directorate.

Business: Vacant Non-domestic Properties

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the vacancy rates in business premises in each of the largest thirty towns, broken down by percentage.

(AQW 28424/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The information requested is not available.

Employment: EU Nationals

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQO 4979/11-15, how many of the European Union Nationals in employment were born outside the United Kingdom.

(AQW 28427/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: In Northern Ireland there were an estimated 1 57,000 EU nationals aged 16 and over in employment that were born outside of the UK, based on respondents' reported nationality and country of birth in the July - September 2013 Labour Force Survey (LFS), conducted by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

1 Since the LFS is a sample survey, these estimates are subject to sampling variation.

Senior Civil Service: Gender Breakdown

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide a gender breakdown of senior civil servants.

(AQW 28429/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There are 215 substantive senior civil servants, of whom 136 are male and 79 are female.

Rating of Empty Homes: Sunset Park, Portstewart

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail any rating payments that have been made in respect of the vacant properties at Sunset Park, Portstewart since the rating of empty homes became operational in October 2011.

(AQW 28437/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There have been no rating payments made in respect of the vacant properties at Sunset Park, Portstewart, since the Rating of Empty Homes policy became operational in October 2011.

Salaries: Company Directors

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the average salary for company directors; and (ii) comparable information for Britain and the Republic of Ireland, for the most recent five years for which data is available.

(AQW 28441/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Information on average salary for Corporate Managers and Directors in the private sector in Northern Ireland and the UK is provided in the attached table, from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) conducted by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

The information provided uses the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) for all Corporate Managers and Directors. It is not possible to disaggregate this information further to provide separate estimates for company directors due to sample size constraints in the ASHE.

Comparable information is not available for the Republic of Ireland.

Table: Median¹ Annual Gross pay for all² private sector Corporate Managers and Directors³ - 2008-2012

Year	Northern Ireland (£)	United Kingdom (£)
2008	28,010	37,056
2009	28,795	37,443
2010	27,544	37,583
2011	28,434	37,000
2012	28,921	38,242

Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)⁴

- 1 The median is the value of earnings below which 50% of employees fall.
- 2 Employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay-period was not affected by absence.
- 3 Job description is based on Standard Occupational Classification code 11. This definition changed from 'Corporate Managers' for 2008-2010 to 'Corporate Managers and Directors' for 2011-2012.
- 4 The ASHE is based on a 1% sample of employee jobs taken from HM Revenue and Customs pay as you earn (PAYE) records and the reported estimates therefore have an associated degree of sampling error.

Note: The heavy black line in the table indicates discontinuities arising from methodological changes and care should be taken when making comparisons between such periods (see background notes in http://www.detini.gov.uk/northern_ireland_ashe_2012_bulletin-revised_22-11-12.pdf).

Senior Civil Service: Cars

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number and make of the cars available for use by senior civil servants; (ii) the annual cost; and (iii) the conditions upon which the cars are made available.
(AQW 28442/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Each department is responsible for the management of their own cars for official use.

The Department of Finance and Personnel has two Skoda Superb cars for official use. When not required for Ministerial business, cars are available for other Departmental use including the transport of officials. It is not possible to disaggregate these costs from normal Ministerial use.

Autism: DFP Buildings

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what provision is made within his departmental buildings to receive visitors diagnosed with autism and to cater for their needs.
(AQW 28513/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Department has not made any specific provision within DFP buildings in regard to receiving visitors diagnosed with autism.

Narrow Water Bridge: DPF Meetings

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of meetings; and (ii) attendees at the meetings to discuss funding for the Narrow Water Bridge project.
(AQW 28531/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I have not had any meetings with either Ministers, or officials, to discuss funding for the Narrow Water Bridge project.

G8 Summit: Expenditure

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide a full breakdown on all expenditure incurred as a result of the G8 Summit taking place in Fermanagh, broken down by (i) department; (ii) arm's length body; and the purpose of the spend.
(AQW 28559/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: My Department does not hold information on all expenditure incurred in respect of the G8 event. Detail on actual spend incurred by the NI Executive should be requested from the relevant departments involved with delivering the G8 Summit.

Special EU Programmes Body: Religious Background of Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of staff employed by the Special EU Programmes Body, broken down by religion.

(AQW 28563/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The religious background of staff currently employed by the Special EU Programmes body is:

Protestant	19
Roman Catholic	33
Other	3

These figures apply only to staff employed in the SEUPB's Belfast and Omagh offices. The SEUPB is not legislatively required to monitor the community background of staff employed in its Monaghan office.

Grocery Stores: Figures

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of grocery shops broken down by council area in each of the last fifteen years.

(AQW 28621/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The number of grocery stores for Northern Ireland and each Local Government District, in September of each year from 2006 to 2013, is the attached table.

This data has been sourced from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR). The IDBR contains information on all businesses in the United Kingdom which are either VAT registered or operating a PAYE scheme.

IDBR data is only available by Local Government District for the last 8 years.

Table: Number of Grocery Stores in Northern Ireland by Local Government District, September 2006 –September 2013

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Northern Ireland	1525	1540	1520	1435	1420	1440	1375	1385
Antrim	35	35	30	30	30	35	30	30
Ards	55	50	55	45	50	50	45	45
Armagh	45	45	45	40	40	40	40	40
Ballymena	55	60	55	60	55	60	55	50
Ballymoney	25	25	30	25	20	20	20	20
Banbridge	30	30	30	30	30	35	30	35
Belfast	310	320	285	275	275	275	260	270
Carrickfergus	30	25	30	35	30	30	25	30
Castlereagh	40	45	45	40	35	35	35	35
Coleraine	50	45	50	45	45	45	45	45
Cookstown	35	35	40	35	30	30	30	30
Craigavon	70	70	65	60	60	65	65	60
Derry	85	95	85	95	90	95	95	95
Down	60	60	60	55	60	55	60	60
Dungannon	55	55	65	55	55	60	55	55
Fermanagh	75	70	60	65	65	65	65	65
Larne	25	25	35	30	25	25	25	25
Limavady	30	30	25	20	25	30	25	25
Lisburn	65	65	70	60	60	60	55	55
Magherafelt	35	35	35	30	35	35	35	35

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Moyle	25	25	25	25	25	20	20	20
Newry & Mourne	75	80	85	80	80	75	75	75
Newtownabbey	50	55	55	60	60	60	55	60
North Down	45	50	45	35	40	45	45	40
Omagh	60	55	55	55	50	50	45	45
Strabane	55	55	50	50	50	55	45	45

Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register, September 2006-2013

Notes:

- 1 Grocery Stores have been defined using the UK Standard Industrial Classification 2007 (UK SIC 07) code: 47110 for 2008-2013. For 2006-2007 the equivalent UK SIC 2003 codes: 52111, 52112 and 52113 have been used.
- 2 In these tables each local site belonging to a business has been counted independently and only sites with the relevant SIC code have been included. Local sites have been assigned to districts based on their postcode.
- 3 Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 and thus may not add to totals.

Home Civil Service/Northern Ireland Civil Service: Salaries

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the salary of Administrative Officers in the Northern Ireland Civil Service; and (ii) the salary of the equivalent Officers in the Home Civil Service in Great Britain, working outside Greater London.

(AQW 28778/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: This information is available in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's statistical bulletin entitled: Pay Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2012: http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/Pay_Statistics_for_the_NICS_2012.pdf.

The next pay bulletin is expected in December.

Home Civil Service/Northern Ireland Civil Service: Salaries

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the salary of Principals in the Northern Ireland Civil Service; and (ii) the salary of the equivalent grade in the Home Civil Service in Great Britain, working outside Greater London.

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Mr Hamilton: This information is available in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's statistical bulletin entitled: Pay Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2012: http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/Pay_Statistics_for_the_NICS_2012.pdf.

The next pay bulletin is expected in December.

Executive: Cash Reserve

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any discussions he has held with his UK and Welsh counterparts concerning the idea of a "cash reserve" for the Northern Ireland Executive, similar to that announced for the Welsh Assembly Government by the UK Government on 18 November 2013.

(AQW 28780/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The concept of the Welsh cash reserve is to provide a mechanism to manage the volatility of any new devolved tax revenue streams. The flexibility for the NI Executive to save surplus revenues in a cash reserve is, therefore, one of the options that will need to be considered should responsibility for corporation tax be devolved.

Although the impact on the Block Grant of a devolved and reduced rate of corporation tax was examined at a high level by the Joint Ministerial Working Group on Rebalancing the NI Economy, I have not yet had any detailed discussions on specific mechanisms to manage volatility. Detailed discussions will only take place once there is a greater clarity on the expected design of a devolved corporation tax regime and the UK Government has made its decision on whether to transfer responsibility for the tax.

Welfare Reform Bill: Financial Penalties

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the financial position in January 2014, following comments by the Minister of State, Mike Penning MP, regarding imminent reductions of £5 million per month from the block grant while welfare reform legislation remains unresolved.

(AQW 28846/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I am increasingly alarmed by the ongoing delay in moving forward the Northern Ireland Welfare Reform Bill. Indeed, I met with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 18th November where he reinforced his intention to impose penalties should the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly not progress the Welfare Reform Bill.

It is now critical that the Welfare Reform Bill is progressed. Failure to do so will have grave financial consequences for the Northern Ireland Executive both in this financial year and beyond. Without progress in the Welfare Reform Bill in this financial year, the Executive would be faced with a £15 million pressure

in its January Monitoring Round. This would be to the detriment of public services here.

Barnett Consequentials

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the Barnett consequentials which follow as a result of the spending by the UK Department of Education in England on the Lessons from Auschwitz programme.
(AQW 28927/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Barnett Formula ensures the Northern Ireland Executive receives a population-based proportion of changes in planned spending on comparable Government services in England, England and Wales or Great Britain as appropriate.

This means that the Northern Ireland administration would have received Barnett consequentials associated with allocations to the Department of Education in England in past UK Spending Reviews. Importantly, funding allocated through the Barnett Formula is unhypothecated, meaning it is for allocation locally in line with the Northern Ireland Executive's priorities.

Fiscal Powers: Review

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update of the review of Fiscal Powers.
(AQO 5177/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: DFP continues to undertake a scoping exercise to examine the Scottish Calman and Welsh Silk Commission reports, and the positions taken in respect of the possible devolution of each individual tax or duty in those.

Since this question was last asked, the UK Government have published their full response to the Silk Commission. It confirms the devolution of Landfill Tax and Stamp Duty Land Tax. The UK Government made it clear that they will not agree to all requests for tax devolution by refusing the devolution of direct long haul Air Passenger Duty to the Welsh Government.

North/South Ministerial Council: DFP Update

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on his recent engagement with his counterpart at the North South Ministerial Council.
(AQO 5175/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The deputy First Minister gave a statement in the Assembly on the 12th November updating members on the last North South Ministerial Council meeting which I attended on 8th November.

The main plenary session, which was also attended by both Michael Noonan (Minister for Finance) and Brendan Howlin (Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform), focused on our shared economic challenges.

I also met separately with Brendan Howlin. We had no formal agenda for that and discussions focussed mainly on the economy, the recent Irish budget, the public expenditure outlook and opportunities for new approaches to public sector reform.

Financial Transactions Capital

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures he will take to prevent the Executive's 2013-14 allocation of Financial Transaction Capital being surrendered back to Her Majesty's Treasury should the allocation not be spent.
(AQO 5182/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Over recent months I have, along with my Scottish and Welsh colleagues, been lobbying the Chief Secretary to the Treasury for End Year Flexibility in respect of Financial Transactions Capital. I am pleased to confirm that such a scheme has now been agreed amongst Treasury and the Devolved Administrations.

This scheme will allow the Northern Ireland Executive flexibility to carry forward unspent Financial Transactions Capital funding across each of the next two financial years. This flexibility amounts to 20% carry forward of unused Financial Transactions Capital funding into 2014-15 and 10% into 2015-16. This will ensure that we have more time to

develop suitable schemes and will significantly reduce the risk of any funding being surrendered to Her Majesty's Treasury.

A5: Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the current position on the A5 monies.
(AQO 5183/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Executive took swift action to address the ongoing delay to the A5 road project. In my Statement to the Assembly on 21 October I detailed a significant reallocation of funding which had become available as a result of, amongst other things, the delay to the A5 project.

An easement of £115 million in relation to the A5 project contributed to resources available, which enabled allocations of some £177 million to be announced for 2014-15. These allocations will enhance our long term economic growth prospects and will also provide an immediate boost for our construction sector.

South Down: Vacant Non-domestic Properties

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many business premises are vacant in each council area in South Down.

(AQO 5184/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: At 31st October 2013, the numbers of vacant non-domestic properties in Banbridge, Down and Newry & Mourne District Council were (i) 373, (ii) 549 and (iii) 909 respectively.

European Investment Bank

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the role that the European Investment Bank has in local investment.

(AQO 5185/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I believe that there are opportunities within Northern Ireland to avail of funding from the European Investment Bank and I am keen to explore how this may help finance regional infrastructure improvements.

Public Contracts: Living Wage

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, given the gap between static wage levels and rising household overheads, what consideration he has given to making the use of a living wage a requirement of public sector contracts.

(AQO 5186/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department has looked in detail at whether the payment of a living wage could be made a condition of public contracts. While the payment of a living wage can be encouraged the introduction of such a requirement within public sector contracts would present a significant legal risk.

This was confirmed by the European Commission in responding to a request for clarification from the Scottish Government. The Commission stated that any requirement to pay a living wage is unlikely to be compatible with European legislation.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the study on the impact of a change in Air Passenger Duty Rates.

(AQO 5187/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Firstly, I would point out to the Member that this study is much broader than he suggests and is considering what more can be done by the Executive to improve our air connectivity including both APD and non-APD measures.

The first scoping study stage is now complete. It examined what research has already been undertaken in this area, and in particular, in relation to the factors that influence airlines in route planning decision making, and the opportunities and barriers that might exist in this regard. It also identified the information available on Northern Ireland's relative connectivity.

Welfare Reform Bill: Financial Penalties

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he is taking to manage any reduction in the £5 million a month penalty, starting January 2014 should the Executive fail to agree a welfare reform package.

(AQO 5188/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I met with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 18th November where he reinforced his intention to impose penalties should the Northern Ireland Executive and this Assembly not progress the Welfare Reform Bill. I cannot emphasize enough the critical importance of now moving the Welfare Reform Bill forward.

The January Monitoring Round will provide an opportunity for the Executive to strategically assess all of the pressures and easements in the current financial year, including the potential impact of any penalties applied by Her Majesty's Treasury for delay to welfare reforms locally.

'Report on DCAL: Management of Major Capital Projects'

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action he has taken in response to the Public Accounts Committee Report on Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Management of Major Capital Projects.

(AQO 5189/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Both I, and separately the Minister for the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL), together with our officials are in the process of considering the Committee's report, and in line with accepted practice a response, in the form of a Memorandum of Reply, will be presented to the Assembly in the New Year.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Prisoners: Health and Social Care Transfers

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what supervised facilities are available to support offenders with complex needs such as alcoholism, substance abuse and learning difficulties once they leave prison. (AQW 28055/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Once prisoners leave custody, the responsibility for their health and social care transfers from prison healthcare staff in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SET) to the various HSC professional teams in the community across all five HSC Trusts. Prison healthcare staff in the SET liaise fully with their community colleagues to share all appropriate health and social care information prior to discharge.

In addition to the transfer arrangements between the HSC Trusts, the Department of Justice (DoJ) and a range of other organisations and agencies, work together to support offenders with complex needs such as alcoholism, substance abuse and learning difficulties, prior to and on their release from prison.

The DoJ and other criminal justice organisations are major contributors to the outcomes defined in my Department's New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs 2011-16. These outcomes include the development of a care pathway for prisoners leaving prison to return to the community and discharge procedures, involving both in-prison health services and voluntary and community sector agencies, to ensure that on release, prisoners have access to services and support across Northern Ireland.

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) currently delivers substance misuse interventions for those under its supervision. PBNI also funds a number of organisations across Northern Ireland which provide support services for addiction problems. If deemed appropriate, offenders will be referred to these services on release from prison.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Stairlift Contracts

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Northern Health and Social Care Trust is stipulating that those tendering to supply domestic stairlifts must have a notation figure of £500,000. (AQW 28369/11-15)

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy requires that Departments and their arms length bodies undertake a financial check as part of the supplier evaluation process. For construction contracts this financial check is carried out using Constructionline, the UK's register of construction related contractors and consultants prequalified to work for public sector clients.

In order to be eligible to tender for a project an Economic Operator's Constructionline Category Value (notation for a particular category of work) must be at least equal to the projected annual spend under the contract. This will be assessed on a pass/fail basis (e.g. a £10m project over 24 months would require a Category Value of £5m).

The number and value of stair lift installations is driven by service demand within the Northern Health & Social Care Trust (NHSCT) which is not known at the outset of the contract period. The NHSCT calculated the cost based on spend over the two years of the previous contract and added a 5% uplift to reflect the potential increase in stair lift installations as a result of the introduction of the "Transforming Your Care" Initiative which has an aim of treating more people in domestic settings (see table on next page).

NHSCT Stair Lift Contract Spend Calculation

July 2011 – June 2012	£551,753.89
July 2012 – June 2013	£401,764.50
Sub - Total	£953,518.39
5% Uplift due to TYC Initiative (Assumed)	£47,675.92
Projected Total Spend Over Two Years of Contract	£1,001,194.31
Projected Annual Spend	£500,597.16
Constructionline Financial Notation	£500,000.00

Anorexia

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the number of inpatients diagnosed with anorexia in each year since 2007; (ii) to detail the treatment plan for inpatients; and (iii) whether there are any specific facilities and specially trained medical and support staff.

(AQW 28381/11-15)

Mr Poots: Inpatients diagnosed with anorexia

The number of inpatient admissions by HSC Trust in Northern Ireland with a diagnosis of anorexic nervosa in each of the last six years is detailed in the table below. This is based on the number of admissions, not the number of patients.

HSC Trust	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Belfast	11	21	15	14	18	18
South Eastern	10	15	12	20	19	19
Northern	12	12	9	15	13	9
Southern	2	6	3	5	13	19
Western	15	7	10	18	7	11
NI Total	50	61	49	72	70	76

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

Treatment Plan for inpatients

Depending on the patient's clinical presentation individualised care plans are developed. The following interventions are available:

- A comprehensive bio psychosocial assessment.
- Containment and reduction of any compensatory behaviours.
- Management of any co-existing psychiatric or medical problems.
- Specialist Dietetic and medical input overseeing the re-establishment of a normal diet and weight regain (re-feeding).
- Psychological input from nursing staff.
- Special nursing observations.
- Specific input from a ward based Occupational Therapist
- Assessment and advice from Physiotherapy when deemed appropriate will be requested.
- On-going weekly therapy with the dedicated Eating Disorder Practitioner from the eating disorder service.
- Weekly discussion with Eating Disorder Team in attendance at ward based Multidisciplinary Meeting. The ward team are also invited to the Eating Disorder team meeting to discuss care planning.

Facilities and specially trained medical and support staff

Eating Disorder Services are provided by specialist community-based teams in each Health & Social Care Trust area. The Belfast Trust provides these services for the South Eastern Trust. In addition to the Health Service provision a number of voluntary and community groups also provide valuable support services.

The Eating Disorder teams include Consultant Psychiatrists, Eating Therapists and Dieticians.

There are no specialised inpatient facilities for the treatment of Anorexia Nervosa in Northern Ireland. Adult inpatient treatment for eating disorders is provided in each Trust area in beds managed by specially trained medical/psychiatric staff, supported on an in-reach basis by staff from community based eating disorder teams.

If a patient requires intense specialist treatment for anorexia Trusts can access beds in England, Scotland and Ireland through the Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) process. Developments in local Eating Disorder Services in recent years have resulted in a significant reduction in the number of ECRs for eating disorders.

Inpatient care for children and adolescents with eating disorders is provided at Beechcroft, the Regional Child and Adolescent Mental Health Inpatient Unit, which has a consultant who specialises in the treatment of eating disorders.

Staff, including ward based mental health nursing staff, have received a range of training including Queens University Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), CBT for eating disorders (CBT-E), the University of Ulster certificate in Eating Disorders, the Beeches Unit of Management Introduction to Eating Disorders.

Dementia Strategy

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline each Health and Social Care Trust's programme for dementia diagnosis; and how each programme is in line with the Dementia Strategy.

(AQW 28421/11-15)

Mr Poots: The regional dementia strategy, which I published in November 2011, addresses the importance of early diagnosis, and includes an action for the HSC Board in collaboration with the Public Health Agency and HSC Trusts to draw up criteria and clear protocols for referral from GP practices to memory services. This will assist in the assessment and diagnosis of dementia. Work is underway to complete this action, as part of the wider implementation of the strategy.

A multi-disciplinary / agency working group has been established by the HSC Board to carry forward this work. It should also be noted that the additional funding that was secured last September was directed towards service enhancement / development in memory services. This group expects to complete the first phase of its work in relation to care pathways and service standards by the end of this year. Phase 2 will address issues related to training, information and support.

East Antrim: Prostate Cancer Incidence

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will carry out an investigation into the reasons why East Antrim is high risk area for prostate cancer; and to publish the findings.

(AQW 28422/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised that the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry at Queen's University Belfast has provided a report that determines that the incidence of prostate cancer in the East Antrim Coastal area is within the range which could be attributed to natural variation, and would therefore not meet the criteria to be considered a cancer cluster.

However, the incidence rate is at the upper end of the range and further examination will take place when more up to date data becomes available. The data used for the report mentioned above was based on figures for 2007 – 2011.

The Northern Ireland Cancer Registry report is attached for reference.

Royal Victoria Hospital: X-rays

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are awaiting x-ray results from the Royal Hospital, Belfast.

(AQW 28484/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been informed by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust that the information is not available in the format requested.

The Belfast Trust has provided the number of x-ray examinations awaiting a report, which they advise is the same as the number of reports for which people are awaiting x-ray results. The reporting turnaround time is the interval between the completion of the diagnostic test and the results of that test being verified or dispatched to the referring clinician.

The number of x-ray examinations awaiting a report within the Royal Victoria Hospital radiology department, as at week commencing Monday 18th November 2013, was 1,771.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Relocation of Services

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he will take to ensure there is not a gap in specialist mental health provision between the closure of facilities in Downpatrick and the commencement of specialist provision at the Ulster Hospital.

(AQW 28516/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Trust is not yet at the stage of developing detailed plans, but in doing so, they will ensure that the process is as inclusive as possible to make the transition as seamless as practicable. This will include service users and carers; community and hospital clinicians and managers.

The proposed development at the Ulster Hospital will comprise 72 acute inpatient beds and 4 psychiatric intensive care beds, which matches current bed capacity. Given that the remodelling of beds has been achieved, the Trust does not anticipate any difficulties in this regard and does not envisage the closure of beds in the lead up to this transition.

The South Eastern Trust's previous successful management of the relocation of acute mental health services from Ards Hospital to the Ulster Hospital, and from the Downshire Hospital to the new Downe Hospital will be brought to bear with this future transition.

Allergy NI: Funding

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration he has given to providing financial support from his departmental budget to Allergy NI; and what improvements he is making in Health Service allergy service provision.

(AQW 28522/11-15)

Mr Poots: Allergy NI is a registered local charity and receives no financial support from my Department. My Department has no plans at present to provide core funding to voluntary organisations in respect of new applications for funding.

The Health and Social Care Board, which commissions services on behalf of the Health Service in Northern Ireland, has just completed an in-depth assessment of need for paediatric asthma, allergy and anaphylaxis services as part of the local implementation of recent NICE guidance which has been issued on food allergy (CG116) and anaphylaxis (CG134).

The Board has allocated over £400k recurrently to these services. Much of this funding will meet the needs of children with allergy specifically. This funding has already been allocated to the Health and Social Care Trusts for them to start addressing waiting lists.

Derry: DHSSPS Decentralisation

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to 27955/11-15, to detail (i) why there are only 2 civil servants from his Department based in Derry and (ii) whether he intends to decentralise any functions to Derry to aid economic growth in the North West region.

(AQW 28538/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Under the Review of Public Administration, 31 DHSSPS posts based in the Derry City Council area (Waterside House) were permanently transferred to the Health and Social Care (HSC) Business Services Organisation on 1 April 2009

In accordance with the DHSSPS RPA Staff Transfer Scheme, civil servants working in these posts were transferred to the employment of the HSC under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) Regulations 2006, while remaining in the same location. Two posts were not TUPE transferred and remain DHSSPS posts.

- (ii) My Department has no plans to relocate any posts to the North West region.

Allergy NI: Funding

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what improvements are planned for patients who suffer from allergies and whether extra funding will be provided to Allergy NI.

(AQW 28567/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board, which commissions services on behalf of the Health Service in Northern Ireland, has just completed an in-depth assessment of need for paediatric asthma, allergy and anaphylaxis services as part of the local implementation of recent NICE guidance which has been issued on food allergy (CG116) and anaphylaxis (CG134).

The Board has allocated over £400k recurrently to these services. Much of this funding will meet the needs of children with allergy specifically. This funding has already been allocated to the Health and Social Care Trusts for them to start addressing waiting lists.

Allergy NI is a registered local charity and receives no financial support from my Department. My Department has no plans at present to provide core funding to Allergy NI.

Fermanagh: Health and Care Centres

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any proposed capital improvements to primary care facilities in County Fermanagh.

(AQW 28582/11-15)

Mr Poots: The consultation document on 'Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action' included an illustrative model of 'hub and spoke' Health and Care Centres. These are proposed primary care facilities across the region, including County Fermanagh.

The Health and Social Care Board, through its Local Commissioning Groups and in association with the HSC Trusts, has been undertaking detailed analysis to determine the most appropriate locations for the various hubs and spokes and identify priorities for the associated primary care infrastructure requirements. This work is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

Following that process, an exercise will be undertaken to develop business cases and prioritise within the available funding which will determine how work on individual hubs and spokes will progress.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Smear Test Results

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average time taken to receive the results of a smear test in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 28591/11-15)

Mr Poots: Smears from women resident in the South Eastern Trust area are sent to the Cytology Laboratory in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust for analysis. It is not possible to provide the information solely for women in the South Eastern Trust Health and Social Care Trust and the table below details the turnaround time for all smear tests sent to the Belfast Cytology Laboratory in September 2013.

Turnaround Time	Number Of Samples	%
0-2 Weeks	3053	90%
3-4 Weeks	309	9%
5-6 Weeks	12	0%
7-8 Weeks	1	0%
9 Weeks or more	0	0%

The nationally agreed guidelines for cervical smear tests is 80% of samples reported within 4 weeks from time sample is taken. The latest statistics for the month of September 2013 for all smear tests sent to the Belfast City Laboratory reflects 99% samples reported within 4 weeks, and 90% of results are generated within 2 weeks.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Cancelled Operations

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many operations have been cancelled in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last four years.

(AQW 28593/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of operations cancelled in the South Eastern Trust is presented in the table below. South Eastern Trust have advised that it has not been possible to provide 2009/10 data as the data were collected from August 2009 only.

Cancelled operations by reason of cancellation, 2010/11 – 2012/13

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Cancellations for non-clinical reasons	549	490	666
Cancellations for clinical reasons	715	798	928
Patient cancellation	2,604	2,755	2,812
Total cancellations	3,868	4,043	4,406
Total scheduled operations	29,462	32,297	33,054

Source: South Eastern Trust

Bangor Community Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why, and for how long, the Bangor Minor Injuries Unit will be closed at weekends.

(AQW 28594/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that this is a temporary measure due to a staff shortage. The Trust is exploring a number of options to address this. In the meantime, the minor injuries unit will be open from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. The Trust has advised that the temporary arrangement will remain in place until staff numbers return to a level where the service can be delivered over seven days.

Dental Specialty: Consultants

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 28148/11-15, to detail the number of consultants with a dentistry speciality based at (i) Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children; (ii) School of Dentistry; (iii) Antrim Area Hospital; (iv) Braid Valley Hospital; (v) Causeway Hospital; (vi) Mid-Ulster Hospital; (vii) Ulster Hospital; (viii) Craigavon Area Hospital; (ix) Daisy Hill Hospital; (x) Altnagelvin Hospital; and (xi) the South West Acute Hospital.

(AQW 28610/11-15)

Mr Poots: Headcount and whole-time equivalent numbers for consultants with a dental speciality based in the specified hospitals are shown in the table below. These figures include only consultants with a defined whole-time equivalent at the relevant hospital; other services are detailed in the notes below.

Hospital	Headcount	Whole-time Equivalent
Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children 1	3	1.5
School of Dentistry ¹	19	12.2

Hospital	Headcount	Whole-time Equivalent
Antrim Area Hospital ²	1 (trust-wide in NSCHT, including Causeway) Excludes visiting consultants see note below.	1.0
Braid Valley Hospital ²		
Mid-Ulster Hospital ²		
Causeway Hospital	1 (visiting consultant)	0.2
Ulster Hospital	4	4.0
Craigavon Area Hospital ^{3,4}	1 (excludes visiting consultant see note below)	1.0
Daisy Hill Hospital ³	0 (excludes visiting consultant see note below)	0.0
Altnagelvin Hospital	5	3.8
South West Acute Hospital	2 (including 1 visiting consultant)	0.4 (including 0.2 visiting consultant)

Source: Health & Social Care Trusts

Notes

- 1 RBHSC and School of Dentistry figures include joint appointments with Queens University Belfast, hence the reduced whole-time equivalent.
- 2 Not included in the Northern Trust figures are visiting Consultants within the Oral Surgery specialty from South Eastern HSC Trust covering Antrim, Braid Valley and Mid Ulster Hospitals.
- 3 Daisy Hill and Craigavon Hospitals are also served by two visiting Consultant Oral-Maxillofacial Surgeons from the South Eastern Trust, both providing a full day each week.
- 4 A visiting Consultant in Paediatric Dentistry from the Belfast Trust also works at Craigavon Area Hospital for one day every second week.

Housing Executive Applications: Medical Records

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a medical professional may charge a patient a fee to provide medical records in connection with the patient's Housing Executive application.

(AQW 28611/11-15)

Mr Poots: Under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998 a fee of between £10 and £50 may be charged for providing medical records.

A charge of £10 may be made if the information is held exclusively in electronic format. If the information is held partially or wholly by any other means a charge of up to £50 may be made.

Bangor Community Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff are currently on leave or sick leave at Bangor Minor Injuries Unit.

(AQW 28630/11-15)

Mr Poots: Due to the small numbers of staff working in the Bangor Minor Injuries Unit it is not possible to release details of those on sick leave as this could result in personal identification.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Nursing Vacancies

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current level of nursing vacancies in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 28632/11-15)

Mr Poots: Vacancies in HSC organisations are collected in the biannual Northern Ireland HSC Vacancy Survey. The most recent report (vacancies as at 31st March 2013) is available at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/vacancy_survey_march_2013_web-2.pdf.

At 31st March 2013, there were 37 (28.8 whole-time equivalent) nursing & midwifery vacancies and 2 (1.7 whole-time equivalent) consultant vacancies in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

The Report as at 30th September 2013 is currently underway, and will be published early in 2014.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Consultant Vacancies

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current level of consultant vacancies in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 28633/11-15)

Mr Poots: Vacancies in HSC organisations are collected in the biannual Northern Ireland HSC Vacancy Survey. The most recent report (vacancies as at 31st March 2013) is available at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/vacancy_survey_march_2013_web-2.pdf.

At 31st March 2013, there were 37 (28.8 whole-time equivalent) nursing & midwifery vacancies and 2 (1.7 whole-time equivalent) consultant vacancies in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

The Report as at 30th September 2013 is currently underway, and will be published early in 2014.

Organ Donor Register

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he has taken in the last twelve months to increase the number of people on the organ donor register.

(AQW 28641/11-15)

Mr Poots: On 11 July 2013 I formally launched the NHSBT UK-wide organ donation and transplantation strategy, Taking Organ Transplantation to 2020 – a UK Strategy. The Strategy, which my Department was involved in developing in conjunction with NHSBT and the other UK Health Administrations, aims to ensure a continued focus on increasing organ donation.

At my request, the Public Health Agency (PHA) is currently developing a public information campaign to enhance awareness and understanding of organ donation, to encourage everyone to sign the organ donor register and to tell their loved ones their wishes. This campaign will be launched in 2014 and follows a major survey of public opinion by the PHA to establish attitudes towards organ donation in Northern Ireland

Emergency Departments: Underage Alcohol-related Attendance

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children under 16 years old have attended Accident and Emergency Departments on multiple occasions suffering from alcohol intoxication, over the last three years.

(AQW 28644/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not routinely collected by the Department and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Emergency Departments: Underage Alcohol-related Attendance

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in each of the last three years, how many children under 16 years old, who attended Accident and Emergency suffering from alcohol intoxication, have subsequently been found to have engaged in substance abuse.

(AQW 28645/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not routinely collected by the Department and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Emergency Departments: Underage Alcohol-related Attendance

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in each of the last three years, how many children under 16 years old have attended Accident and Emergency with physical injuries were also under the influence of alcohol.

(AQW 28646/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not routinely collected by the Department and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Derry: Health and Care Centre Network

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made on the Health and Social Care campus for cityside in Derry.

(AQW 28650/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board, through its Local Commissioning Groups and in association with the HSC Trusts, has been undertaking detailed analysis to determine the most appropriate locations for the various hubs and spokes which will form the basis of the health and care centre network. This work will provide an evidence base for the locations and will replace the illustrative model in the "Vision to Action" consultation document. It is expected that this work will be completed by the end of this year.

Following that process, an exercise will be undertaken to develop business cases and prioritise within the available funding, which will determine how work on individual hubs and spokes will progress.

Downe Hospital: Fire and Rescue Service

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on how many occasions, since the opening of the Downe Hospital in June 2010, the Fire Service has been called out to the hospital; and how much these incidents have cost.
(AQW 28658/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) have attended 86 incidents at Downe Hospital since June 2010, at an estimated total cost of £108,478.

Downe Hospital: GP Unit

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the 1st Floor location of the GP Unit in the centre of the Downe Hospital, (i) to outline the risks of having a GP Unit in the middle of a hospital; (ii) how many hospitals have a GP Unit located in the middle of their facility; and (iii) what procedures have been put in place to mitigate the impact of cross-infection and other related health risks.
(AQW 28660/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) All hospitals, whether they include a GP unit or not, are subject to the risk of external infection being brought in by visiting members of the public and other patients. This risk is slightly increased when a GP unit is sited within a hospital as more people than usual are being brought into the hospital environment. This risk was assessed when the decision was made to include the GP unit within the Downe Hospital, and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust's infection prevention and control managers were consulted on and approved the transfer from Pound Lane to Downe Hospital.
- (ii) There are no other local enhanced hospitals with an integrated GP practice, although I understand there are some in England.
- (iii) The GP unit has been carefully designed to minimise the risk of cross-infection, and so operates on the basis of procedures similar to those for the outpatients department, which also has the potential for patients and public to attend with various medical complaints. The closest in-patient ward to the GP practice is cardiology; entry to this ward is restricted and controlled by electronic access control systems reducing chance of cross-infection. The remaining wards are located a considerable distance away from the GP unit, and operate an established access/egress protocol. Each clinical department, including the GP unit, is self-contained within its own zone, which means that the only integration of hospital and GP patients is in the community spaces (corridors/stairs/coffee shop etc). Clear way-finding to the GP unit further minimises the chances of GP and hospital patient integration.

'Changing the Culture 2010' is the strategic regional action plan for the prevention and control of healthcare-associated infections (HCAIs) in Northern Ireland. This provides the strategic context, principles and objectives that inform the Trust's HCAI action plan, this plan is updated regularly and as necessary. The Trust's approach to tackling HCAIs includes measures such as promoting good hand hygiene on the part of staff, visitors and patients; good clinical practice including the use of high-impact interventions – also known as care bundles – to prevent surgical site infections, ventilator-associated pneumonias and other infections; implementation of the regional dress code including the use of personal protective equipment; improving environmental cleanliness and hygiene, and using the regional healthcare hygiene and cleanliness audit tool to assess environmental cleanliness and hygiene within the Trust; prudent prescribing of antibiotics, to reduce the risk of *Clostridium difficile* infection and to address the global problem of antimicrobial resistance; diarrhoea risk assessment and the isolation of patients where necessary; water management plans, to reduce the risk of infection by water-borne organisms such as *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *Legionella*; the use of HCAI surveillance; training and continuous professional development in respect of IPC, including the use of the online regional infection prevention and control manual; restrictions on visiting; the targeted use of MRSA screening and the isolation of patients; the use of escalation procedures for a potential or identified outbreak, including cohort nursing and the isolation of patients; improving communications with patients and carers; and board-to-ward assurance processes for ensuring compliance with and implementation of the Trust's IPC policies.

Using these and other measures Trusts have achieved significant reduction in HCAIs. In particular the South Eastern Trust, since 2006/07, cases of MRSA bloodstream infection in in-patients have been reduced by 73.5%, and cases of *Clostridium difficile* infection (CDI) in in-patients aged 65 and over have been reduced by 80.5%. Since 2008/09 CDI cases in in-patients aged two years and over have been reduced by 63.5%.

Addiction: Inpatient-based Treatment Services

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the level of inpatient addiction services.
(AQW 28682/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) recently launched its consultation on Inpatient Based Addiction Treatment Services, which outlines proposals for a re-configuration of all the Tier 4 addiction services currently available. The Consultation highlights that the present service configuration is characterised by variation in structure, role and function. It therefore sets out proposals for a more standardised, and evidence-based, regional model.

This consultation, which is available at: http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/consult/Consultation-Tier_4_Addiction_Services/index.html#P-1_0, closes on 10 January 2014. No decisions have been made about the future of any addiction services across Northern Ireland. I would therefore encourage as many people as possible to feed into the consultation process. The HSCB will take all comments and views into consideration before finalising proposals.

Organ Donation: Posthumous

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many posthumous organ donations have taken place in the last twelve months.

(AQW 28704/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is collated by NHS Blood and Transplant, which is the organ donation and transplantation organisation for the UK, and is available on its website at:

http://www.organdonation.nhs.uk/statistics/downloads/northern_ireland_sep13.pdf

Organ Donation

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (i) registered organ donors; and (ii) organ donations, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 28705/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is collated by NHS Blood and Transplant, which is the organ donation and transplantation organisation for the UK, and is available on its website at:

http://www.organdonation.nhs.uk/statistics/downloads/northern_ireland_sep13.pdf

Care Homes: Complaints

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures are in place to monitor, record and investigate complaints against care homes.

(AQW 28730/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSC Complaints Procedure applies equally to statutory residential care and nursing homes and independent residential care and nursing homes where the placement is paid for by an HSC Trust. All providers must operate a complaints procedure that meets the requirements of applicable Regulations, relevant Minimum Standards and the HSC Complaints Procedure.

All regulated establishments and agencies are required to provide RQIA, on request, with a statement containing a summary of complaints made during the preceding 12 months and the action that was taken in response.

The RQIA has a duty to assess and report on how the HSC and the regulated sector handle complaints in light of the standards and regulations laid down by the DHSSPS. RQIA will assess the effectiveness of local procedures and will use information from complaints to identify wider issues for the purposes of raising standards.

Causeway Hospital: Cancelled Operations

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many planned routine operations have been cancelled in November 2013 at the Causeway Hospital; and for what reasons.

(AQW 28731/11-15)

Mr Poots: For the purpose of answering this question, it is assumed that 'planned routine operations' means elective operations. The number of operations cancelled in the Causeway Hospital from 1st to 27th November 2013 (inclusive) is presented below.

Cancelled operations by reason of cancellation, 1st – 27th November 2013

Reason	Number
Patient did not attend	41
Patient could not attend	20
Patient unfit for procedure	15
To be seen by anaes / operator to assess if fit for surgery	8
Date unsuitable	5
Operator unavailable	5
Theatre list incorrect / late	5
Consent not completed / incorrect	3

Reason	Number
Previous list overrun	3
Not fasted as instructed	2
Bed availability – ICU / HDU	1
Emergency patient took priority	1
Late / no transport home	1
Other unplanned event	1
Patient notes/test results unavailable	1
Total	112

Source: Northern Trust

Radon

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the start of Lung Cancer Awareness Month, whether his Department is aware of any health action zones that has radon as a specific issue to address.

(AQW 28737/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health Action Zones are no longer in existence. The last of the Health Action Zones was amalgamated into the Belfast Strategic Partnership in 2009, when the Public Health Agency was established. Regarding lung cancer, the single most important factor is smoking tobacco. The Public Health Agency commissions smoking cessation services in localities across Northern Ireland from a range of providers as part of the Tobacco Control Strategy (2012-22) and an Action Plan with a range of targets is currently being implemented.

Since 1988, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency has carried out a number of radon campaigns across Northern Ireland in conjunction with Public Health England (formerly the Health Protection Agency). Results from these campaigns have been used to prepare radon risk maps of Northern Ireland and identify Radon Affected Areas. Any householder found to have a radon level above the action level is sent information by Public Health England along with their test results giving advice on any actions necessary to reduce radon levels.

Lisburn: Health and Care Centre

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services will be provided at the new health and care centre in Lisburn; and how this new centre will enhance the patient experience for users.

(AQW 28740/11-15)

Mr Poots: I propose to answer these two questions together.

Transforming Your Care (TYC) set out a proposed “hub and spoke” model to support the delivery of high quality integrated primary and community care services. This is in line with the vision of TYC to deliver more care closer to people’s homes, thereby reducing reliance on hospitals except where absolutely necessary and supporting an increasing number of people to live independently. Under this model, primary care professionals from a range of disciplines, including GPs, will work together in health and care centres employing modern equipment and advanced technologies to provide enhanced services that are accessible and responsive to client and patient needs.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has developed a model of care to be provided from the new Health and Care Centre in Lisburn. Services to be provided from the new facility will include:

- GP Practices;
- Nursing Services - District Nursing/Specialist Nursing/Treatment Room/Health Visiting;
- Community Mental Health Services;
- Psychology Services;
- Family Planning Services (include Sexual Health);
- Children’s Centre (including Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services)
- Social Care for Older People;
- Diagnostics;
- Imaging;
- Cancer Supportive and Chemotherapy Services;
- Complementary Therapies;
- Allied Health Profession Services (Dietetics, Dental, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy);
- Integrated Clinical Assessment & Treatment Services (ICATS);

- One Stop Assessment;
- Rehabilitation; and
- Marie Curie.

The services in this community based facility are expected to enhance the patient experience by supporting an increasing number of people to live independently, preferably in their own homes, for longer; promoting good health and well-being; enabling early diagnosis and treatment; improving support for people who have a long term condition; and reducing the number of avoidable admissions to hospital.

Lisburn: Health and Care Centre

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how a new health and care centre in Lisburn can contribute to the implementation of Transforming Your Care.

(AQW 28747/11-15)

Mr Poots: I propose to answer these two questions together.

Transforming Your Care (TYC) set out a proposed “hub and spoke” model to support the delivery of high quality integrated primary and community care services. This is in line with the vision of TYC to deliver more care closer to people’s homes, thereby reducing reliance on hospitals except where absolutely necessary and supporting an increasing number of people to live independently. Under this model, primary care professionals from a range of disciplines, including GPs, will work together in health and care centres employing modern equipment and advanced technologies to provide enhanced services that are accessible and responsive to client and patient needs.

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- Children’s Centre (including Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services)
- Social Care for Older People;
- Diagnostics;
- Imaging;
- Cancer Supportive and Chemotherapy Services;
- Complementary Therapies;
- Allied Health Profession Services (Dietetics, Dental, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy);
- Integrated Clinical Assessment & Treatment Services (ICATS);
- One Stop Assessment;
- Rehabilitation; and
- Marie Curie.

The services in this community based facility are expected to enhance the patient experience by supporting an increasing number of people to live independently, preferably in their own homes, for longer; promoting good health and well-being; enabling early diagnosis and treatment; improving support for people who have a long term condition; and reducing the number of avoidable admissions to hospital.

Lisburn: Health and Care Centre

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the key challenges to opening the new health and care centre in Lisburn at the earliest opportunity.

(AQW 28759/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has fully engaged with the 3PD Pathfinder Project to create a new Primary and Community Care Centre for Lisburn and will continue to engage with all key stakeholders to pursue the provision of a new, fit for purpose, health and care centre at the earliest opportunity.

The key challenges to opening a new health and care centre include the innovative use of a third party developer model (3PD) as a procurement method; issues relating to site selection and planning; ensuring value for money and ensuring the involvement of General Practitioners in the new centre.

Termination of Pregnancy: Guidance

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will bring revised abortion guidance to the Executive.

(AQW 28783/11-15)

Mr Poots: While I remain committed to producing guidance, a range of complex issues were raised by respondents to the public consultation on the latest draft. The implications of the responses must be fully considered before I can bring a revised document to the Executive.

A summary of the issues raised to the consultation is currently available on my Department's website.

It must also be remembered that the guidance will not, and cannot, change the law in Northern Ireland on termination of pregnancy.

Fertility: NICE Guidelines

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when his Department will complete its review of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines on fertility and publish its findings and recommendations.

(AQW 28784/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has completed its review of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guideline on fertility and the guideline was endorsed as applicable in Northern Ireland on 12 November 2013. The information is available on my Department's website at:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/phealth/sqs/sqsd-guidance/sqsd-guidance-nice-guidance/clinical_guidelines.htm

Legislation: Lasting Power of Attorney

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the timescale under which he proposes to switch the current law concerning Lasting Power of Attorney to match that now in use in England and Wales.

(AQW 28829/11-15)

Mr Poots: The member will be aware that the Mental Capacity Bill (the Bill), which is currently being drafted by my Department along with colleagues from the Department of Justice, provides for a new scheme of Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPA) which will replace the existing Enduring Powers of Attorney (EPA) scheme in Northern Ireland.

It remains my intention that the Bill will be enacted within the current mandate of the Assembly.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Children's Mental Health Inpatient Beds

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of children's mental health beds in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 28844/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are no mental health inpatient beds specifically for children in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) in the South Eastern area are managed by the Belfast HSC Trust.

Cherry Tree House: Review

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the recent whistle blower case regarding Cherry Tree House Nursing Home, whether he will widen the Desk Top Review which he has commissioned, to permit staff, relatives and elected representatives, an opportunity to give oral evidence to the Review Team.

(AQW 28949/11-15)

Mr Poots: The objective of the review currently being undertaken by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) is to examine the evidence held by, among others, the HSC Board, Trusts and the Department regarding all the concerns raised about the quality of care in Cherry Tree House during the period 1 January 2005 – 31 March 2013.

RQIA has now compiled a volume of evidence which will include concerns raised to relevant organisations by staff, relatives and elected representatives during the period of time covered by the review. At this point I am content that RQIA continues with this already significant exercise and, to that end, I have agreed an extension until the end of January 2014 to allow full consideration of evidence gathered.

Royal Victoria Hospital: Car Parking

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken to improve car parking facilities at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast.

(AQO 5162/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Belfast Trust is in the process of developing a business case to provide a long term, sustainable, affordable and accessible car parking solution for patients, staff and visitors for the Royal Victoria Hospital site. This will be subject to business case approval and availability of funding.

The Belfast Trust has introduced a number of interim measures in order to alleviate the current pressures on car parking spaces on the RVH site, including an additional temporary 300 space car park at Broadway Towers, the release of an additional 60 spaces in the main visitor's car park and a number of other initiatives to help reduce demand for parking spaces.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: College of Emergency Medicine Report

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his response to a recently published report from the College of Emergency Medicine regarding the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQO 5167/11-15)

Mr Poots: I welcome the Belfast Trust's initiative in inviting the College of Emergency Medicine to visit the Trust to undertake a review of the provision of emergency medicine. HSC Trusts are always seeking to improve how they deliver services and one of the ways in which they can do this is by seeking views from external experts. The Belfast Trust has welcomed the report's recommendations, which have enhanced and informed the improvement plans already in progress within the Trust. The Trust has an action plan in place to implement the recommendations. I look to the Health and Social Care Board to work with all Trusts to ensure the continuous delivery of high quality, safe and effective services.

Health: Winter Emergencies

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures his Department is putting in place to cope with winter emergencies.

(AQO 5169/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board has been working with the Trusts to ensure that effective escalation plans are in place to respond appropriately to any surge in hospital activity over the winter. This includes being ready to expand hospital bed capacity and increase community care packages to support people at home. In addition, plans are being put in place to enhance GP Out of Hours arrangements. My Department is also liaising with the HSC to ensure emergency plans are in place to manage the response to any severe weather this winter. This includes public health messaging about being prepared and encouraging people to be proactive about helping themselves, their neighbours and vulnerable people during a prolonged spell of severe weather.

Blood Bags: Regulations

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the impact that the new EU Medical Devices Regulations will have on Blood Bags.

(AQO 5170/11-15)

Mr Poots: The changes to the proposed Regulations on Medical Devices include provisions that would ban the use of certain materials in some categories of medical devices. This would include the use of phthalates in blood bags. If these provisions are agreed, to continue to use phthalates in blood bags, manufacturers shall be required to apply for authorisation to do so demonstrating that any possible risks in their use are outweighed by benefits to patient care.

Typhoon Haiyan: Local Healthcare Staff

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support has been offered to local healthcare workers directly affected by Typhoon Haiyan.

(AQO 5171/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following that tragic event, I urged everyone in the Health and Social Care and independent health care sectors to proactively support co-workers with families directly affected by Typhoon Haiyan.

Counselling and support services have been made available and flexible rotas and annual leave arrangements offered. HSC Trusts will continue to work with the staff involved to ensure assistance is provided, as necessary.

Hospitals: Cancelled Consultant-led Appointments

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what strategy is in place to address cancelled appointments.

(AQO 5172/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care Trusts have taken action to minimise the number of cancelled appointments by requiring clinical staff to give at least six weeks notice of their planned annual or study leave. In some Trusts patients are given the opportunity to choose a suitable time and date for their appointment which should be offered to them no more than six weeks ahead.

The total number of hospital cancelled outpatients appointments has been steadily falling in recent years; down from 216,800 in 2008/09 to 167,172 in 2012/13, however I want to see further improvement. To achieve this, I intend to introduce a specific target to reduce the number of hospital cancelled consultant-led outpatient appointments by 17% in 2014/15. If achieved this will result in a further reduction of some 28,000 cancelled appointments next year. Progress on this will be monitored by the Health and Social Care Board.

Flu Vaccine

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have received the seasonal flu vaccine to date.

(AQO 5173/11-15)

Mr Poots: The latest available uptake figures cover the period up to the 31 October 2013. By that stage 301,011 people in Northern Ireland had received the seasonal flu vaccine. The programme remains ongoing and I would urge anyone who is eligible to receive the flu vaccine to take up the offer as soon as possible before flu viruses are widely circulating in the community.

Prostate Surgery

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the availability of advanced keyhole prostate surgery.

(AQO 5174/11-15)

Mr Poots: Prostate surgery techniques include radical prostatectomy, which is open surgery through an incision in the abdomen, and laparoscopic (keyhole) radical prostatectomy and laparoscopic robotic prostatectomy which are minimally invasive and utilise technologies such as fibre optics and miniaturization.

The Health and Social Care Board advises that keyhole prostatectomy is commissioned from the Belfast HSC Trust for the treatment of localised prostate cancer, however since December 2012 the procedure has not been provided due to consultant vacancies. However a robotic laparoscopic surgeon has been recruited and it is planned that a robotic laparoscopic prostatectomy service will commence as soon as is practical. In the meantime radical prostatectomy is available with an open surgery technique and there has been no adverse impact on patients.

Department of Justice

Legal Aid: Job Losses

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice to detail any assessment made on the number of job losses that may result from proposals to cut civil and criminal legal aid.

(AQW 28348/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Through the access to justice reform programme the Department aims to create an effective, sustainable, affordable and accessible legal aid system. The Department believes the reform proposals are proportionate to bring legal aid expenditure within budget.

The Department has conducted impact assessments as proposals have been developed and the findings included within public consultation documents. The Department has not, however, conducted an assessment on the number of job losses that may result from the proposals.

It has not been possible for the Department to quantify the impact in terms of jobs to individual solicitor firms or Counsel as this could vary greatly depending on the business model operated within each firm, the extent to which firms rely on legal aid work and type of work undertaken in respect of counsel.

Forensic Science Northern Ireland: Outsourcing

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the arrangements that Forensic Science Northern Ireland have had in place for outsourcing forensic toxicology services; (ii) which companies received outsourced work; (iii) the value of the work; and (iv) whether outsourcing was subject to an open and competitive tendering process, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 28382/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) Since April 2010, Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI) has had a range of mechanisms in place for the provision of toxicological services, all of which were procured in line with Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policies. These included a competitive framework in place for the outsourcing of forensic services. Those services not included on this framework were procured through an open and competitive tendering process. Where only one specialist service provider existed, a Direct Award Contract was used.
- (ii) and (iii) During the period April 2010 to date, toxicological work was outsourced by FSNI to the following companies:

Company	2010/11 (£)	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)	2013/14 (to date) (£)
LGC	0.00	288,000.00	0.00	0.00
ROAR	0.00	0.00	0.00	480.00
ChemTox/Eurofins	900.63	2764.00	728.00	3500.70
CT Labs Cardiff	70.34	70.34	0.00	0.00
Totals	970.97	290834.34	728.00	3980.70

- (iv) The Framework in place for routine toxicology services was subject to open and competitive tendering process and in line with NI Public Procurement Policies.

Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice to detail the minimum tariff imposed for murder under the Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001; and for his assessment of how this compares with (i) England and Wales; and (ii) Scotland.

(AQW 28453/11-15)

Mr Ford: Departmental databases indicate that, between January 2002 and October 2013, the minimum tariff handed down for murder under the Life Sentences (Northern Ireland) Order 2001 was five years. In this case, the conviction was changed to manslaughter on appeal. The next lowest tariff handed down in the courts was eight years.*

As the setting of each tariff takes into account the factors pertaining in the individual case, no case will be directly comparable to another. However, the consultation on the review of the legislation governing the determination of tariffs will consider arrangements in other jurisdictions and the potential for their applicability to the Northern Ireland context.

*Convictions datasets are currently available until 2009. Prisons and courts datasets were interrogated for information for 2010 onwards and to obtain and validate tariff details.

Prison Service: Healthcare

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice to detail the amount spent on healthcare within the Prison Service; and the proportion devoted to mental health issues in each of the last five years.

(AQW 28474/11-15)

Mr Ford: The amount spent on healthcare provision for staff of the Northern Ireland Prison Service in each of the last five years is detailed in the table below.

It is not possible to state what proportion of these costs relate specifically to mental health issues as due to the confidential nature of staff engagement with Carecall, NIPS Employee Assistance Provider, this information is not disclosed.

Cost of Healthcare Provision to NIPS Staff

	Carecall £	Occupational Support costs £	Hepatitis Vaccinations £	Total £
2009/10 (pre Devolution)	45,269	73,563	Not available	118,832
2010/11	31,851	108,352	8,778	148,981
2011/12	25,175	106,326	2,858	134,359
2012/13	24,478	101,157	3,059	128,694
2013/14 (31 October)	19,299	128,377	8249 *	155,925
Total	146,072	517,775	22,944	(686,791)

* This figure includes the cost of vaccinations for all new recruits during 12/13 and 13/14.

The Minister of Health Social Services & Public Safety is responsible for healthcare for prisoners.

Sexual Offences Prevention Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 28049/11-15, to detail the total number of alleged breaches per defendant, broken down by court division.

(AQW 28534/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below details the total number of charges that relate to an alleged breach of a Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO) per defendant, broken down by court division, as at 11 November 2013.

Division	Number of Defendants	Number of SOPO Breach Charges	Number of Breaches Per defendant
Antrim	1	31	31
Ards	2	2	Defendant 1 – 1 Defendant 2 – 1
Armagh and South Down	1	1	1
Belfast	4	7	Defendant 1 – 1 Defendant 2 – 1 Defendant 3 – 3 Defendant 4 – 2
Craigavon	2	2	Defendant 1 – 1 Defendant 2 – 1
Fermanagh and Tyrone	3	4	Defendant 1 – 1 Defendant 2 – 2 Defendant 3 – 1
Londonderry	2	7	Defendant 1 – 6 Defendant 2 – 1
Total	15	54	54

Source: Integrated Court Operations System

Autism: DOJ Buildings

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what provision is made within his departmental buildings to receive visitors diagnosed with autism and to cater for their needs.

(AQW 28545/11-15)

Mr Ford: All visitors to government buildings are treated with courtesy and respect by staff. Where possible, details of visitors are notified to reception in advance of their arrival. Where visitors with disabilities, including those with autism spectrum conditions, advise of any need for additional help and support to cater for their needs, every effort will be made to ensure this is provided for them. In all our buildings visitors are met at reception and are accompanied throughout their visit.

As you will be aware Autism is a spectrum condition encompassing people with a wide range of needs. My Department is planning to take forward a number of actions under the forthcoming Cross-Departmental Autism Strategy and Action Plan, led by DHSSPS, to improve services and support for those with autism, working in partnership with the criminal justice agencies, our delivery partners in the voluntary sector and the autism charities. These actions include proposals for autism awareness training for frontline staff across the DOJ family. We have also, through our departmental diversity programme, been taking steps to support those within the workforce who have autism and those who have caring responsibilities for someone with autism.

Prison Service: Scanners/Justification Application

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 28043/11-15, under Section 15 of the Justification of Practices Involving Ionising Radiation Regulations 2004, to detail the time period under which the Justification application would be assessed.

(AQW 28549/11-15)

Mr Ford: NIPS officials have submitted its Justification Application and have met with the Justification Liaison Group. The NIPS Application is under consideration and I await the outcome.

I cannot provide a timetable as to when these decisions will be made. However, I am aware that NIPS officials have been in contact with the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) to press for an outcome as soon as possible.

Legal Aid: Budget

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Justice whether the Legal Aid budget of £75 million is sufficient to meet expenditure.

(AQW 28570/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department allocated an additional £15 million funding to the legal aid budget during the Department of Finance and Personnel's (DFP) June monitoring round process.

Forecast shortfall for 2013/14 is currently estimated at £25.8 million. A review of spending plans and priorities is currently underway, via the ongoing January monitoring round process.

DOJ: Overspend

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Justice to detail the overspend in his departmental budget and the reasons for it.
(AQW 28571/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice did not overspend in the 2012-13 financial year.

The Department faces a range of pressures in the current (2013-14) financial year, largely in relation to legal aid and the NI Prison Service. These pressures are currently being reviewed and considered as part of the January in-year monitoring round process.

Derry: DOJ Decentralisation

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to 27956/11-15, to detail (i) why there are only 5 civil servants from his Department based in Derry and (ii) whether he intends to decentralise any functions to Derry to aid economic growth in the North West region.

(AQW 28609/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) As outlined in my answer to AQW/27956/11-15, the information provided did not include the number of civil service posts in the NI Courts and Tribunals Service. This information will follow as soon as possible. My answer also only included those staff at grades specified in the question. At 1 January 2013 and 1 January 2013 there were also 11 non-general service grades based in Derry.
- (ii) The Bain Review on the relocation of public sector posts outside Belfast predates the Department of Justice, which came into existence on 12 April 2010. The Department of Finance and Personnel has responsibility for taking forward the recommendations of the Bain Review. There are currently no strategic or active plans to move any posts to Derry.

Policing Board: Injury Benefit Scheme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of former police officers, who are in receipt on an Injury on Duty award in bands 2, 3 and 4, have the designation permanent with no further review on their medical certificates.

(AQW 28665/11-15)

Mr Ford: The administration of the Injury Benefit Scheme is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the independence of the Policing Board. You may therefore wish to direct your question to its Chief Executive.

Policing Board: Injury Benefit Scheme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of former police officers, who are in receipt on an Injury on Duty award in bands 2, 3 and 4, and have the designation permanent with no further review on their medical certificates, are aged over 65.

(AQW 28666/11-15)

Mr Ford: The administration of the Injury Benefit Scheme is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the independence of the Policing Board. You may therefore wish to direct your question to its Chief Executive.

Bombs: Belfast/Londonderry

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice, given the number of attempted bomb attacks in Belfast and Londonderry in the last month, whether he has met with the Chief Constable regarding these attacks; and to detail the steps being taken to counter such attacks in the future.

(AQW 28670/11-15)

Mr Ford: Those who are responsible for these attacks have shown a total disregard for human life, particularly of the drivers who have been forced to transport devices.

Whilst issues relating to national security are primarily matters for the Secretary of State, I meet both the Chief Constable and the Secretary of State on a regular basis to discuss the security situation. We last met formally on 27 November, and I have also spoken to the Chief Constable on a number of occasions recently.

It is not for me to comment on specific operational steps being taken to counter such attacks. I can say, however, that the police and other agencies are working hard to protect the public and to bring the perpetrators and planners of such attacks to justice. I would also note the Chief Constable's public reassurance that there will be a significantly increased policing presence on the streets over the next few weeks.

Prison Officers: Medical Retirement

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many prison officers have been medically retired in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28723/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number of prison officers medically retired in the calendar years 2011, 2012 & 2013 is as follows:-

2011	22
2012	18
2013	27 (to date).

Human Trafficking/Prostitution: DOJ and Swedish Government

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 28048/11-15, to detail the dates of the conversations and correspondence between departmental officials and their counterparts in the Swedish Department of Justice on the subject of (i) human trafficking; and (ii) prostitution, since August 2012.

(AQW 28725/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am not aware of any contact between my Department and the Swedish Department of Justice regarding human trafficking and prostitution. As I said in my reply to AQW/28048/11-15, there is widespread availability of published material on the regulation of prostitution in Sweden, and my Department is of course familiar with this material.

Department for Regional Development

A26: Upgrade

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the further upgrade of the A26.

(AQW 26181/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I am pleased, having made the case for the A26 project, to have secured funding of around £8 million in 2014/15 for the A26 Frosses Road Dual Carriageway scheme, which will enable construction to commence in late 2014.

I have now considered the Inspector's Report into the Public Inquiry for the scheme and tasked Roads Service to progress the project, taking into account the Inspector's recommended amendments. This will enable the Statutory Orders to be made and the procurement process to be publicised. It is anticipated the scheme will take 24 months to complete at an estimated cost of £65 million.

Flooding: Lisheegan Lane, Ballymoney

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development when measures to alleviate pooling and flooding will be introduced at Lisheegan Lane, Ballymoney.

(AQW 27743/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: If the Member has identified particular flooding or pooling problems, I would be grateful if he could contact the local Roads Service, Area Maintenance Engineer, to discuss the matter.

Children: Travel Behaviours

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what percentage of children (i) cycled; and (ii) walked to school, over each of the last five years.

(AQW 27881/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It would be difficult to collect information of this type for Northern Ireland as a whole. However, data on travel behaviours, including for children, is routinely collated through the Travel Survey for Northern Ireland (TSNI). The figures shown in the tables below have been compiled from this survey. While the Survey is updated annually, due to small sample size the statistics are provided for a rolling three (calendar) year period, (e.g. the period 2010 – 2012 is based on data collected between January 2010 and December 2012), rather than on a year-by-year basis.

Percentage of journeys to or from school by walking/bicycling for 4-11 year olds: 2006-2008 to 2010-2012

Age group	Travel mode	2006-2008	2007-2009	2008-2010	2009-2011	2010-2012
4-11	Walk	34%	29%	26%	25%	26%
	Bicycle	1%	1%	1%	<0.5%	<0.5%
	All modes	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Percentage of journeys to or from school by walking/bicycling for 12-18 year olds: 2006-2008 to 2010-2012

Age group	Travel mode	2006-2008	2007-2009	2008-2010	2009-2011	2010-2012
12-18	Walk	18%	18%	17%	17%	16%
	Bicycle	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%
	All modes	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

I want to see an increased focus on the needs of cyclists and to encourage greater participation in this sustainable form of transport. To this end, I have established a new cycling unit in my Department. I have given it responsibility for coordinating all cycling issues and it will ensure that cycling interests are progressed in a more integrated manner, are given an increased focus and priority, and are measured more comprehensively.

Cycling: Floating Bus Stops

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has considered the introduction of a 'floating bus stop' similar to those in London.
(AQW 28082/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am aware the construction of floating bus stops is a relatively recent development being trialled in the United Kingdom.

I have asked my Department's recently formed Cycling Policy Unit to monitor this initiative.

NI Water: Renewable Energy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development, in view of the cost of NI Water's electricity usage and the prospect that electricity prices will continue to rise, whether he will request that NI Water produce a cost benefit analysis of producing as much of their electricity as possible using renewable energy.
(AQW 28171/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Existing Ministerial guidance for water and sewerage services already includes a priority for NI Water to "Agree appropriate targets to plan and deliver a contribution to the Programme for Government greenhouse gas emissions reduction target (e.g. through increased use of green energy)."

NI Water has exceeded its targets for the use of renewable energy through generating renewable energy from water turbines and the incineration of sewage sludge. NI Water has considered the use of other sustainable sources for the generation of renewable energy and uses a cost benefit analysis as one of the processes to decide if it is economical to proceed with these projects.

My Department is currently consulting on draft Social and Environmental Guidance for Water and Sewerage Service (2015-21). This includes priorities on renewable energy including investigating opportunities for generating renewable energy from NI Water assets. The Draft Guidance also includes a number of other priorities that could contribute to managing future increases in NI Water's energy demands and operating costs. The public consultation on Draft Social and Environmental Guidance closes on 31 January 2014.

Roads: Surface Life Span

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the factors that contribute towards the life expectancy of road surfaces.
(AQW 28307/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Road surfaces have finite lifespans and research and observations over many years has shown that road pavements generally do not deteriorate in a uniform way over their serviceable life. The rate and extent of this deterioration is influenced by several factors which include:

- natural ageing (oxidisation) of bitumen that makes the road surface less flexible and more susceptible to cracking, which allows the ingress of water;
- weather conditions, in particular the frequent freeze / thaw cycle experienced during the winter. A hard freeze / thaw cycle can break up a damaged or cracked surface leading to potholes and, in severe cases, cause total foundation failure. High summertime temperatures can also be very damaging as bitumen in the surface layers can melt;

- road openings by utilities – an increasingly frequent occurrence which leaves a structural weakness no matter how well the opening is reinstated;
- traffic volumes and in particular HGV's;
- Initial design and construction – the design criteria for roads has evolved over the years and has become more sophisticated and in general the motorway and trunk road network has been built and upgraded to these standards. However, these roads represent only about 5% of the total road network. Most of Northern Ireland's roads are old, had little formal design and construction and were not built to withstand modern traffic volumes. The rate of deterioration in such roads is much greater, once excavations or bad weather disturbs their foundations;
- periodic maintenance – roads should receive timely periodic resurfacing treatments to extend the life of the overall pavement construction and negate the need for patching, which is less cost effective. Unfortunately, due to historical funding shortfalls many roads do not receive the necessary periodic treatments when they should and resurfacing frequencies usually far exceed recommended best practise. This makes them more susceptible to the effects previously outlined.

Magherafelt/Cookstown: Penalty Charge Notices

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of Penalty Charge Notices issued in (i) Magherafelt; and (ii) Cookstown, broken down by street, in each of the last two years.
(AQW 28314/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: A breakdown of all street locations where Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) have been issued in Magherafelt and Cookstown, in each of the last two years, is not readily available.

However, information in relation to PCNs issued in specific streets can be provided, upon request, from my Department's Road Service.

Cairnshill, Belfast: Park and Ride

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the trend in usage of Cairnshill Park and Ride over the last two years.
(AQW 28332/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Cairnshill Park and Ride site has seen a steady growth in its usage over the last two years.

On average, 216 cars used this site daily in 2012. From January 2013 to September 2013 a daily average of 230 cars used this site. However, since September 2013 there has been a marked increase in usage of this site, with a daily average of 353 cars over the last four weeks.

This demonstrates an extremely encouraging shift in travel behaviour on this corridor, away from the private car and on to public transport.

Sprucefield/Black's Road: Park and Ride

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the average occupancy, expressed as a percentage, for the Park and Ride facilities at (i) Black's Road; and (ii) Sprucefield in each of the last three years.
(AQW 28333/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the average occupancy for the Park and Ride facilities at Black's Road and Sprucefield, based on weekly average figures, in each of the last three years are provided in the table below:

Average Occupancy of Park and Ride Facilities

YEAR	Sprucefield (320 spaces)	Black's Road (220 spaces)
2011	67%	69%
2012	71%	80%
2013 (Up to end of October 2013)	78%	87%

Car Parking: Residents

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the provision of residents parking schemes.
(AQW 28343/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is currently developing a scheme for the introduction of residents parking on the Lower Malone area of Belfast. The scheme is well advanced, both in terms of design and consultation, and officials hope to carry out the formal consultation on the proposed scheme in early 2014.

Informal consultations, to determine if residents parking proposals have broad local support in the Rugby Road/College Park Avenue, Donegall Pass and Sandy Row areas are also underway.

In association with scheme development, officials are currently drafting the necessary subordinate legislation to facilitate schemes and aims to have the above schemes delivered during 2014.

Officials are also drafting the necessary subordinate legislation for the provision of Residents Parking Schemes in Massereene Street and Clarke Court in Antrim and also the Bogside area of Londonderry, with the aim of introducing these schemes in 2014.

Roads: Traffic Calming

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 27574/11-15, in the case of each area, whether accident and fatality rates have dropped in each example since the introduction of vertical deflection schemes, and if so, by how much.

(AQW 28367/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of collision history, collision reduction and fatalities pursuant to AQW 27574/11-15 are provided in the table below. Schemes undertaken in 2008/09 and 2009/10 have 3 years' complete data; schemes undertaken in 2010/11 have 2 years' data; and schemes undertaken in 2011/12 have 1 year's complete data. A complete set of data for schemes completed in 2012/13 is unavailable:

Year	Traffic Calming Scheme	3 Year Collision History	Collisions 3 Years After Completion	Fatalities
2008/09	Ballymagarry Lane, Belfast	0	0	0
	Clarawood Park area, Belfast	0	2	0
	Coolnasilla Park area, Belfast	1	0	0
	Earlswood Road / Belmont Church Road area, Belfast	0	2	0
	Euston Street area, Belfast	0	0	0
	Kensington Road area, Belfast	1	0	0
	Lepper Street / Spamount Street area, Belfast	6	4	0
	Maryville Park / Myrtlefield Park area, Belfast	2	0	0
	North Boundary Street area, Belfast	0	0	0
	Sydenham Avenue area, Belfast	2	1	0
	Tamar Street / Witham Street area, Belfast	2	0	0
	Lower Braniel Road area, Castlereagh	8	2	0
	Wynchurch Road area, Castlereagh	1	1	0
	Causeway End Road area, Lisburn	1	2	0
	Lagmore Avenue & Dale area, Lisburn	1	1	0
	Magheralave Road area, Lisburn	8	1	0
	Skyline Drive area, Lisburn	2	1	0
	Barn Road / Elizabeth Avenue area, Carrickfergus	0	3	0
	Bracken Drive area, Newtownabbey	0	0	0
	Hazelburn Road area, Newtownabbey	2	0	0
	Drumhirk Drive area, Bangor	3	1	0
	Grays Hill area, Bangor	3	1	0
Woodburn area Derry/Londonderry	8	0	0	
Bishop Street Area Derry/Londonderry	5	0	0	

Year	Traffic Calming Scheme	3 Year Collision History	Collisions 3 Years After Completion	Fatalities
2008/09	Benview Estate, Derry/Londonderry	1	0	0
	Stiles Estate, Antrim	3	1	0
	Randalstown	5	1	0
	Seacliff, Larne	2	0	0
	Eastermeade, Ballymoney	0	0	0
	Gortgore Road, Greysteel	1	0	0
	Shore Rd, Cushendall	1	0	0
	Strangford Heights, Newtownards	0	0	0
	Derrymore Rd, Bessbrook	0	0	0
	Clonallen Rd, Warrenpoint	1	1	0
	Laurelvale	2	1	0
	Drunbreda Walk, Armagh	0	0	0
	Commercial Road, Banbridge	0	1	0
	Diamond Road, Dromore	1	0	0
	Donard View, Loughbrickland	0	0	0
Bachelors Walk, Portadown	3	0	0	
2008/09	Cecil Street area, Portadown	0	1	0
	Derrychara Area, Enniskillen	3	2	0
	Fountain Street Area, Strabane	5	0	0
	Ardstraw Village, SDC	2	0	0
	Mourne Park, Newtownstewart, SDC	3	0	0
	Killyclogher area, ODC	4	8	0
	Lambrook Road, Omagh	0	1	0
	Ballyronan Village	1	0	0
	Ardboe Village	2	0	0
	Blackpark Road, Toome	6	0	0
	Leckagh / Killowen, Magherafelt	3	0	0
	2009/10	Alexandra Gardens area, Belfast	0	0
Ballysillan Park area, Belfast		3	4	0
Bilston Road area, Belfast		0	2	0
Cabin Hill Park area, Belfast		0	0	0
Friendly Street, Belfast		2	0	0
Jellicoe Avenue area, Belfast		1	0	0

Year	Traffic Calming Scheme	3 Year Collision History	Collisions 3 Years After Completion	Fatalities
2009/10	Martinez Avenue area, Belfast	0	0	0
	Beechill Road area, Castlereagh	0	2	0
	Cairnshill Park / Burnside Park area, Castlereagh	0	0	0
	Merok Crescent area, Castlereagh	2	0	0
	Newtownbreda Road, Castlereagh	1	0	0
	Gregg Street area, Lisburn	0	0	0
	Hawthorne Way / Ollardale Park area, Ballyclare, Newtownabbey	2	0	0
	Castle Park Road area, Bangor	5	1	0
	Carnhill, Derry/Londonderry	1	0	0
	Knockwellan, Derry/Londonderry	0	0	0
	Rathenraw Antrim	0	0	0
	Toome Village	0	0	0
	Glynn	2	0	0
	Saul St/ Saul Rd Downpatrick	2	3	0
	Circular rd, Castlewellan	0	0	0
	Cumber RD Drumanness	0	0	0
	Victoria Ave Newtownards	0	1	0
	Dorans Hill Newry	2	0	0
	Scrogg Rd Kilkeel	1	1	0
	Cloughmore Rd Rostrevor	2	0	0
Granemore Road, Keady	2	2	0	
Madden Row, Keady	0	0	0	
2009/10	Newry Street, Rathfriland	3	1	0
	Seapatrik road, Banbridge	0	1	0
	North Circular Road, Lurgan	1	0	0
	Gortgonis Road & Plater's Hill, Coalisland	6	1	0
	Irvinestown	11	3	0
	Castletown Area, Strabane	4	0	0
	Mountfield Village, ODC	1	0	0
	Hospital Road North & Winters Lane, ODC	4	0	0
	Fintona Village, ODC	3	2	0

Year	Traffic Calming Scheme	3 Year Collision History	Collisions 3 Years After Completion	Fatalities
2010/11	Cupar Way area, Belfast	2	2	0
	Laurelhill Road, Lisburn	1	1	0
	Ballybog Road / Seymour Hill area, Lisburn	1	1	0
	Carnmoney Road North area, Newtownabbey	2	2	0
	East St / West St Newtownards	6	4	0
	Forkhill Village	1	1	0
	Eastway, Derry/Londonderry	0	1	0
	Hawthorn Terrace, Derry/Londonderry	1	1	0
	Church Rd, Randalstown	1	0	0
	Ballytromery Road, Crumlin	0	0	0
	Bridge Rd, Dunloy	2	0	0
	Greystone Estate Antrim	2	0	0
	Ardmore, Armagh	1	0	0
	Acton	1	0	0
	Mill Hill, Waringstown	1	0	0
	Hillview & Kilmacormick Road, Enniskillen	0	0	0
	Victoria Bridge Village, SDC	1	2	0
	Lurganboy Rd, Castlederg, SDC	0	1	0
	Parkview Rd, Castlederg, SDC	0	0	0
	Seskinore Village, ODC	1	0	0
	Queens Avenue, Magherafelt	0	0	0
	Milburn / Princess Terrace	1	0	0
	Northland, Moneymore	0	0	0
Gortalowry, Cookstown	0	0	0	
Coolnafranky, Cookstown	0	0	0	
2011/12	Bryson Street / Madrid Street area, Belfast	3	1	0
	Cambrai Street, Belfast	3	0	0
	Circular Road area, Belfast	3	0	0
	Newington Avenue area, Belfast	1	0	0
	Tudor area (Shankill), Belfast	2	1	0
	Branial / Whincroft area, Castlereagh	0	1	0

Year	Traffic Calming Scheme	3 Year Collision History	Collisions 3 Years After Completion	Fatalities
2011/12	Glen Road / Roddens Crescent area, Castlereagh	6	0	0
	Manse Road, Carryduff, Castlereagh	1	0	0
	Ravenswood Park, Castlereagh	2	0	0
	Alexander Road area, Carrickfergus	1	0	0
	Regent Avenue area, Carrickfergus	0	0	0
	Rashee Park area, Ballyclare	0	0	0
	Abbey Ring area, Holywood	2	0	0
	Ballymacconnell Road South area, Bangor	1	0	0
	Church View / Spencer Street area, Holywood	0	1	0
	Skipperstone Road / Whitehill Drive area, Bangor	2	0	0
	Rosstown Road, Derry/Londonderry	4	0	0
	Bards Hill, Derry/Londonderry	0	0	0
	Hillfort Road, Derry/Londonderry	0	1	0
	Springtown Road, Derry/Londonderry	1	0	0
	Parkhall Estate, Antrim	2	0	0
	Linn Rd Upper Carncastle Rd Larne (Phase One)	9	1	0
	Bayview Road,Ballycastle (traffic management scheme)	Data not available	Data not available	0
	Ballykinlar Village	2	0	0
	New Harbour Rd Portavogie	2	0	0
	Mourne Esplanade Kilkeel	2	1	0
	Forth rd/Dallan Rd Warrenpoint	4	0	0
	Ballygowan Road, Banbridge	0	0	0
	Huntly Road, Banbridge	4	1	0
	Annaclone	1	0	0
	Lower Toberhewny Rd, Lurgan	0	0	0
	Annagher Area, Coalisland	7	0	0
	Killen Village, SDC	1	0	0
Drumquin Village, ODC	2	0	0	
Drumnakilly Rd, Carrickmore, ODC	0	0	0	
Sunningdale, Omagh	0	0	0	
2011/12	Upperlands Village	2	1	0
	Tullagh Drive, Cookstown	2	0	0
	Fortview / Drumcree, Cookstown	0	0	0
	Grove Terrace / O'Hara Road	0	0	0

Roads: Potholes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the number of potholes on roads; and to detail the average percentage of potholes that are repaired annually.

(AQW 28370/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not record statistics solely in relation to potholes either recorded or repaired.

As you may be aware, Article 8 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, places a duty on Roads Service to maintain all public roads in reasonable condition. In recognition of its duty of care, Roads Service has put in place a set of Maintenance Standards for Safety. These standards, which are designed to ensure a consistent service level and a safe highway while offering value for money, are based on best practice, research and consultation with both the public and other professional bodies and Industry.

The standards and procedures currently in operation establish frequencies for road inspections, dependent on traffic volumes and specify response times for the repair of defects. Inspection frequencies vary between daily cycles for motorways to four monthly cycles for carriageways carrying low volumes of traffic. Response times specified for the repair of defects are dependent on the severity of the defect and range from one calendar day, to simple inclusion in the next work programme for that particular route. If it becomes apparent that the relevant response time cannot be met then the Department has the option of installing signs to warn road users of a possible danger.

I should also explain that there is a direct linkage between the amount of Capital funding available for resurfacing and surface dressing and the numbers of defects which need repaired. As the level of Capital funding decreases, the numbers and cost of responsive patching increases and vice versa.

Mullaghcarton Road, Maghaberry: Road Repairs

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the repairs that have been completed on the Mullaghcarton Road, Maghaberry in the last twelve months; and whether further repairs are planned.
(AQW 28377/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Mullaghcarton Road is inspected on an eight week cyclical basis and any identified defect considered to be hazardous to the public is processed for repair on a prioritised basis with the more severe defects treated more urgently . During the period November 2012 to November 2013, approximately 100 recorded defects have been identified and repaired on the Mullaghcarton Road.

I am pleased to confirm that Roads Service plans to carry out a carriageway resurfacing scheme on Mullaghcarton Road at its junction with White Lane, as part of a minor improvement scheme.

In the meantime, Roads Service will continue to regularly inspect the area and carry out any safety related repairs that are considered necessary.

Grants: DRD

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the grants available from his Department.
(AQW 28385/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below details the grants that are available from my Department.

Grants	Purpose
Public Service Obligation	Funding required to allow NI Railways to operate passenger services within an agreed fare structure that otherwise would prove uneconomic to complete in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1370/2007.
Railway Capital	Capital Grant used for the purposes of maintaining and improving railway services in Northern Ireland, in accordance with Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.
Bus Capital	Capital Grant to Translink for the acquisition of new buses and also maintaining and improving bus facilities in Northern Ireland, in accordance with Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.
Rural Transport Fund	Support to Rural Community Transport Partnerships to provide transport options for rural people in Northern Ireland, to improve access to work, education, healthcare, shopping and recreational activities and in so doing reduce social isolation. This is done through the provision of Dial-a-Lift services for rural individuals throughout Northern Ireland. CTA – Community Transport Association provide the Department with advice, guidance and training in relation to voluntary and community organisations.

Grants	Purpose
Transport Programme for People with Disabilities Funding	<p>Disability Action Transport Services are providing an interim service in urban areas across Northern Ireland for people with disabilities who are unable to use mainstream public transport.</p> <p>Shopmobility Schemes are providing services to their members who are either permanently or temporarily mobility impaired. They do this through the provision of scooters, wheelchairs and other ambulatory aids.</p> <p>IMTAC – Inclusive Mobility Transport Advisory Committee provide advice and guidance to the Department on issues around mobility for people with disabilities.</p> <p>Volunteer Now – provide a buddying scheme to assist people who have difficulties using public transport for various reasons to increase their confidence to enable them to regain their independence and travel on the public transport options available to them.</p>
ecar Home and Workplace Charge Point Grant	Electric car owners are able to apply for a 100% grant for the supply and installation of a smart home or workplace charging point up to a maximum of £1,500.

Transport: Easibus

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of passengers who used the Easybus service in each of the last five years; and (ii) the average number of passengers who boarded the bus, per journey, on each route in the last year.

(AQW 28405/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink records the number of passenger journeys and estimates the average number of passengers. The tables below set out the information requested. No figures are available for Bangor and Londonderry beyond 2010/2011 as Easibus services in these areas were withdrawn in 2010 under the mandate of my predecessor the then Minister, Conor Murphy.

Belfast Easibus Figures

Total Passenger Journeys for Financial Year				
2012/13	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09
31,788	33,274	32,244	32,574	35,216

Bangor Easibus Figures

Total Passenger Journeys for Financial Year				
2012/13	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09
-	-	5,396	41,938	52,142

Londonderry Easibus Figures

Total Passenger Journeys for Financial Year				
2012/13	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09
-	-	13,697	57,030	112,894

Route No	Route	Belfast Easibus Average Passengers per journey per route 2012/13
EB1	Connswater - Cregagh	12.5
EB2	Connswater - Newtownards Road	3.3
EB3	Connswater - Gilnahirk	8.5
EB4	Connswater - Knocknagoney	4.0
EB5	Forestside - Belvoir	9.1
EB6	Forestside - St George's Market (Adelaide St via Ormeau Road)	3.9
EB7	Forestside - Annadale via Rosetta	6.3
EB13	Abbeycentre - Rathcoole	8.1

Route No	Route	Belfast Easibus Average Passengers per journey per route 2012/13
EB15	Abbeycentre - Downview	3.7
EB16	Abbeycentre - Cloughfern	10.4

Coleraine: Christmas Car Parking

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will consider relaxing car parking charges in Coleraine during the Christmas Holiday period, in an effort to promote town centre shopping and put the town centre parking facilities on a par with out of town shopping outlets.

(AQW 28416/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware I have made a number of important decisions relating to parking charges including freezing the current off-street tariffs, rejection of the proposal to introduce on-street charging and the introduction of a cashless payment system for parking, Park Mobile. These decisions have been very beneficial to local businesses and were made against a backdrop of the requirement to recover costs and the need to effectively manage town centre parking, by promoting greater turnover of spaces and enhancing accessibility to businesses and services in our local towns and cities.

I have also recently announced the introduction of a new Christmas parking rate of five hours parking for just one pound in 95 of my Department's car parks including the Mall, Abbey Street and Long Commons car parks in Coleraine. The new tariff will be introduced from 2 December 2013 and will continue until 11 January 2014. Drivers will still be able pay the minimum tariff in each car park, if they so choose.

My Department's Roads Service is working in partnership with Coleraine Borough Council to provide a free 'Park & Ride' bus service to operate from Riverside Retail Park to the town centre every 15 minutes between 9.30 a.m. and 6.00 p.m. on each of the four Saturdays leading up to Christmas, commencing on 30 November.

I am confident these measures will provide a welcome boost for traders in Coleraine and would encourage the public to continue to support their local economy by shopping locally.

Compensation Claims: DRD

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost, including legal costs, to his Department of successful compensation claims for damage to (i) motor vehicles; and (ii) personal injury, arising over the last five years.

(AQW 28446/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below sets out the cost, including legal costs, to my Department associated with compensation claims for damage to (i) motor vehicles; and (ii) personal injury, arising over the last five years. The costs associated with both successful and unsuccessful claims are included as the Department does not disaggregate costs between successful and unsuccessful claims.

Year	Motor Vehicles (£000's)	Personal Injury (£000's)
2008/09	183	3,939
2009/10	246	3,982
2010/11	348	3,945
2011/12	392	3,965
2012/13	155	4,128

Translink: Belfast-Derry

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of preparing tender documents for the passing loop on the Belfast to Derry railway line.

(AQW 28447/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have liaised with Translink officials who have stated that the preparation of tender documents is just one element of the project management process and staff timesheet allocations do not differentiate this work from other project management functions.

It is therefore not possible to provide the information requested.

Door-2-Door

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the delivery of the Door-to-Door Scheme by the Rural Transport Scheme.

(AQW 28450/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Door-2-Door scheme ended on 31 March 2013.

Disability Action continues to provide Disability Action Transport Services, on an interim basis, in partnership with a number of other voluntary and community organisations which include some rural community transport partnerships in 29 urban areas across Northern Ireland. For the period 01 April 2013 to 31 October 2013, there have been in excess of 54,000 passenger trips delivered.

I understand from Disability Action, who has operational responsibility for the scheme that there is a good working relationship and understanding between it and the rural partnerships and that Disability Action Transport Services continue to be delivered effectively.

Door-2-Door

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he plans to review the current arrangements regarding the delivery of the Door-to-Door Transport Scheme.

(AQW 28451/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Disability Action Transport Service has only been in place since April 2013 and as such it would be too early to undertake any operational review.

My Department is undertaking an evaluation of the transport policies and schemes initiated by the Department to promote social inclusion. The outcome of the evaluation will assist my Department to better understand the barriers to the use of mainstream public transport, to identify what measures can be taken to overcome these barriers and to develop proposals to meet the transport needs of elderly and disabled people across Northern Ireland.

EU Funding: DRD

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the EU funding surrendered by his Department in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 28492/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has not surrendered any EU funding in the last two financial years.

A6: Randalstown–Castledawson

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 27642/11-15, to detail the procurement process for the Randalstown to Castledawson dual carriageway.

(AQW 28507/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service proposes to use a no value "Framework Contract" to procure the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson Dual Carriageway. The contract will be based around the principles of the New Engineering and Construction 3 Framework Contract which facilitates Early Contractor Involvement. In using this type of contract, the Employer (the Department) invites tenders from contractors to carry out work on an 'as instructed basis' over a set term but only one contractor is appointed.

The Framework Contract would comprise two phases:

- Phase 1 – Completion of detailed design work. At the same time, Works Orders could be instructed for works, such as archaeological and geotechnical investigations, which can be carried out in advance of the main construction works.
- Phase 2 – Commencement of construction.

This form of contract allows the appointment of a contractor and progresses the scheme to a "shovel ready" position, allowing construction to commence immediately funding is confirmed.

A6: Unsuccessful Bids

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 27642/11-15, to detail why bids to fund construction on the A6 were unsuccessful.

(AQW 28509/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Following the court ruling in April of this year, which delayed the A5 Western Corridor dualling scheme, I wrote to the then Finance Minister in May, highlighting other schemes which could commence construction in 2014/15. The A6 Randalstown to Castledawson dual carriageway scheme was one of four schemes, for which bids were submitted as part of the October 2013 Monitoring Round and the 2014/15 Capital Budget Exercise.

Unfortunately, the bid to commence construction on the A6 in 2014/15 was not met by the Executive. However, sufficient funding was secured to establish a "no-value" contract that allows a contractor to be appointed to complete the detailed design work, and be ready to commence construction, when funding is confirmed.

The A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dualling scheme has been through a Public Inquiry. My officials have considered the Inspector's recommendations and I expect to make a Departmental Statement on the way forward later this financial year. Although well advanced, this scheme is not in a position to commence construction in 2014/15 and was therefore not eligible for construction funding in this period.

I will continue to press the need for this scheme in future bids for funding.

A6: Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 27642/11-15, whether the only obstacle to dualling the A6 from Derry to Dungiven is funding.

(AQW 28511/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Delivering major roads schemes is a long process and can take up to six or seven years to develop, procure and commence construction. With our major projects two significant obstacles must be overcome: the securing of funding for procurement and construction and the successful completion of the statutory processes.

The A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dualling scheme is well advanced in terms of development; it has been through Public Inquiry, with publication of the Departmental Statement expected early in the new year. Progression of the project would, subject to final approval of the business case, be reliant upon funding being made available.

The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-21 sets out plans to augment Executive funds by accessing alternative finance for some projects that are suitable to be funded in this way. This includes the progression of a package of high priority road schemes amounting to around £390 million, which would embrace improvements to the A6. However, a commitment to fund the revenue consequences of this roads package will be required and so the timing depends on future resource budgets. I will, however, continue to bid for conventional funding for the A6 dualling schemes.

TEN-T: A4/A5

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 27376/11-15, to detail (i) whether the A5 and A4 are now part of the TEN-T network; (ii) the funding implications for the A4 and the A5 Western Transport Corridor dual carriageway project; (iii) the discussions he has had with the National Roads Authority to ensure that there is a standardisation of quality and seamlessness at the (a) A5/N2; (b) A4/N16; and (c) A5/N14 connection points.

(AQW 28518/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

- (i) I can confirm that both the A5 and A4 have been included on the TEN-T Comprehensive Network.
- (ii) Regarding funding implications, it is anticipated that 5% of the total €13,174bn Connecting Europe Facility budget will be reserved for the Comprehensive Network. Funding applications for any project may only be submitted once the periodic call criteria have been announced by the Commission. My Department, as always, will seek to maximise EU income by submitting suitable projects that match the call criteria.
- (iii) My Department's Roads Service has had discussions with the National Roads Authority on many road projects and, while there are some slight differences in terms of road standards, standardisation of quality does not prove to be an issue for road users. This is evidenced by the highly successful A1/N1 cross border project.

In relation to the A5 Western Transport Corridor project, technical working groups are in place for both the A5/N2 and A5/N14 border interfaces with representation from Roads Service, the National Roads Authority, Monaghan County Council (for A5/N2) and Donegal County Council (for A5/N14). These working groups ensure coordination and consistency between jurisdictions on this particular project.

Autism: DRD Buildings

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what provision is made within his departmental buildings to receive visitors diagnosed with autism and to cater for their needs.

(AQW 28546/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It is standard practice for my Department's staff to treat all visitors to government buildings with courtesy and respect.

Where possible, details of visitors are provided to the Department in advance. In cases where the Department is notified of any visitors who may require additional help and support to cater for their needs, every effort is made to ensure that such assistance is provided. This applies to all visitors with disabilities, including those with autism spectrum conditions.

DRD officials have contributed to the cross-Departmental Autism Strategy 2013-2020 and initial Action Plan (2013-2016), which were recently approved by the NI Executive. The Action Plan contains proposals for autism awareness training for frontline staff across all Departments, including DRD.

Comber: Public Realm Scheme

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the Public Realm Scheme that is planned for Comber and following the public petition regarding narrow footpaths, whether he is content that a footpath less than one metre wide is a reasonable provision to ensure adequate safety for pedestrians and people with a disability.

(AQW 28568/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has inherited many footpaths in towns and villages throughout Northern Ireland, which do not meet modern day standards. The Public Realm Scheme planned for Comber is an Ards Borough Council led project, mainly funded by the Department of Social Development (DSD), but with a contribution from the Council.

In general, Environmental Improvement Schemes are intended to enhance and revitalise towns, providing finishes which will help encourage new development, increase business potential and make them more commercially viable and attractive to visitors. My Department's Roads Service is one of a number of consultees to the planning process in this regard.

As you will appreciate, site constraints in some narrow streets, together with other contributory factors, can present considerable practical difficulties when seeking to achieve desired aims. However, Roads Service, in conjunction with Public Representatives, Ards Borough Council, DSD, Comber Regeneration Community Partnership, PSNI, Appointed Consultants and other interested parties, will continue to provide advice and guidance in relation to potential road safety improvements in the town where practicable, subject to the availability of resources.

Roads: Potholes

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 28021/11-15, to detail the criteria used to allocate different depth of potholes into priorities for repair. [R]

(AQW 28742/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The level of priority attributed to the repair is determined by a number of factors including defect depth, volume of traffic, defect location in relation to carriageway width etc.

Department for Social Development

Housing Executive: Home Repairs Assistance Grant

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has received a proposal from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to reinstate the Home Repair Assistance grant scheme.

(AQW 27932/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Housing Executive submitted a proposal to my Department earlier this year to have a more flexible approach to Home Repairs Assistance Grants (HRAG). However, the proposal related to a short term scheme which would only be available in a selected number of areas. It was therefore considered not to be a feasible option at this time

Having consulted on proposals to deregulate the statutory grants schemes, including the HRAG, my Department is currently examining options to make available alternative forms of assistance for repair and improvement in the private sector. I hope to make an announcement about this matter by Spring 2014.

Ballymena/Ballymoney/Ballycastle: Housing Executive Spend

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 27344/11-15, for a breakdown of how the money was spent by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in (i) Ballymena; (ii) Ballycastle; and (iii) Ballymoney, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28263/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has provided the following breakdown of expenditure for their Ballymena, Ballycastle and Ballymoney District Office areas in each of the last three years:-

	2010/11 £k	2011/12 £k	2012/13 £k
Ballymena			
Land & Property	0	1	1
Capital Improvements	94	247	182
*Private Sector Grants	61	18	0
Accommodation	1	0	146
Loan Repayments	0	0	0

Ballymena	2010/11 £k	2011/12 £k	2012/13 £k
Maintenance	4,809	6,716	6,485
Supervision & Mgt	58	58	72
SPED Acq	82	0	108
Misc Public & Private Exp	221	286	104
Total	5,326	7,326	7,098

Ballycastle	2010/11 £k	2011/12 £k	2012/13 £k
Land & Property	0	0	0
Capital Improvements	12	138	10
*Private Sector Grants	22	30	0
Accommodation	0	0	0
Loan Repayments	0	0	0
Maintenance	593	1,124	844
Supervision & Mgt	23	23	31
SPED Acq	0	0	0
Misc Public & Private Exp	61	45	59
Total	711	1,360	944

Ballymoney	2010/11 £k	2011/12 £k	2012/13 £k
Land & Property	0	0	0
Capital Improvements	167	84	133
*Private Sector Grants	87	29	0
Accommodation	0	0	0
Loan Repayments	0	0	0
Maintenance	1,505	2,855	2,301
Supervision & Mgt	58	68	85
SPED Acq	0	1	84
Misc Public & Private Exp	52	62	207
Total	1,869	3,099	2,810

Notes

* Warm Homes spend is included in Private Sector Grants figures and Loan Charges are not available at district level

In addition the table below provides details of expenditure on the Social Housing Development in the District Council areas in question.

District Council	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Ballymena	£1,111,790	£3,209,776	£2,835,612
Ballymoney	-	£314,289	£177,902
Moyle	-	£840,629	£317,424

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Housing: Benefit Fraud

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to prevent housing fraud.
(AQW 28341/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive recently developed a Tenancy Misuse / Fraud Strategy which sets out measures to allow staff to effectively prevent, detect and tackle misuse and fraud. The Tackling Fraud Strategy is being rolled out during 2013/14. The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations is also in the process of developing a model strategy for Housing Associations to adopt and use as appropriate. In conjunction with this, my Department has set up a working group incorporating the Department, the Housing Executive and Housing Associations to examine what actions can be taken to more effectively address housing tenancy fraud.

Bloomfield Estate, Bangor: Housing Executive Ownership

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in the Bloomfield Housing Estate, Bangor, are owned by the Housing Executive.

(AQW 28386/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested because the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by individual estates. However, the information below provides details of the properties owned by the Housing Executive in the Bloomfield, Rathgill and Willowbrook estates, all of which have the same estate code: -

Bungalows	270
Flats	184
Houses	270

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Soft Services: DSD

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development why AQW 27641/11-15 remains unanswered.

(AQW 28410/11-15)

Mr McCausland: AQW 27641/11-15 was answered on 22 November 2013

Housing: Scheme for the Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Scheme for the Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings applications made in each of the last five years; and of these, how many were successful.

(AQW 28411/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table attached details the number of applications under the Scheme for the Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings in the last five years and those who were accepted.

Year	Applications received	Accepted
2008/09	100	46
2009/10	112	42
2010/11	69	26
2011/12	67	29
2012/13	64	28

Note: Applications received, does not include those security forces applicants who were not issued a Chief Constable's Certificate

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East Belfast: Housing Waiting List

Mr Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current housing waiting list for East Belfast, broken down by ward.

(AQW 28432/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested because the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Ward. However, the table below details the number of applicants on the waiting list at 1 November 2013 by Common Landlord Area in East Belfast:-

Common Landlord Area	Applicants on Waiting List
Albertbridge Rd	80

Common Landlord Area	Applicants on Waiting List
Ardcarn	41
Ashmount	14
Ballyhackamore	105
Bridge End/ Rotterdam Court	2
Bloomfield/Ravenscroft	215
Cherryvalley	7
Beersbridge Lwr-The Mount	73
Clarawood	72
Dundela	41
Edenvale	52
Garnerville	20
Inverary	32
Knocknagoney	31
Newtownards Rd	290
Orchard Court	2
Short Strand	94
Summerhill	14
Sydenham/Sandbrook/Lisavon	201
Wandsworth	26
Willowfield/Upper Castlereagh	227
Total	1639

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South Belfast: Housing Waiting List

Mr Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current housing waiting list for South Belfast, broken down by ward.

(AQW 28433/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested because the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Ward. However, the table below details the number of applicants on the waiting list at 1 November 2013 by Common Landlord Area in South Belfast: -

Common Landlord Area	Applicants on Waiting List
Annadale	67
Cromac	80
Donegall Pass	71
Donegall Rd	239
Finaghy	191
Flush Pk	45
Ormeau Upper	396
Ormeau Lower	280
Lisburn Rd	868
Sandy Row	70
Stranmillis	32

Common Landlord Area	Applicants on Waiting List
Taughmonagh	57
Woodstock/Ravenhill	359
Total	2755

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Derry: Social Housing Need Assessment

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development why the Social Housing Need Assessment 2012-17, included in the Derry District Housing Plan 2013, projects five year need at 1540 when the current Common Waiting List stands at 3286. (AQW 28468/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The 2013/14 Derry City District Housing Plan identified a need for 1560 additional units over the period 2012 to 2017.

The Housing Executive carries out an annual assessment of social housing need for local housing areas in Northern Ireland. Essentially, the assessment is a five year social housing need projection and is calculated by subtracting the number of applications in housing stress (demand) from the number of allocations and vacant properties (supply). The Housing Executive also considers additional factors such as demographic trends and regeneration issues (redevelopment) before determining the final figure.

The waiting list figures published in the report stem from December 2012 and state that 3,311 households were on the waiting list at this time, and that 2,203 were in housing need. Housing stress refers to applicants who have 30 points or more. 619 Allocations were made in the past year and of that, 23 properties were void.

The most recent waiting list data for the area is from 31 October 2013, with 3,425 on the waiting list, and 2,307 in housing stress.

Housing Executive: Enforcement Actions

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive tenants, who were in arrears in each of the last five years, had enforcement action taken against them through the legal system. (AQW 28483/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information below provides the number of enforcement actions taken by the Housing Executive against tenants in rent arrears at 31 March in each of the last five years: -

2009	105
2010	43
2011	58
2012	32
2013	52

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Housing Executive: Loan Balance

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development how much is the historic debt of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and to what does this debt relate. (AQW 28523/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As at 31 March 2013, the outstanding loan balance was £541,183,740.

The loans were generally taken out to finance new build housing activities by the Housing Executive and its predecessor organisations, including the Housing Trust and former local authorities.

Employment and Support Allowance: Fibromyalgia

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been awarded Employment and Support Allowance after being diagnosed with Fibromyalgia. (AQW 28590/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The latest published statistical information for Employment and Support Allowance covers the period ending 31 May 2013.

At that date there were 1,070 Employment and Support Allowance claimants who had fibromyalgia registered as their primary medical condition.

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Charities: Pensions Deficit

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development how his Department is supporting charities and voluntary organisations that are facing a substantial pensions deficit.
(AQW 28629/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department does not have a specific role in supporting charities and voluntary organisations which are facing substantial pension deficits. Pension deficits are primarily a matter for the administrators of the individual schemes and for local voluntary organisations and charities as employers. Additionally, pensions are regulated by The Pensions Regulator who has a UK wide remit, on behalf of Government, to promote and improve understanding of the good administration of work-based pensions to protect member benefits. Whilst the Pensions Regulator does not provide specific advice on scheme funding, guidance is provided on key issues such as valuations and deficit recovery plans.

The Pensions Regulator has indicated that, if advice around the funding of a particular scheme is required it should be sought from a professional source.

Autism: DSD Buildings

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what provision is made within his departmental buildings to receive visitors diagnosed with autism and to cater for their needs.
(AQW 28651/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has not made any specific provision within DSD buildings in regard to receiving visitors diagnosed with autism.

Newry and Armagh: Homelessness

Ms Fearon asked the Minister for Social Development i) how many people presented themselves as homeless in Newry and Armagh, in the last three years; and (ii) what action his Department is taking to support these people.
(AQW 28664/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- (i) The table below shows homeless presentations and acceptances in Newry & Armagh:

Homeless presentations and acceptances Newry & Armagh 2010/2013

Newry

Year	Presenting as homeless	Accepted as homeless (Full duty Applicant)
2010/11	770	324
2011/12	805	322
2012/13	761	402

Armagh

Year	Presenting as homeless	Accepted as homeless (Full duty Applicant)
2010/11	278	122
2011/12	300	133
2012/13	259	126

- (ii) In response to homelessness in Northern Ireland, the Housing Executive and its partners in the Promoting Social Inclusion Homelessness Partnership have been developing and producing a range of homeless prevention measures under the auspices of the Homelessness Strategy 2012/2017.

The Housing Executive launched the Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland on 1 May 2012. This followed an extensive consultation and redrafting process throughout 2011, to establish agreement among the Statutory and Voluntary Agencies who would be delivering the strategy.

The Homelessness Strategy 2012-17 sets out their strategy for tackling homelessness over the next five years and establishes the guiding principles for the development and delivery of homelessness services. At this time of economic uncertainty and financial constraints it is more important than ever that homelessness services are appropriate, timely and effective.

The aim of this homelessness strategy is that long term homelessness and rough sleeping is eliminated across Northern Ireland by 2020 and has four Strategic Objectives:

- To place homelessness prevention at the forefront of service delivery
- To reduce the length of time households and individuals experience homelessness by improving access to affordable housing
- To remove the need to sleep rough
- To improve services to vulnerable homeless households and individuals

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Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of (i) applications; and (ii) approvals for the Warm Homes Scheme in each constituency, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28668/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive administers the Warm Homes Scheme and uses 2 external Scheme Managers to deliver the programme. The Scheme Managers arrange to have the measures installed once it is established that an applicant is eligible for assistance. The information is not available at constituency level, but is shown at District Council level for the number of measures provided.

The Tables below show the number of enquiries received (Table 1); the number of those enquiries who are eligible for Warm Homes measures (Table 2) and the number who have had Warm Homes measures provided (Table 3).

Table 1 (Enquiries Received)

Year 1 (From 01/07/09)	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5 (to 31 Oct 13)	Total
38,636	35,820	36,111	33,641	13,423	157,631

Table 2 (Eligible Referrals)

Year 1 (From 01/07/09)	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5 (to 31 Oct 13)	Total
11,270	16,803	17,189	14,413	7,102	66,777

Table 3 (Measures Provided)

Council Area	Year 1 (From 01/07/09)	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5 (to 31 Oct 13)	Total
Antrim	213	200	279	229	109	1,030
Ards	359	313	312	264	111	1,359
Armagh	277	365	411	388	136	1,577
Ballymena	219	292	367	351	177	1,406
Ballymoney	136	131	149	173	110	699
Banbridge	189	252	270	283	81	1,075
Belfast	793	1,166	1,043	988	474	4,464
Carrickfergus	130	211	185	183	86	795
Castlereagh	283	264	247	163	65	1,022
Coleraine	187	319	339	324	162	1,331
Cookstown	273	430	287	279	98	1,367
Craigavon	377	586	702	546	201	2,412
Derry	260	819	918	1,127	438	3,562

Council Area	Year 1 (From 01/07/09)	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5 (to 31 Oct 13)	Total
Down	296	307	409	399	160	1,571
Dungannon	249	414	417	379	111	1,570
Fermanagh	371	477	608	536	185	2,177
Larne	104	194	131	181	100	710
Limavady	140	297	367	294	139	1,237
Lisburn	372	571	436	372	127	1,878
Magherafelt	141	303	261	248	139	1,092
Moyle	71	118	101	106	65	461
Newry & Mourne	491	595	682	559	215	2,542
Newtownabbey	300	419	434	332	175	1,660
North Down	306	319	329	260	116	1,330
Omagh	321	496	590	452	134	1,993
Strabane	217	511	377	339	145	1,589
Total	7,075	10,369	10,651	9,755	4,059	41,909

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Living over the Shop

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to announce a grant programme to encourage town centre regeneration similar to the Living Over the Shop scheme, particularly for towns which have not been supported by such a scheme.

(AQW 28770/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department's new Urban Regeneration and Community Development Policy Framework establishes town and city centre regeneration as a key policy priority and the Housing Strategy sets out my intention to revitalise the Living over the Shops (LOTS) initiative and ensure synergy with our mainstream urban regeneration initiatives.

My officials are currently developing policy proposals to introduce an initiative to encourage people to return to town centre living, in recognition of the important role that housing can play in helping to diversify and re-energise our town and city centres. Proposals will be informed by a review of the previous LOTS scheme which was undertaken by the NIHE and by discussions with key stakeholders such as Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association.

Soft Services: DSD

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development why AQW 27641/11-15 remains unanswered.

(AQW 28833/11-15)

Mr McCausland: AQW 27641/11-15 was answered on 22 November 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Work Contracts: Zero Hours

Mr Flanagan asked the Assembly Commission to detail the number of employees that are on zero hour contracts within Parliament Buildings arising from Commission expenditure.

(AQW 28193/11-15)

Mrs Cochrane: The Assembly Commission does not employ any members of staff on zero hour contracts.

Expenditure by the Assembly Commission includes a number of contracts with third party service providers covering services such as printing and publishing, broadcasting, maintenance and support services (catering, cleaning and retail). These contracts are managed by the third party suppliers.

Parliament Buildings: Telephone System

Mr McGlone asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) how many telephone lines within Parliament Buildings are restricted from making calls to '00353' numbers; and (ii) what consultation took place with Members, Assembly Management and Assembly staff prior to enforcing these restrictions.

(AQW 28396/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey: During the comprehensive spending review, it was noted that the telephone system in Parliament Buildings had little or no access control employed and that international calls could be made from most landlines in the building.

In order to minimise any potential for misuse, senior management agreed to re-set the access level on all landlines to bar international calls. This was part of a range of cost saving measures introduced as part of the review that also included removing voicemail systems that had not been activated.

It should be noted, however, that the international bar does not prevent calls to GB mainland, the Republic of Ireland and to mobile networks.

It was agreed that Building Services Branch would, on request, re-set the access level on any telephone to permit international calls to be made and many have now been re-set. The number of telephones in the building currently restricted from making international calls is 159.

I can also confirm that your own landline currently has no restrictions in place.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 13 December 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Judicial Appointments Commission

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, following the findings by the Public Accounts Committee against Mr Eoin Doyle, whether he will continue to serve as a Lay Magistrate and member of the Judicial Appointments Commission. (AQW 27404/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The procedure for appointing members to the NI Judicial Appointments Commission and for terminating such appointments is set out in Section 3 and Schedule 2 of the Justice (NI) Act 2002.

Reinvestment and Reform Initiative

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the current state of the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative; and to detail the current and planned expenditure in relation to the initiative. (AQW 27992/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Reinvestment and Reform Initiative (RRI) commenced in 2002. Elements of the Initiative have since been subsumed into a number of key Executive programmes, including the Programme for Government and Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Regular updates on former military and security sites included in the Programme for Government are provided to the OFMDFM Committee. We made a Written Statement to the Assembly on progress with the implementation of the Investment Strategy in July 2013.

In 2011, a further three sites were gifted under the Hillsborough Agreement. These sites were not intended primarily for regeneration but are intended to provide capital receipts for the Executive. A soft market test of the Shackleton site is being undertaken to determine options for sale. Options for the other two sites are being reviewed.

The Executive plans to borrow £200 million in 2013-14 and £250 million in 2014-15. In addition, as part of the 'Economic Pact' there is a further £100 million RRI borrowing available across 2014-15 and 2015-16 for shared housing and shared education projects.

Looking forward, the Executive will make decisions on the appropriate level of RRI borrowing for 2015-16 as part of its Budget process.

Ballykelly: Expressions of Interest

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what criteria will be applied when choosing a buyer for the former army barracks at Ballykelly, following the recent advertisement for expressions of interest. (AQW 28444/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our Department is testing the market by calling for expressions of interest following a number of meetings between officials and interested parties. We will consider the contents of all submissions before making a decision on the next steps.

Any final decision will be based on the demonstrable value to the Executive, the local community and to the region. We may request further engagement in order to clarify and or explore potential uses in the context of an emerging strategy for the Shackleton site.

Autism: OFMDFM Buildings

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what provision is made within their departmental buildings to receive visitors diagnosed with autism and to cater for their needs. (AQW 28515/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: All visitors to government buildings should be treated with courtesy and respect by staff. Where possible, details of visitors are notified to reception in advance of their arrival. Where visitors with disabilities, including those with autism spectrum conditions, advise they require additional help and support to cater for their needs, every effort will be made to ensure this is provided for them.

As required by the 2011 Autism Act, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety led on the development of the cross-departmental Autism Strategy and Action Plan, which was approved by the Executive on 28 November 2013. The Action Plan contains proposals for autism awareness training for frontline Civil Service staff. It is anticipated that the Strategy and Action Plan will be launched and published before the end of the year.

Shackleton Barracks: Development

Mr G Robinson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they envisage the development of the former Ministry of Defence Shackleton base at Ballykelly proceeding.

(AQO 5110/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The former Shackleton Barracks was transferred to OFMDFM under the Hillsborough Castle Agreement. The original intention was that it should be sold and the proceeds used to help fund Executive programmes.

When we received this site, the property market was in a steep decline and offers for the site did not match its commercial value, nor assist in the economic development potential for the region. The decision was therefore taken to maintain the site until the property market started to improve and potential uses could be developed that would address regional, social and economic needs.

In 2012, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development announced an intention to relocate the DARD headquarters to Shackleton.

We believe the time is right to test the market, to determine the level of interest in this vast 720 acre site. In order to do this, a soft market testing exercise began on 18 November. We anticipate that this exercise will provide potential ideas and uses for the site.

After the level of interest is determined, a decision will be taken as to the suitability to go forward with development plans.

Goods, Facilities and Services: Legislation

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to explain the delay with bringing forward the goods, facilities and services legislation; and when the legislation will be brought before the Assembly.

(AQW 28824/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are currently considering the scope of the legislation and the implications of the various options available to us for taking this forward.

This is an extremely complex policy area, and Junior Ministers have responded positively to requests for meetings to discuss the issue with stakeholders, such as the Equality Commission and the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

Goods, Facilities and Services: Legislation

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister which issues of the goods, facilities and services legislation have yet to be agreed.

(AQW 28825/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are currently considering the scope of the legislation and the implications of the various options available to us for taking this forward.

Children's Expenditure: Pilot

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) when the Children's Budgeting Pilot will commence; (ii) which expenditure it will track; and (iii) when, and to whom, it will report its progress, outcomes and findings.

(AQW 28826/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is expected that the pilot on tracking children's expenditure will commence in April 2014. Preparatory work has already commenced and, over the next few weeks, we will be asking key departments to identify areas of expenditure which could be further disaggregated to identify spend on children and young people.

When a suitable area is identified, the Terms of Reference will be agreed with the participating department which will set out the scope, duration and the monitoring and reporting arrangements for the pilot.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister in which financial year is the money allocated to the Social Investment Fund due to be spent.

(AQW 28882/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is anticipated there will be significant spend over the next 3 financial years.

Child Poverty: Definition

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what are the definitions of (i) absolute; and (ii) relative child poverty used by their Department.

(AQW 28999/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The definitions of absolute and relative child poverty used by OFMDFM are the definitions that are laid out in the Child Poverty Act 2010.

A child is considered to be in absolute poverty if they are living in a household with an equivalised income below 60% of median income in 2010/11, as adjusted for subsequent inflation. This is a measure of whether those in the lowest income households are seeing their incomes rise in real terms. In 2011/12, the most recent year for which data were available, the absolute poverty threshold for a couple with two children aged 5 and 15 was an income of £404 per week before housing costs are taken into account. Absolute child poverty in 2011/12 was estimated to be 25% (109,000 children).

A child is considered to be in relative poverty if they are living in a household with an equivalised income below 60% of UK median income in the year in question. This is a measure of whether those in the lowest income households are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the population as a whole. In 2011/12 the relative poverty threshold for a couple with two children aged 5 and 15 was an income of £392 per week (before housing costs) from all sources. Relative child poverty in 2011/12 was 22% (almost 95,000 children).

Definitions for the measurement of relative and absolute child poverty are prescribed in the Child Poverty Act (2010). Child poverty rates are measured through the Family Resources Survey which, as a sample survey, is subject to sampling error. Household incomes are equivalised to allow households of different sizes and compositions to be compared.

Social Investment Fund: Zones

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the basis of what criteria have funds been allocated across the nine social investment zones.

(AQW 29017/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have now agreed the allocations for the nine Social Investment Fund (SIF) Zones. In coming to this decision, we considered both the scale of need and identification of need in each zone under the objectives of the Fund, using the original set of criteria below as a guide:

- Areas within the top 10% most deprived Super Output Areas on the Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010.
- Areas within the top 20% most deprived Super Output Areas on the key domains of income, employment, education and health.
- Areas which can provide independently verified and robust evidence of objective need linked to the 4 strategic objectives of SIF.

The approach we have set out will focus the funds we have available to meet the objectives of SIF and clearly target the areas of deprivation that exist in each of the zones, as well as ensuring that funding is disbursed across all areas of deprivation, regardless of scale and not just those with concentrated urban problems. This approach means that we will tackle deprivation in the areas of high and durable need but also allows us to reach into smaller pockets of deprivation.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Forest Service: Relocation

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on her Department's proposal to relocate Forest Service headquarters to Co. Fermanagh; and to detail when she expects to make an announcement on the preferred location.

(AQW 28622/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): In line with the Programme for Government target, I remain fully committed to the relocation of Forest Service to Fermanagh by June 2015. An appraisal of the options for accommodating Forest Service in Fermanagh is ongoing.

The appraisal is informed by my Department's Estate Framework which complements the Executives Asset Management Strategy. That Framework points towards the preferred location being in Enniskillen. My officials are exploring

accommodation options including the potential of Inishkeen House in Enniskillen where some Forest Service staff are currently based. When the appraisal is complete I will confirm the findings.

City of Culture 2013: DARD Tenders/Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) tenders awarded; and (ii) funding provided to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 28671/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) No tenders were awarded.
- (ii) My Department did not provide funding to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013. However, the Loughs Agency, a North South Implementation Body, which is co-sponsored by my Department and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in the south played a vital role in the City of Culture events and sponsored the Turner Prize event and also the Fields Trio event, which was part of the Walled City Music Festival. The total sponsorship used by the Loughs Agency from north/south grant aid was £9,000.

The Agency partnered with Tate Britain to supply local oysters, harvested from Lough Foyle, to the event which was attended by 1500 guests. In addition the Agency supplied local oysters to a reception on an Irish naval vessel on Lough Foyle. The Turner Prize launch received wide national and international media coverage.

The Loughs Agency also had a high profile role in the Flavours of the Foyle Seafood Festival, which attracted 18,000 visitors and hosted the Sea Angling Competition in the World Police and Fire Games in Derry.

The Loughs Agency will also be working with key partners in the development of the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race events, planned for June 2014 and June 2016 and the events surrounding it including sailing events, other water based activities, angling competitions and a seafood festival.

Integrated Prevention and Pollution Control: Training

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's current capability to deliver training of Integrated Prevention Pollution Control.

(AQW 28855/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is currently working with LANTRA Awards, the organisation who accredits training in Integrated Prevention and Pollution Control, to have trainers approved to deliver this training. I anticipate that my Department will be in a position to deliver training in early 2014.

Integrated Prevention and Pollution Control: Training

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the current waiting list for training of Integrated Prevention Pollution Control.

(AQW 28856/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There is a current waiting list of 59 people.

Training: DARD

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what was the value of the fees paid for training courses that her Department was unable to deliver, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28857/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: This current financial year £340 of fees were returned for a training course my Department did not deliver due to insufficient applications. No fees were returned during the previous three financial years.

Reservoirs: Legislation

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 27876/11-15, whether the reservoirs named are currently up to the standard required under the forthcoming legislation on reservoirs.

(AQW 28859/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The reservoirs referred to in the response to AQW 27876/11-15 are owned by NI Water (NIW). It is my understanding that NIW have been managing these reservoirs in the spirit of the Reservoirs Act 1975. If this is the case, and subject to any amendments to the legislation during the Assembly process, these reservoirs should satisfy the requirements of the Reservoirs Bill.

Training: DARD

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department's literature promotes training providers other than the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise.

(AQW 28891/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department produces literature to promote its services to the industry which includes the training programmes provided by CAFRE. My Department also promotes training programmes which are delivered by other training providers on behalf of DARD.

Single Farm Payment

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department will act on the agreement reached at Brussels, which allows for advance contributions to be made to Single Farm Payment Scheme claimants, to make advance payments to Single Farm Payment applicants that have included land in their application that is the subject of more than one claim.

(AQW 28896/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Advance payments are not possible in cases where two applicants have used the same land to support their Single Farm Payment claims and the issue has not been resolved. Payments (regardless of whether these are advances or within the December payment window) can only be made once the claim is fully validated and the duplicate field issue resolved.

Greyhound Racing: Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to introduce legislation on greyhound racing and welfare.

(AQW 28920/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has policy and legislative responsibility for the welfare of both farmed and other animals, including greyhounds. The regulation of greyhound racing per se does not come under my Department's remit as greyhound racing is not regarded as an agricultural activity and does not take place on agricultural land. The Department for Social Development is responsible for the licensing of dog racing tracks for the purpose of betting.

My Department has recently made substantial improvements to animal welfare legislation with the introduction of the new Welfare of Animals Act 2011. The 2011 Act aims to safeguard the welfare of all animals and provides powers for inspectors to take such steps as necessary to ensure the welfare of these animals is maintained, should they believe a protected animal is suffering or is likely to suffer.

I believe the 2011 Act provides sufficient powers to protect the welfare of greyhounds both on and off the track. Any specific welfare concerns in respect of any greyhound should be reported to the Councils' Animal Welfare Officers who enforce the 2011 Act in respect of non-farmed animals, including greyhounds. Contact details for the relevant Councils' Animal Welfare Officers can be obtained at <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/>.

Given the recent substantial improvements to animal welfare legislation, which covers greyhounds, I have no plans to introduce further legislation in this area.

Salmon: Drift Net Licences

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what decision has been made to deal with Lough Foyle fishermen who were promised outright purchase of their Drift Net Licences by the Department, given that these fishermen have been banned from fishing for the last five years.

(AQW 28952/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Neither my Department or the Loughs Agency is aware of any promise of an outright purchase of salmon Drift Net Licences within the Foyle Area.

Salmon drift net fishermen were previously offered a salmon fishing hardship package in 2007 after a period of consultation. The scheme was not taken up by a small number of fishermen who decided that they would prefer to retain their fishing history and continued to fish in 2007, 2008 and 2009. However, the stocks of salmon did not improve and in 2010 all salmon drift netting within Lough Foyle was suspended (not banned) by Regulation, and currently remains suspended.

Farming: Remote Sensing

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how, and when, land owners were notified that their land was subject to remote sensing inspections.

(AQW 29204/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department will issue letters to affected farm businesses in December 2013, informing them that their land was subject to control with remote sensing. Land owners will not be notified, unless they are claimant farmers that have had an inspection by control with remote sensing.

There is no requirement to notify land owners or farmers.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

GAA: Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 7387/11-15, for an update on the data provided. (AQW 27449/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I am not aware of any GAA Clubs that are named after a so-called terrorist. Since April 2011, Sport NI has provided a total of £1,527,973 to GAA clubs across the north up to 31 March 2013. A breakdown of this figure, and the names of the GAA clubs that have received funding, is attached at Annex A.

Annex A

Organisation Name	2011	2012	Grand Total
All Saints GAC	£4,329		£4,329
Annaghmore GAC	£2,890		£2,890
Armagh Harps GFC	£3,133		£3,133
Ballinderry Shamrocks GFC	£245,000		£245,000
Cairde Naomh Pól	£8,100		£8,100
Clady Sean South GFC	£2,630		£2,630
Collegeland O'Raghillys GAC	£5,964		£5,964
Doire Colmcille CLG		£245,000	£245,000
Friends of St. Dallan's	£2,765		£2,765
John Mitchel's Glenullin GAC	£3,269	£245,000	£248,269
Lamh Dearg GAC	£245,000		£245,000
Na Magha Hurling and Camogie Club	£2,410		£2,410
Naomh Colum Cille Hurling Club	£6,795		£6,795
St James GAC	£2,347		£2,347
St Joseph's Ladies GFC (Glenelly)	£3,525		£3,525
St Malachy's GAC (Moortown)	£7,044	£245,000	£252,044
St Patrick's GAC (Lisburn)	£2,772		£2,772
St Patrick's GAC (Loup)		£245,000	£245,000
Grand Total	£547,973	£980,000	£1,527,973

City of Culture 2013: Legacy

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how organisations apply for funding from the £2 million City of Culture Legacy Fund. (AQW 28767/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The funding I announced on 20th November is not subject to an open call for applications. Rather, it will be allocated on the basis of need to continue key projects from the 2013 cultural programme, and in the context of my Department's priorities and Business Plan.

The aim is to promote the positive continuance of key benefits, partnerships and momentum after December 2013 and to invest in the development of modern sports facilities.

It is my intention to make a bid to the Executive for funding for the 2014/ 15 financial year to support ongoing and new interventions which maximise City of Culture benefits across the North West of Ireland in tackling poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

City of Culture 2013: Legacy

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) when the company limited by guarantee to deliver the City of Culture legacy programmes and activities will be established; (ii) where this company will be based; (iii) the number of staff to be employed by the company; and (iv) when it will produce its corporate plan.

(AQW 28768/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Whilst detailed arrangements will be developed in the coming months, it is my intention to have new structures in place for the 2014/15 financial year in order to maintain momentum and maximise benefits from the City of Culture 2013.

The new body, which will be based in Derry will have responsibility for developing the area as a creative and cultural driver for the north of Ireland and beyond.

City of Culture 2013: Legacy

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the (i) projects that will be supported by the £2 million City of Culture Legacy fund; and (ii) monies allocated to each project.

(AQW 28769/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have secured over £2m for the January to March 2014 period to support continuation of key projects from the City of Culture's cultural programme in 2013 to prevent the loss of key benefits, partnerships and momentum after December 2013 and to invest in strategic sports facility development.

All projects will be subject to acceptance and adherence to conditions set out in detailed contracts or letters of offer which have not yet been finalised.

Supported projects are expected to include:

- Music projects, for example key elements of the Music Promise project and the return of Other Voices to Derry in February 2014;
- Digital projects, for example continuation of the Portrait of a City project and digital skills provision;
- Literacy skills projects, for example the Disobey Gravity programme;
- Community projects delivered under Community Cultural Strategies developed for neighbourhood renewal areas;
- A pilot creative voucher scheme in Derry designed to stimulate new collaborations between creative enterprises and businesses from a diverse range of other sectors;
- Expansion of the Nerve Centre's Fab Lab with a wider North West emphasis; and
- Sports facility development.

In addition I will make available funding for the purchase of Eamonn O'Doherty's Armoured Pram, Lumiere's Stitch in Time piece and a portable community venue, subject to appropriate contractual agreements.

North-west: DCAL Office

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) when the departmental North West office will open; (ii) where it will be located; (iii) what will be its remit; and (iv) to detail the number and grade of staff employed.

(AQW 28836/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My officials are currently preparing detailed plans and costings for the establishment of the DCAL North West Office during this financial year. Further details will be released in due course.

City of Culture 2013: Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to the £12.6 million awarded to fund the City of Culture 2013, to detail (i) the projects funded by the award; (ii) the arts organisations that received funding; and (iii) the monies awarded to each organisation.

(AQW 28837/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has allocated a total of £12.6m (£6.5m for 2012/13 and £6.1m for 2013/14) to Derry City Council for the 2013 City of Culture's cultural programme of events.

Derry City Council has responsibility for providing funding to the many hundreds of organisations for events that have taken place as part of the cultural programme. These events have included Music Promise, Portrait of a City, Individual Artists Programme, Digital Book of Kells, London Symphony Orchestra and many others.

As we do not yet have a final account, it would not be appropriate to provide a breakdown of funding for each project and organisations at this time.

Sport: Sharing of School Sports Facilities

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what collaboration has taken place with the Department of Education to ensure there are adequate outdoor sporting facilities for use by community and sporting groups and local schools in Bangor.

(AQW 28873/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have been having ongoing discussions with the Minister of Education regarding the opening up and sharing of school sports facilities with the local community and sports groups throughout the north of Ireland, including Bangor.

Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department, and the Department of Education (DE) have worked together to develop two guidance documents that seek to encourage community use of schools and school sports facilities, including within the Bangor area. As part of the delivery of Sport Matters, Sport NI's guidance document 'Your School, Your Club' has been developed to ensure that its content and advice is complementary to that provided in the DE Community Use Toolkit.

The Minister of Education and I intend to jointly launch both documents early next year.

Commonwealth Games 2014: Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much financial support her Department and Sport NI will award to local competitors in the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

(AQW 28923/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The NI Commonwealth Games Council has not yet selected local competitors for the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

However, Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department, is investing £543,129 in Commonwealth Games sports through its Athlete Investment Programme in this current financial year. The Sports Costs strand of the Programme, which contributes to the implementation of agreed training and competition programmes, is made to the Governing Body which in turn selects the most suitable athletes. Athletes may apply directly to Sport NI for the Living Costs strand of the Programme which contributes to essential living and travel costs.

This funding is not solely for preparation for the Commonwealth Games, but also in respect of other competitions that take place during the investment period. Funding for 2014/15 in respect of Commonwealth Games sports has yet to be determined.

City of Culture 2013: Legacy

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what legacy is envisaged in areas outside Londonderry from the UK City of Culture.

(AQW 28996/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I recently announced my strategic vision for City of Culture legacy, not just for the City of Derry, but for the entire North West of Ireland.

A key legacy objective is to ensure that the benefits of our investment in the City are felt in the towns and villages across the North West of Ireland.

It is my intention to make a bid to the Executive for funding for the 2014/15 financial year and beyond to support ongoing and new interventions which maximise City of Culture benefits across the whole North West of Ireland in tackling poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

My Department is working with Derry City Council, Limavady Borough Council and Coleraine Borough Council to support the development of modern sports facilities over the next 2-3 years which I believe will benefit the local communities, enhance good relations and promote equal opportunities in this area. This will include support for sports complexes at Daisyfield, in Derry, Dungiven and Coleraine.

I will continue to engage and work with stakeholders throughout the North West over the coming months to develop my legacy plans.

Sport: Museum/Hall of Fame

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on a local sports museum.

(AQW 29038/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Ulster Sports Museum Association (USMA) has received significant financial support from Government Departments in recent years to undertake feasibility work and to develop an outline business case for an Ulster Sports Museum/Hall of Fame. This proposal did not demonstrate value for money nor long term sustainability without significant, on-going public sector support.

As part of the ongoing stadia development each of the Business Cases for the stadia will include proposals for Education and Heritage Centres which will celebrate the evolution of the games of Rugby Union, Association Football and Gaelic Games and their respective positive roles in contributing to a healthy, shared society. It is anticipated that this provision at the new stadia will further impact on the viability of a dedicated Sports Museum/Hall of Fame.

David Healy

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has any plans to mark David Healy's retirement as a professional footballer.

(AQW 29039/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have no plans to mark David Healy's retirement as a professional footballer.

However, I have publically recognised David Healy's remarkable goal scoring achievements during his career in international football.

Sport: Subregional Stadiums

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the funding for sub-regional stadia, including a timescale for progress.

(AQW 29249/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Given that funding for the development of sub-regional association football stadiums has still to be secured, no decision of any kind on funding to assist the development of any sub-regional stadiums has yet been taken.

Department of Education

Grants: DE

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail all the grants available through his Department.

(AQW 28388/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): There are a number of different types of grants allocated through my Department and these are listed below.

Grant-in-aid to provide revenue and capital support to each of the Department's Arms Length Bodies. Paid to:-

- The Belfast Education and Library Board
- The North-Eastern Education and Library Board
- The South-Eastern Education and Library Board
- The Southern Education and Library Board
- The Western Education and Library Board
- The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
- The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- The Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards
- The Youth Council
- The General Teaching Council
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
- Council for Integrated Education
- Middletown Centre for Autism Limited
- Boards of Governors of Grant Maintained Integrated Schools
- Boards of Governors of Voluntary Grammar Schools
- Boards of Governors of Irish Medium Schools
- Trustees of Catholic Maintained Schools

Current and capital grant provided for furtherance of the Department's objectives Paid to:-

- | | |
|--|---|
| ■ Middletown Centre for Autism (Holdings) Limited | ■ NI Centre for Information on Teaching (NICILT) |
| ■ British Council | ■ Association of Science Education (NI) |
| ■ Women's Aid Federation | ■ The Queen's University, Belfast |
| ■ National Children's Bureau (NIABF), previously Save the Children | ■ The University of Ulster |
| ■ Childline (Helpline Expansion) | ■ Early Years, The Organisation for Young Children |
| ■ National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children | ■ The Health & Social Care Board (for Sure Start and related services) |
| ■ The Gaelic Athletic Association | ■ Recipients of the Early Years Fund (administered on behalf of DE by the Early Years Organisation) |
| ■ The Irish Football Association | ■ Charter Work Experience |
| ■ Music for Youth | ■ School Employer Connections |

- Centre for Information & Language Teaching
- An Gaelaras
- BT Young Scientist
- Stock Market Challenge
- Business Education Partnerships
- Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS)
- Sentinus
- Stranmillis University College
- St Mary's University College
- Young Enterprise
- Public Health Agency
- Fostering Network
- Voices Of Young People In Care
- Commission for Catholic Education
- Controlled Schools' support body working group
- East Belfast Partnership
- North Belfast Partnership
- South Belfast Partnership
- West Belfast Partnership
- Greater Shankill Partnership
- The Pushkin Trust
- Business in the Community
- Trustees of Voluntary Youth Centres
- Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships

Schools: Maximum Travel Distance

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has a maximum distance beyond which a child should not have to travel to attend school.

(AQW 28491/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Parents can express their preference as to which school they wish their child to attend anywhere in the North.

The Department does not specify a maximum distance beyond which a child should not travel, this is a matter for the parents.

Autism: DE Buildings

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what provision is made within his departmental buildings to receive visitors diagnosed with autism and to cater for their needs.

(AQW 28652/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All visitors to Department of Education buildings are treated with courtesy and respect by staff. Where possible, details of all visitors are provided to reception staff prior to their arrival. Where visitors advise of a requirement for additional help and support to cater for their specific needs, including autism spectrum conditions, every effort will be made to ensure this support is provided for them. All visitors who are attending by invitation, or notify my Department in advance, are met at reception and are escorted to their destination.

West Belfast: DE Spend

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of (i) capital spend; (ii) maintenance spend; and (iii) any other additional spend by his Department in West Belfast, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28691/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

	2010/11 £	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	Total
Capital	8,429,425	8,123,126	10,217,603	26,770,154
Maintenance	4,074,520	4,581,502	5,691,734	14,347,756
Other Spend*	121,148,134	122,782,083	122,029,706	365,959,923
Total	133,652,079	135,486,711	122,029,706	407,077,833

* includes spend on schools, school meals kitchens, youth clubs, transport, Sure Start, special needs etc.

Crossroads Primary School, Kilrea: Newbuild

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education for an update on the plans for a new build for the Crossroads Primary School near Kilrea, including an estimated completion date.

(AQW 28713/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At present, there are no specific plans for a new build project for Crossroads Primary School.

While Crossroads Primary School will be disappointed that it is not included in my capital programme at this time, this in no way implies that it will not be considered for funding at a later stage within the on-going area planning process.

Schools: 3G Pitches

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education what funds are available to upgrade school pitches to 3G.
(AQW 28749/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are no specific funds dedicated to the upgrade of school pitches.

Education and Library Boards receive a budget to progress a programme of minor works in controlled schools and the Department administers a programme for non-controlled schools. Applications are considered on a case by case basis and assessed on their individual merits in line with ministerial priorities.

All schools are welcome to make an application to the relevant authority for the provision of a synthetic pitch, either to the Education and Library Boards in respect of Controlled schools or the Department of Education for non Controlled schools .

School Attendance: Legislation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education whether the law which compels parents or guardians to ensure children attend school is also enforceable against care home staff.

(AQW 28762/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Article 45(1) of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 ("the 1986 Order") states that:-

"The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise."

Article 45(2) goes on to state that the provisions of Schedule 13 (Enforcement) shall apply and a parent who contravenes the provision of Article 45(1) shall be guilty of an offence and liable to the penalties provided by paragraph 4 of that Schedule.

Article 2D of the 1986 Order states that a parent in relation to a child or young person includes any person -

"(a) who is not a parent of his but who has parental responsibility for him, or

(b) who has care of him"

For a child living in a care home, any legal action taken under these provisions would be against the relevant Health and Social Care Trust.

Schools: Outdoor Sports Facilities

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how much each Education and Library Board has spent on primary school outdoor sports facilities in each of the last five years; and from which budget area this was funded.

(AQW 28869/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Education and Library Boards (ELBs) receive a budget to progress a programme of minor works in controlled schools. I have been advised that applications are assessed and prioritised using the published criteria. Within this programme a range of sporting and play facilities are provided including playgrounds, upgrade of existing and provision of new sports pitches, provision of drainage, security fencing and storage units. The following table details expenditure by year:

Board	School Type	2008/09 (£000'S)	2009/10 (£000'S)	2010/11 (£000'S)	2011/12 (£000'S)	2012/13 (£000'S)	Total (£000'S)
BELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
WELB	Primary	119	64	190	166	585	1,124
	Post Primary	7	3	13	0	171	194
NEELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	393	0	0	393
SEELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	0	0	456	456
SELB	Primary	0	0	0	1,053	0	1,053
	Post Primary	53	0	0	0	482	535
Total	Primary	119	64	190	1,219	585	2,177
	Post Primary	60	3	406	0	1,109	1,578

Outdoor sports facilities have been approved for grant aid in the following major work capital investment schemes funded through the major work capital budgets as follows:

Board	School Type	2008/09 (£000's)	2009/10 (£000's)	2010/11 (£000's)	2011/12 (£000's)	2012/13 (£000's)	Total (£000's)
BELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	01	0
	Post Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
WELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
NEELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	0	420	0	420
SEELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
SELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	600	0	0	600
Total	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	600	420	0	1,020

1. A major work was completed at a BELB primary school in 2012/13 financial year at a total cost of approximately £3,103k but the value of work relating to sporting facilities is not readily available.

ELBs have also received either part or full capital funding for outdoor sport facilities associated with major/minor works from other funding bodies as follows:

Board	School Type	Source of Funding	2008/09 (£000's)	2009/10 (£000's)	2010/11 (£000's)	2011/12 (£000's)	2012/13 (£000's)	Total (£000's)
BELB	Primary		0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary		0	0	0	0	0	0
WELB	Primary		0					
	Post Primary	New Opportunities Fund	432	34	4	0	0	470
NEELB	Primary		0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	New Opportunities Fund/Larne Council	0	0	648	0	0	648
SEELB	Primary	Big Lottery	0	190	0	0	0	190
	Post Primary		0	0	0	0	0	0
SELB	Primary		0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	New Opportunities Fund/Sports NI	0	0	1,044	0	0	1,044
Total	Primary		0	190	0	0	0	190
	Post Primary		432	34	1,696	0	0	2,162

Other major work capital schemes include PPP schemes however the cost of outdoor sports facilities are subsumed within the overall contract cost.

Primary Schools: Sports Facilities

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail the outdoor primary school sports facilities that his Department has directly funded, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 28870/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not directly fund capital programmes in schools. It grant aids a programme of capital minor works in non-controlled schools in conjunction with the relevant school authority.

This programme grant aids a range of facilities including playgrounds, upgrade of existing pitches, and provision of drainage, security fencing and storage units. The Department does not record sporting facilities grant aided under the minor works programme as a separate funding stream. However, the total available for all minor works programmes in the last 5 years, including sporting facilities, in the non-controlled sector is detailed in the table below.

2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013
£26.855m	£39.248m	£18.516m	£21.103m	£29.106m

Sports facilities have been included and approved for the purposes of grant aid in major school capital build projects, however, the costs of these facilities are subsumed within the overall cost of the project.

Post-primary Schools: Sports Facilities

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how much each Education and Library Board has spent on post-primary school outdoor sports facilities in each of the last five years; and from which budget area this was funded.

(AQW 28871/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Education and Library Boards (ELBs) receive a budget to progress a programme of minor works in controlled schools. I have been advised that applications are assessed and prioritised using the published criteria. Within this programme a range of sporting and play facilities are provided including playgrounds, upgrade of existing and provision of new sports pitches, provision of drainage, security fencing and storage units. The following table details expenditure by year:

Board	School Type	2008/09 (£000'S)	2009/10 (£000'S)	2010/11 (£000'S)	2011/12 (£000'S)	2012/13 (£000'S)	Total (£000'S)
BELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
WELB	Primary	119	64	190	166	585	1,124
	Post Primary	7	3	13	0	171	194
NEELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	393	0	0	393
SEELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	0	0	456	456
SELB	Primary	0	0	0	1,053	0	1,053
	Post Primary	53	0	0	0	482	535
Total	Primary	119	64	190	1,219	585	2,177
	Post Primary	60	3	406	0	1,109	1,578

Outdoor sports facilities have been approved for grant aid in the following major work capital investment schemes funded through the major work capital budgets as follows:

Board	School Type	2008/09 (£000's)	2009/10 (£000's)	2010/11 (£000's)	2011/12 (£000's)	2012/13 (£000's)	Total (£000's)
BELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	01	0
	Post Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
WELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
NEELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	0	420	0	420

Board	School Type	2008/09 (£000's)	2009/10 (£000's)	2010/11 (£000's)	2011/12 (£000's)	2012/13 (£000's)	Total (£000's)
SEELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
SELB	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	600	0	0	600
Total	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	0	0	600	420	0	1,020

2. A major work was completed at a BELB primary school in 2012/13 financial year at a total cost of approximately £3,103k but the value of work relating to sporting facilities is not readily available.

ELBs have also received either part or full capital funding for outdoor sport facilities associated with major/minor works from other funding bodies as follows:

Board	School Type	Source of Funding	2008/09 (£000's)	2009/10 (£000's)	2010/11 (£000's)	2011/12 (£000's)	2012/13 (£000's)	Total (£000's)
BELB	Primary		0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary		0	0	0	0	0	0
WELB	Primary		0					
	Post Primary	New Opportunities Fund	432	34	4	0	0	470
NEELB	Primary		0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	New Opportunities Fund/Larne Council	0	0	648	0	0	648
SEELB	Primary	Big Lottery	0	190	0	0	0	190
	Post Primary		0	0	0	0	0	0
SELB	Primary		0	0	0	0	0	0
	Post Primary	New Opportunities Fund/Sports NI	0	0	1,044	0	0	1,044
Total	Primary		0	190	0	0	0	190
	Post Primary		432	34	1,696	0	0	2,162

Other major work capital schemes include PPP schemes however the cost of outdoor sports facilities are subsumed within the overall contract cost.

Post-primary Schools: Sports Facilities

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail the outdoor post-primary school sports facilities that his Department has directly funded, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 28872/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not directly fund capital programmes in schools. It grant aids a programme of capital minor works in non-controlled schools in conjunction with the relevant school authority.

This programme grant aids a range of facilities including playgrounds, upgrade of existing pitches, and provision of drainage, security fencing and storage units. The Department does not record sporting facilities grant aided under the minor works programme as a separate funding stream. However, the total available for all minor works programmes in the last 5 years, including sporting facilities, in the non-controlled sector is detailed in the table below.

2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013
£26.855m	£39.248m	£18.516m	£21.103m	£29.106m

Sports facilities have been included and approved for the purposes of grant aid in major school capital build projects, however, the costs of these facilities are subsumed within the overall cost of the project.

Schools: Transformation to Integrated Status

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education how many designated officers there are within (i) the Department of Education; (ii) each Education and Library Boards; and (iii) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, to support schools that (a) have transformed; and (b) wish to transform.

(AQW 28875/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: (i) The Department of Education does not have a designated officer as the funding and other help provided to support schools that (a) have transformed; and (b) wish to transform to integrated status is provided by a team of officials as part of their wider duties. (ii) Each Education and Library Board has arrangements in place to support schools that have transformed or wish to transform. SEELB has a designated officer whereas the other Education and Library Boards identify a team of officers to provide advice and support in relation to all relevant issues, as required. (iii) The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools does not have a designated officer.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Monitoring/Evaluation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what monitoring and evaluation takes place on the Education and Training Inspectorate. **(AQW 28921/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: As an organisation committed to continuous improvement and increased openness, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) secures an independent evaluation of its work on an annual basis.

Up until 2008/09, this external independent evaluation had been conducted for a number of years by Price Waterhouse Coopers. From 2009 to date, to reduce costs involved, an independent, confidential, post-inspection evaluation has been conducted by the (NISRA).

Furthermore, during the last four years, ETI has also been subject to a (1) Charter Mark Assessment, (2) DE Internal Audit Evaluation, and (3) Customer Service Excellence Award Assessment.

All of these assessments of quality have reported very positively on the organisation.

Schools: Crossing Patrols

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the criteria used to determine whether a school crossing patrol guard is replaced when a vacancy arises.

(AQW 28939/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards are responsible for the provision of school crossing patrols (SCP). In the event of an SCP position becoming vacant, the Board that is responsible is required to undertake a series of surveys and a risk assessment at the site to determine whether there is a continued need for the provision. The surveys and risk assessments are carried out in accordance with agreed five Board criteria based on Road Safety GB guidelines developed by the Local Authority Road Safety Officers' Association in England and Wales. The guidelines incorporate elements from the existing widely adopted criteria for the assessment of potential zebra and pelican crossing sites, and consider factors such as:

- Vehicular traffic flow at school times;
- The number of pedestrians crossing (both accompanied and unaccompanied);
- The average age of the pupils traversing the road;
- The safety record on the portion of the road where the SCP is positioned;
- Speed limit; and
- Sight lines.

The appointment process for SCPs is carried out in accordance with established Board procedures and there are no plans to change the process or the determination of need for an SCP.

The Road Safety GB guidelines, that are used to determine whether a school crossing patrol is replaced, were formally reviewed by Road Safety GB in June 2012. Given this recent review Boards consider that there is no requirement for another review in the short term.

Schools: Crossing Patrols

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to review the process of appointment and determination of need for a school crossing patrol guard.

(AQW 28940/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards are responsible for the provision of school crossing patrols (SCP). In the event of an SCP position becoming vacant, the Board that is responsible is required to undertake a series of surveys and a risk assessment at the site to determine whether there is a continued need for the provision. The surveys and risk assessments are carried out in accordance with agreed five Board criteria based on Road Safety GB guidelines developed by the Local Authority Road Safety Officers' Association in England and Wales. The guidelines incorporate elements from the existing widely adopted criteria for the assessment of potential zebra and pelican crossing sites, and consider factors such as:

- Vehicular traffic flow at school times;
- The number of pedestrians crossing (both accompanied and unaccompanied);
- The average age of the pupils traversing the road;
- The safety record on the portion of the road where the SCP is positioned;
- Speed limit; and
- Sight lines.

The appointment process for SCPs is carried out in accordance with established Board procedures and there are no plans to change the process or the determination of need for an SCP.

The Road Safety GB guidelines, that are used to determine whether a school crossing patrol is replaced, were formally reviewed by Road Safety GB in June 2012. Given this recent review Boards consider that there is no requirement for another review in the short term.

Schools: Crossing Patrols

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what plans there are to change the criteria used to determine whether a school crossing patrol guard is appointed.

(AQW 28941/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards are responsible for the provision of school crossing patrols (SCP). In the event of an SCP position becoming vacant, the Board that is responsible is required to undertake a series of surveys and a risk assessment at the site to determine whether there is a continued need for the provision. The surveys and risk assessments are carried out in accordance with agreed five Board criteria based on Road Safety GB guidelines developed by the Local Authority Road Safety Officers' Association in England and Wales. The guidelines incorporate elements from the existing widely adopted criteria for the assessment of potential zebra and pelican crossing sites, and consider factors such as:

- Vehicular traffic flow at school times;
- The number of pedestrians crossing (both accompanied and unaccompanied);
- The average age of the pupils traversing the road;
- The safety record on the portion of the road where the SCP is positioned;
- Speed limit; and
- Sight lines.

The appointment process for SCPs is carried out in accordance with established Board procedures and there are no plans to change the process or the determination of need for an SCP.

The Road Safety GB guidelines, that are used to determine whether a school crossing patrol is replaced, were formally reviewed by Road Safety GB in June 2012. Given this recent review Boards consider that there is no requirement for another review in the short term.

Children: Failure to Send to School

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 28720/11-15, for a breakdown of these figures shown by the primary and post-primary sector.

(AQW 28957/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that the number of cases of parents or guardians failing to send children to school in the 2012/13 academic year that were prosecuted in each ELB broken down by primary and post-primary sector is as set out below.

ELB	Number of Prosecutions	
	Primary	Post-Primary
Belfast ELB	*	*
Western ELB	6	27
North-Eastern ELB	20	48
South-Eastern ELB	*	*

ELB	Number of Prosecutions	
	Primary	Post-Primary
Southern ELB	12	55

* denotes fewer than 5 cases, figure suppressed to avoid possible identification of individuals

Education and Library Boards: Senior Management Salaries

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how the salaries for senior managers in Education and Library Boards, within the current structure, are independently reviewed.

(AQW 28966/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The salaries of Chief Executive Officers and Second Tier Officers in the Education and Library Boards are independently reviewed by the Senior Management Pay Review Panel (SMPRP) which is headed by the Chair of the Staff Commission.

In determining the salary ranges, the SMPRP take into account of the Executive's Public Sector Pay Policy and associated guidance, the independent recommendations published annually by the Review Body on Senior Salaries (an advisory NDPB of the Cabinet Office) and of pay movements in the wider public sector, particularly salaries of Directors of Education in comparably-sized local authorities in Great Britain.

Bangor: Primary School Enrolments

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many pupils attend each primary school in Bangor.

(AQW 28968/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The most up-to-date validated figures for pupil enrolments relate to the 2012/13 school year, these are detailed in the table below. Updated 2013/14 figures will be available following the completion of the annual school census which is currently being undertaken.

Pupil enrolments in primary schools in the Bangor area - 2012/13

School name	Total enrolments
Ballyholme Primary School	627
Ballymagee Primary School	404
Bangor Central Primary School	604
Bloomfield Primary School	394
Clandeboye Primary School	181
Crawfordsburn Primary School	212
Glenlola Collegiate Prep School	62
Grange Park Primary School	394
Kilcooley Primary School	165
Kilmaine Primary School	670
Rathmore Primary School	598
St Comgall's Primary School	302
St Malachy's Primary School	351
Towerview Primary School	391
Total	5,355

Source: School census

Notes:

1. Figures for primary schools include nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
2. Schools have been included above if they have Bangor stated as part of their postal address.

Strabane Academy: Newbuild

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Education what is the position and timescale regarding the new build for Strabane Academy, given that the Economic Appraisal for the new build has been with the Department of Finance and Personnel since May 2008. (AQW 28976/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In my statement to the Assembly on 22 January 2013 I announced a programme of 22 new build projects that would advance in planning. Strabane Academy was included in this announcement.

A previous Economic Appraisal (EA) for a new build for Strabane Academy, although undertaken, was never approved by my Department or the Department of Finance and Personnel and, as this EA was more than two years old at the time of my January 2013 announcement, current guidelines state that it had to be updated.

The revised EA was submitted to the Department by the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) in August 2013, and is currently under consideration. This work is well advanced and it is expected that it will be sent to DFP shortly for their approval.

The WELB in its role as managing authority for Strabane Academy has advised that the appointment of consultants for this project is currently ongoing however it is not in a position to advise of a possible start on site date due to the early stage of the project.

Armagh: Education Campus

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed 'Lisanelly-styled' campus in Armagh City. (AQW 28978/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In the first instance it will be for the SELB and CCMS, as the school managing authorities, to determine and agree the best way forward including any proposals to co-locate schools and share facilities.

I am aware that the concept of a campus in Armagh is being considered. I have met with some of those involved and been appraised of their proposals. It will be for the SELB, as the planning authority for the area, working in conjunction with other relevant managing authorities to determine the next steps in developing this, or any other area solution for the Armagh city area.

Holocaust Educational Trust

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education what plans there are to promote further the work of the Holocaust Memorial Trust among school children. (AQW 29003/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I believe this question refers to the Holocaust Educational Trust and their work in schools. The Department of Education has no plans to further promote the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust.

There are opportunities for schools here to explore the Holocaust and related issues through a number of Areas of Learning within the revised curriculum.

In line with the flexibility provided by the revised curriculum, it is a matter for individual schools to decide on their involvement with outside organisations, such as the Holocaust Educational Trust, to assist in their delivery of the curriculum.

Learning Disability: Departmental Liaison

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education how his Department is working with the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to identify and respond to specific barriers faced by young people with a learning disability at key life transitions during school, training and employment and day centre opportunities. (AQW 29021/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education (DE) has already taken actions to strengthen the transition planning process, including the appointment of Education Transition Co-ordinators in each Education and Library Board (ELB) and the provision of life skills training for young people with a learning disability. At operational level, it is incumbent on ELBs to develop close working relationships with colleagues in other agencies to ensure effective and coherent plans for young people in transition.

DE is liaising with the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) in relation to transition planning through both the cross-departmental Autism Strategy & Action Plan and the Bamford Action Plan, and is also engaged with the cross-agency Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership's (CYPSP) 'Transition to Adulthood of Young People with Disabilities' sub-group.

The CYPSP sub-group will explore the potential for a number of mechanisms to help improve the experience of transition to adult services for the young person and their families, including an integrated plan which will be multiagency and have a person centred approach. Appropriate post-school provision that ensures progression for young people is part of the group's remit.

Support is also available through the ELBs' Transitions Services and DEL's Careers Service for young people who are vulnerable to social exclusion and who have high priority career guidance needs where specialist skills are required.

DE is committed to the continuous improvement of the quality of careers education in schools and both DE and DEL are working well together to take forward the full and continuing implementation of the joint DE/DEL 'Preparing for Success – Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Strategy'.

In addition, the Education and Training Inspectorate will undertake an evaluation of current transition arrangements in both mainstream and special schools, including post-primary to adult services, in early 2014. The findings of this report will be shared with DHSSPS and DEL when completed.

Children: Failure to Send to School

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 28720/11-15, how these figures compare to the two previous academic years; and whether there is evidence of any specific trends.

(AQW 29034/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that the number of prosecutions of parents or guardians failing to send their children to school, since the 2010-11 school year is as set out below.

ELB	Number of Prosecutions 2010-11	Number of Prosecutions 2011-12	Number of Prosecutions 2012-13
Belfast ELB	*	*	*
Western ELB	45	26	33
North-Eastern ELB	6	10	68
South-Eastern ELB	7	9	*
Southern ELB	37	37	67

* denotes fewer than 5 cases, figure suppressed to avoid possible identification of individuals.

The Department has no evidence of any specific trends.

Children: Failure to Send to School

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 28720/11-15, how much advice is offered, or warnings given, to parents and guardians in these situations; and for how many days or occasions a child is absent before action is taken to prosecute.

(AQW 29061/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools should refer pupils to Education welfare Service (EWS) for support, if appropriate, if their attendance falls below 85% or if there is a cause for concern.

The intervention by the EWS is tailored to the individual child following the assessment of their circumstances including their needs, the parents/carer's capacity to meet those needs and the family and environmental factors. Provision of advice and support, consideration of warnings or any onward referral is completely determined by the outcome of this assessment.

Schools: 3G Pitches

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education which body is responsible for funding 3G pitches for schools.

(AQW 29069/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There is no specific provision in the Department of Education's (DE's) Building Handbook for any pitches (including 3G pitches) at primary schools, whereas the Building Handbook for Secondary Schools Edition 4 states that "in schools with enrolments in excess of 349, the Department may approve the provision of a pitch with a sand-filled synthetic surface, provided it is matched by a reduction of two conventional pitches.

Education and Library Boards receive a budget to progress a programme of minor works in controlled schools and the Department administers a programme for non-controlled schools. Applications are considered on a case by case basis and assessed on their individual merits in line with ministerial priorities.

All schools are welcome to make an application to the relevant authority for the provision of a 3G pitch, either to the Education and Library Boards in respect of Controlled schools or the Department of Education for non Controlled schools.

Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus: Replacement Building

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education to make a statement on the proposal for a replacement building for Woodburn Primary School, Carrickfergus.

(AQW 29070/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have no plans at this time to provide a replacement school building for Woodburn Primary School in Carrickfergus.

I will continue to examine the case for capital investment across the estate and any proposals the Northern Eastern Education and Library Board have for Woodburn Primary School will be considered along with other priorities as part of a future capital announcement.

Cherish Sure Start

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education how the electoral wards served by Cherish SureStart were selected.
(AQW 29083/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: DHSSPS established the Sure Start Programme in the north of Ireland during 2000/01. Geographical areas applied for Sure Start funding and were required to demonstrate need in their area.

Cherish Sure Start was launched in January 2001 following a successful bid for Sure Start funding by a consortium made up of a number of community, voluntary and statutory partners to the Western Area Childcare Partnership. The project was originally established to provide services to the following wards: Irvinestown, Kesh, Ederney and Lack, Trillick, Ballinamallard and Lisnarick as the consortium identified particular need for services in rural areas at that time.

In the 2006-2008 expansion of the Sure Start programme, Cherish Sure Start extended its services to a further three wards (Rosslea, Newtownbutler and Devenish) in line with the direction that services should be provided to at least the top 20% most disadvantaged areas at ward level, as measured by the Multiple Deprivation Measure (MDM) .

Schools: Newbuilds

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Education how his Department provides (i) capital; and (ii) recurrent funding to a new school.
(AQW 29093/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The process which my Department adopted to select new build school projects for capital funding in 2012 and 2013 is set out in two protocol documents published on the Department's website and can be accessed via the following links;

- http://www.deni.gov.uk/major_works_protocol.pdf
- http://www.deni.gov.uk/microsoft_word_-_protocol_for_selection_of_project_to_advance_on_planning.pdf

In addition the protocol for the Schools Enhancement Programme is accessed via the following link;

- <http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/schools-and-infrastructure-2/school-enhancement-programme-protocol.htm>

Following Ministerial approval of a Development Proposal to open a new school, and subject to all required conditions of grant-aid approval having been met, the new school will receive a recurrent budget allocation under the current arrangements as set out in the Common Funding Scheme. Full details of the current Common Funding Scheme for 2013/14 Financial Year may be found at the following link:

- <http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/schools-and-infrastructure-2/schools-finance/common-funding-section/common-funding-scheme-2013-14.htm>

Where the new school opens mid financial year, it will receive a recurrent budget allocation calculated pro rata from the start of the month in which it opens.

Schools: Capital Expenditure

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Education how much funding his Department has committed to school capital expenditure since May 2011.
(AQW 29094/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: School capital expenditure committed by my Department in each financial year since May 2011 is as follows:

Financial year	£000s
2011/12	109,967
2012/13	103,007

In the current financial year, a total capital budget of £106.9m has been committed to be spent on schools' capital projects.

Community Relations, Equality and Diversity: DE Expenditure

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Education to detail his Department's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity expenditure in (i) 2012; and (ii) 2013.
(AQW 29095/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I can confirm that my Department allocated £1,139k in 2011/12 and £1,163k in 2012/13 to fund the delivery of the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity policy.

Education: Arm's-length Bodies

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Education how many people are employed in his Department's arm's-length bodies, including (i) teaching staff; (ii) non-teaching staff; (iii) chief executives; and (iv) board members.

(AQW 29096/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of people employed in DE's Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) in 2012/13 is as follows:

		Number (headcount)
(i)	Teaching staff	19,436
(ii)	Non-teaching staff	29,134
(iii)	Chief Executive Officers (CEOs)	12
(iv)	Board members	203
	Total	49,152

Notes:

- Headcount figures include part-time staff.
- Figures will fluctuate during the year with leavers and new starts.
- Non-teaching staff figure includes Headquarter staff (excluding Chief Executives), school based staff and out centre and youth club staff. Figure excludes support staff in Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated schools. This information is not currently held centrally as these schools are individual employers and run their own payroll systems.
- CEO figure includes all ALB figureheads - some posts are not referred to as CEOs for example the GTCNI Registrar and the Commission Secretary of the Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards.
- The Board members figure does not include the Commissioners appointed to carry out the functions of the suspended SEELB Board.

Relationships and Sexuality Education: Vetting

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education to outline how visiting speakers are vetted, prior to speaking in schools on such issues such as abortion.

(AQW 29194/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has issued advice in its circular 2001/15 'Relationships and Sexuality Education' (RSE) to schools, including the need for them to develop their own age appropriate RSE policy in consultation with parents and the Board of Governors. The consultation with parents is very important and will allow the school to seek parental views regarding their proposed delivery of RSE. The starting point should always be the development of a RSE policy.

A report published by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in January 2011 about RSE provision in post-primary schools highlighted the need for teachers to be provided with more support to help them deal with sensitive issues. To address this, the Department has commissioned the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) to review current RSE guidance for schools and it intended that this work will be completed during the 2014/15 financial year.

In terms of the delivery of RSE by schools, it is accepted that schools do find it helpful to involve outside organisations or individuals, to supplement the school's delivery of the curriculum.

The Department of Education's Circular 2013/1 requires staff engaged in Regulated Activity in schools to be vetted. However, visitors who are asked to deliver a presentation to a class or take part in or host a class discussion would not usually be classed as being engaged in regulated activity. Teachers should always be present when a representative from an agency or individual is taking a session with a class. Consequently, they would not routinely need to be vetted before being allowed onto school premises. Such visitors should of course be managed by school staff and their access to pupils, areas and movement within the school should be restricted as needs require.

A member of school staff should review the resources which are to be used and judge the appropriateness of such materials for the age range and maturity of the pupils and as I have already stated schools should consult with parents in developing their RSE policy.

As with all aspects of the revised curriculum, delivery of RSE and related issues, such as abortion, is a matter for individual schools, taking into account the maturity and level of understanding of their pupils.

North Down: Primary School Enrolments

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the intake of pupils to each primary school in North Down, in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 29200/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below. Please note that the 2013/14 figures are provisional, finalised figures will be available at the end of February.

Year 1 enrolments - Primary schools in North Down constituency - 2009/10 – 2013/14

School name	2009/ 10	2010/ 11	2011/ 12	2012/ 13	2013/ 142
Ballyholme Primary School	76	84	93	90	90
Ballymagee Primary School	59	57	59	60	57
Ballyvester Primary School	7	8	18	18	20
Bangor Central Primary School	86	85	86	87	87
Bloomfield Primary School	41	44	60	59	59
Clandeboye Primary School	15	21	26	51	48
Connor House Preparatory School	19	4	-	-	-
Crawfordsburn Primary School	35	35	33	29	31
Donaghadee Primary School	59	56	59	52	57
Glencraig Integrated Primary School	30	30	29	29	30
Glennola Collegiate	11	15	6	12	12
Grange Park Primary School	50	43	53	60	60
Hollywood Primary School	50	49	38	65	80
Kilcooley Primary School	15	23	13	24	17
Kilmaine Primary School	89	87	86	89	91
Millisle Primary School	21	28	35	30	26
Rathmore Primary School	80	78	85	84	84
Redburn Primary School	19	16	15	-	-
St Anne's Primary School, Donaghadee	5	4	3	13	10
St Comgall's Primary School, Bangor	36	25	51	52	46
St Malachy's Primary School, Bangor	37	35	52	59	59
St Patrick's Primary School, Hollywood	25	28	34	45	36
Sullivan Upper School	26	24	27	26	24
Towerview Primary School	41	48	53	55	49

Source: School census

Notes:

1. These figures include year 1 intakes only; new entrants into other year groups have not been included.
2. Figures for 2013/14 are provisional.
3. '-' denotes schools that have since closed

North Down: After-school Clubs

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the schools in North Down which hold after school clubs.
(AQW 29202/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department (DE) does not have responsibility for after school clubs which operate outside the Extended Schools (ES) programme.

The ES programme provides additional funding, £12m in 2013/14, for those schools serving the most disadvantaged areas to provide for a wide range of services and activities outside of the normal school day. Where assessed as needed by schools, this may include after school clubs.

The schools in the North Down constituency that are eligible to receive ES funding in the 2013/14 financial year and provide after school clubs are outlined below.

- Kilcooley PS, Bangor
- Bloomfield PS, Bangor
- Clandeboye PS, Bangor
- St Malachy's PS, Bangor

Foyle: Schools and PPPs/PFIs

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) which schools in the Foyle constituency are currently subject to Public Private Partnership, or Private Finance Initiative, contracts; (ii) the length of each contract; (iii) the current cost of each contract; (iv) the remaining term of each contract; (v) the average cost to the public purse for this arrangement; and (vi) the year the contract was signed.

(AQW 29237/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) There are two schools in the Foyle Constituency, St Cecilia's College and St Mary's College, which are currently subject to Public Private Partnership (PPP) contracts. Together the schools form the Derry Diocese PPP project.
- (ii) The two schools are part of the same project, which has a 25 year contract.
- (iii) The current (annual) cost of the contract is measured by the unitary charge payment. For this project the unitary charge for 2013/14 is £6.38m.
- (iv) There are 22 years remaining of this contract.
- (v) The total cost to the public purse of this project is £163m over the 25 years of the project.
- (vi) The contract was signed in 2008 and became operational on 02 September 2010.

Shared Education: Funding

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how much funding was allocated to shared education in each of the last five years. [R]
(AQW 29281/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer the Member to my response to AQW 28806/11-15. My Department has not issued funding specifically for shared education. Indications are that schools have funded shared education through department funding streams (such as the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy and Entitlement Framework funding), external funding sources or from within their own school budget. In addition, the Extended School policy encourages schools to partner or cluster with one or more other schools for the delivery of extended services.

Shared Education: Funding

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education which organisations received shared education funding in each of the last five years. [R]
(AQW 29282/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer the Member to my response to AQW 28806/11-15. My Department has not issued funding specifically for shared education. Indications are that schools have funded shared education through department funding streams (such as the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy and Entitlement Framework funding), external funding sources or from within their own school budget. In addition, the Extended School policy encourages schools to partner or cluster with one or more other schools for the delivery of extended services.

Post-primary Schools: Sports Participation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many post-primary schools offer participation for pupils in (i) football; (ii) gaelic games; (iii) cricket; (iv) rugby; and (v) tennis.
(AQW 29305/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not collect information on the individual sports or games provided by each school nor do we hold information on schools with competitive teams.

Physical Education (PE) is a compulsory element of the revised curriculum for all pupils of compulsory school age and Department of Education guidance recommends that schools should provide a minimum of 2 hours PE per week.

The Department does not prescribe specific sports or games to be delivered within a school's PE curriculum as this is a matter for each school.

However, legislation does detail that PE provision to pupils should cover different types of physical activity. Namely in Primary Schools, provision should include athletics, dance, games and gymnastics with the addition of swimming at Key Stage 2. For

Key Stage 3 pupils in Post-Primary School, provision should include athletics, games, gymnastics and swimming. For pupils in Key Stage 4 schools should facilitate pupils' participation in a regular, frequent and balanced programme of physical activity.

Primary Schools: Sports Participation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many primary schools offer participation for pupils in (i) football; (ii) gaelic games; (iii) cricket; (iv) rugby; and (v) tennis.

(AQW 29306/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not collect information on the individual sports or games provided by each school nor do we hold information on schools with competitive teams.

Physical Education (PE) is a compulsory element of the revised curriculum for all pupils of compulsory school age and Department of Education guidance recommends that schools should provide a minimum of 2 hours PE per week.

The Department does not prescribe specific sports or games to be delivered within a school's PE curriculum as this is a matter for each school.

However, legislation does detail that PE provision to pupils should cover different types of physical activity. Namely in Primary Schools, provision should include athletics, dance, games and gymnastics with the addition of swimming at Key Stage 2. For Key Stage 3 pupils in Post-Primary School, provision should include athletics, games, gymnastics and swimming. For pupils in Key Stage 4 schools should facilitate pupils' participation in a regular, frequent and balanced programme of physical activity.

Primary Schools: Sport

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many primary schools have competitive teams in (i) football; (ii) gaelic games; (iii) cricket; (iv) rugby; and (v) tennis.

(AQW 29307/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not collect information on the individual sports or games provided by each school nor do we hold information on schools with competitive teams.

Physical Education (PE) is a compulsory element of the revised curriculum for all pupils of compulsory school age and Department of Education guidance recommends that schools should provide a minimum of 2 hours PE per week.

The Department does not prescribe specific sports or games to be delivered within a school's PE curriculum as this is a matter for each school.

However, legislation does detail that PE provision to pupils should cover different types of physical activity. Namely in Primary Schools, provision should include athletics, dance, games and gymnastics with the addition of swimming at Key Stage 2. For Key Stage 3 pupils in Post-Primary School, provision should include athletics, games, gymnastics and swimming. For pupils in Key Stage 4 schools should facilitate pupils' participation in a regular, frequent and balanced programme of physical activity.

Department for Employment and Learning

City of Culture 2013: DEL Tenders/Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) tenders awarded; and (ii) funding provided to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 28674/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): My Department did not award any tenders or provide any funding to organisations in Derry related to the delivery of the City of Culture 2013.

Queen's University Belfast/Stranmillis University College: Merger

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide an update on the current status of the proposed merger of Stranmillis Teacher Training College and Queen's University, Belfast.

(AQW 28727/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have updated members previously on the proposed merger and made a statement on teacher education issues to the Assembly on 28 November 2011. I have commissioned a two-stage study of the teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland. The first stage has now been completed and I made a statement on this to the Assembly on 21 May this year. The second stage which is examining options for a more shared and integrated system for the delivery and funding of teacher education is currently underway and I expect it to conclude by the summer of 2014. Any merger would be considered in the context of the outcome from this work.

Universities: Religious Background of Applicants

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 2962/11-15, for an update on the data provided.

(AQW 28733/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department does not hold information on the religion of applicants to university and this is also not collected by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). The Department does however hold information on the religion of Northern Ireland (NI) domiciled students enrolled at the NI Higher Education Institutions.

The number of NI domiciled students from a Catholic, Protestant and Other/Not Known background enrolled at: Queen's University; the University of Ulster (broken down by each campus); St Mary's University College; and Stranmillis University College in each of the last seven years is detailed in Annex A. This has been placed in the Assembly Library and on my department's website at <http://www.delni.gov.uk/>.

Universities: Religious Background of Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the religious background of the current (i) teaching staff; and (ii) non-teaching staff at (a) Queen's University Belfast; (b) the University of Ulster, broken down by campus; (c) St Mary's University College; and (d) Stranmillis University College.

(AQW 28734/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Higher Education Institutions have provided the information which I have placed in the Assembly Library and on the DEL website on <http://www.delni.gov.uk/>.

Assured Skills

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the spend on the Assured Skills budget for every year since its foundation; (ii) the amount that each company has received through this programme; (iii) whether the funding provided through this scheme is included as part of the support offered by Invest NI.

(AQW 28773/11-15)

Dr Farry:

- (i) The Assured Skills programme was established in 2010/11. The year-on-year Assured Skills spend is as follows:
- 2010/11 – £888,644.44
 - 2011/12 – £346,971.68
 - 2012/13 – £659,429.57
 - 2013/14 – £222,591.38 (to 30 November 2013)
- (ii) Currently, Assured Skills is engaged in eleven company projects supporting the creation of 2,232 jobs at a total Departmental commitment of £3.44million. Since the start of the programme, including completed projects, the amount that companies have received from Assured Skills funds (up to 30 November 2013) is as follows:

Company	Assured Skills Support 1 April 2010 to 30 November 2013
Allstate	£239,477
Andor	£66,031
Axiom	£103,518
Barclays Bank	£5,802
BT	£107,225
Citigroup	£182,225
CVS Caremark	£121,409
Deloitte	£34,014
First Source Solutions	£28,028
Heritage	£40,674
Liberty	£79,159
Market Resource Partners	£83,078
MITIE Security	£54,435
Navinet	£56,928

Company	Assured Skills Support 1 April 2010 to 30 November 2013
Santander	£26,266
Stream International	£777

Please note that agreements are also in place or being finalised with Chicago Mercantile Exchange, Cowen Group, Caterpillar and Magellan Aerospace. However, no claims have yet been made against the support offered.

- (iii) Yes. A potential investor is presented with one offer from Northern Ireland. However, the offer comprises two complementary parts: the Invest Northern Ireland element and the Assured Skills element, which is aimed at supporting the skills needs of the investor.

Please note that, during the first pilot phase of the programme, a variety of approaches were trialled and a number of projects had no Invest Northern Ireland component. Since the initial pilot finished in 2011/12 and arising from the evaluation of the pilot, only projects with components from both the Department for Employment and Learning and Invest Northern Ireland have been supported under Assured Skills.

Labour Relations Agency

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail, for each of the last eight years (i) the number of queries to the Labour Relations Agency (LRA); (ii) the number of queries relating to potential unfair dismissal claims; (iii) the number of employment tribunal hearings; (iv) the amount of funding provided to the LRA; (v) the full time equivalent staff makeup of the LRA; and (vi) the number of mediation cases involving the LRA.

(AQW 28777/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Labour Relations Agency is a Non-Departmental Public Body with responsibility for promoting the improvement of employment relations in Northern Ireland. The Agency has provided the information in Annex A, by way of answer to points (i), (ii), (iv), (v) and (vi). This has been placed in the Assembly Library and on my department's website at <http://www.delni.gov.uk/>.

Apprentices: Redundant

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the number of apprentices who failed to complete their apprenticeship due to their employer terminating their employment, in each of the last three years; and (ii) any actions taken to enable them to complete their apprenticeship.

(AQW 28782/11-15)

Dr Farry: From September 2010, 684 apprentices who left the ApprenticeshipsNI programme were classified as 'redundant apprentices'. Table 1 overleaf provides the breakdown for the last three years.

My Department has advised contracted Training Suppliers that in cases where an apprentice's employment is terminated, ApprenticeshipsNI participants may join the Training for Success programme (subject to eligibility).

As a contingency measure my Department introduced the Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme in 2009. With the provision of a revised Training for Success Level 2 training option (contracts awarded in June 2013) the continuation of Programme-Led Apprenticeships was considered unnecessary.

My Department also introduced contingency arrangements in 2008 for Construction, Engineering or Motor Vehicle Industry apprentices to allow an apprentice who had been made redundant to continue with his/her training. These arrangements were introduced as a short-term measure but remain in place.

Table 1 Leavers from ApprenticeshipsNI where Termination Reason was recorded as "Redundant Apprentice", by Academic Year (1)

2010/11	225
2011/12	241
2012/13	218
Total	684

Source: Data extracted from the Department's Client Management System on 25th October 2013

- (1) From 1st August to 31st July in each year

Apprenticeships: Emigration

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of apprentices in each different skill area that have emigrated or left Northern Ireland to find employment, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28808/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not hold data relating to apprentices that have emigrated or left Northern Ireland to find employment. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency publishes statistics relating to "International Out-Migration". Unfortunately, publications do not include the detail that you have requested.

My Department's ApprenticeshipsNI Statistical Bulletin provides key information on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme and contains data to July 2013. The Bulletin is published on a quarterly basis with the statistics presented covering a range of topics including starts, occupancy, leavers and outcomes for participants on ApprenticeshipsNI.

A full copy of the Statistical Bulletin can be viewed by following the link below.

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/publications/r-and-s-stats/apprenticeshipsni-statistical-bulletins.htm>

As the member will be aware, in February I announced a major review of my Department's apprenticeship policy. This review, which is all-encompassing in nature, is progressing as planned, and I will be reporting its findings shortly.

Apprenticeships: Female Participation

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline any initiatives being introduced to increase the number of females participating in apprenticeship courses.

(AQW 28942/11-15)

Dr Farry: The most recent edition of my Department's ApprenticeshipsNI Statistical Bulletin indicates that from the introduction of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme in 2007 to date, the percentage of females starting ApprenticeshipsNI funded training has increased from 35% to 51%. A full copy of the Statistical Bulletin can be viewed by following the link below.

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/publications/r-and-s-stats/apprenticeshipsni-statistical-bulletins.htm>

Factors impacting on this increase include the introduction of an all-age provision coupled with accessibility for those working a minimum of 21 hours per week.

As outlined in my oral statement to the Assembly on Tuesday 4 June 2013, I am aware of a range of gender equality issues facing Northern Ireland. I recognise that females, despite gaining strong educational attainments in the further and higher education fields, are much less likely than males to pursue careers in economically relevant areas such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM).

The implementation of the STEM Strategy, 'Success through STEM' sets out how we will collectively help to address this issue. Businesses themselves have an important role to play. For example, the STEM Business sub-group ran a seminar entitled 'Are you getting the balance right?' in association with the Equality Commission. The seminar engaged with STEM businesses to investigate the issues of gender bias in STEM and assist in identifying additional steps businesses can take to make careers in STEM attractive to women.

As the member will be aware, back in February I announce a major review of my Department's apprenticeship policy. This review, which is all encompassing in nature, is progressing as planned and I will be reporting its findings shortly.

Learning Disability: NEETs

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline any plans his Department has to collate data on young people with a learning disability who are Not in Education, Employment or Training, or at risk of being NEET.

(AQW 28943/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department developed and leads the cross-departmental strategy, 'Pathways to Success' (PtS) the Executive's formal strategy for addressing the needs of young people who are not in employment, education and training (NEET). As part of its implementation a range of programmes are available to a wide range of young people in the NEET category including those with learning disabilities. While the individual PtS providers collect data on participants with disabilities and health problems, details of the specific disabilities of the participants are not collated centrally.

The official source of population estimates of the number of young people who are NEET is the Labour Force Survey (LFS) which is carried out by the Department of Finance and Personnel. The most recent LFS figures for the period July-September 2013 estimate that there were 11,000 (23% of total NEETs) with a disability. However, the LFS sample size is too small to provide a more detailed breakdown by type of disability.

My Department intends to analyse data from the 2011 Census of Population with respect to young people in the 16-24 age range. This analysis will examine, amongst other things, the issue of disability. In addition, as outlined in the 'Pathways to Success' strategy, my Department will explore with other Departments options for the development of a tracking system for NEETs which would ultimately encompass those young people with a disability.

Data collected for Northern Ireland European Social Fund (NIESF) programme monitoring records the number of NEETs aged 16-19 and also the number of participants with disabilities or health conditions. The data therefore allow the identification of participants who are NEET and who have a disability. However, it does not enable the identification of participants with any specific disability, such as learning disability.

Learning Disability: NEETs

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail any targeted programmes that support young people with a learning disability who are Not in Education, Employment or Training, or are at risk of being NEET.

(AQW 28944/11-15)

Dr Farry: DEL offers the following programmes that directly and indirectly target and support young people with a disability including those with a learning disability.

Work Connect

Work Connect is an employment programme designed to help recipients of Employment Support Allowance (ESA) or Incapacity Benefit (IB) to overcome barriers to employment, improve their employability and, where possible, find and keep suitable employment. Work Connect is delivered in partnership with external organisations, and provides quality specialist pre-employment and employment provision to clients who have health conditions and / or disabilities, but who are capable of, and wish to play, a full and active role in society. Since its introduction 21 young people with a learning disability have entered the programme, and currently 12 of these young people continue to be supported through Work Connect.

Access to Work (NI)

Access to Work (NI) assists people with disabilities who are either in paid employment, or who have a job to commence, through the provision of practical support and by meeting any additional costs associated with overcoming work-related obstacles that may result from having a disability.

The programme provides a range of individually assessed supports that may be one-off in nature or for a longer term and potentially indefinite period. It provides support to participants where there are additional costs associated with their specific disability, for example; adaptation to premises and equipment; communication support at interview; special aids and equipment; support workers and travel to work support.

There are currently 640 people with disabilities being supported through Access to Work (NI) of which 149 have a learning disability and 31 are aged 16 to 24.

Workable (NI)

This programme aims to assist people with disabilities enter or retain employment through the provision of a flexible range of specialist supports such as a job coaching, mentoring or extra training. All participants have individually focused development plans to help them achieve realistic occupational goals. Workable (NI) is delivered by organisations with extensive experience of meeting the vocational needs of people with disabilities. There are currently 455 employees availing of support through Workable (NI) of which 87 are aged 18 - 24 with a learning disability.

Youth Guarantee

The Department offers a guarantee of a training place through its Training for Success programme for all unemployed 16-17 year old school leavers with extended eligibility for those with a disability. The Training for Success programme is designed to enable participants to progress to higher level training, further education, or employment by providing training to address personal and social development needs, develop occupational skills and employability skills and, where necessary, Essential Skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT.

Community Family Support Programme (CFSP)

The Community Family Support Programme (CFSP), is an initiative designed to help families make life changing decisions to enhance their prospects and support them to become full participants in society. It also supports families with a high level of need in developing their capacity to reach their full potential. During the 26 week programme families will receive help to address the health, social, economic, educational, employment and training issues that impact on their daily lives.

The programme also aims to prevent young people falling into the NEET category and help other young people who find themselves in this situation to re-engage with education, training or employment.

Professional support workers will engage and consult with parents of children and young people to promote early intervention and high quality parenting and to identify solutions to address their specific needs. This includes support for young people or children that may have learning disabilities.

Families will get help to tackle a range of issues and receive support to improve parenting skills. Working closely with schools, children will receive support for needs they may have including additional help with essential skills, numeracy, literacy, problem solving and ICT. Help and support for social and economic issues, health, housing, alcohol and drugs will also feature in the support package and everyone of working age will get help to develop skills to find work.

Collaboration and Innovation Fund (CIF)

The Collaboration and Innovation Fund (CIF) is one of the employment initiatives developed under the Executive's 'Pathways to Success' strategy for young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Over £9.2 million has been made available to 24 organisations from the community, voluntary and educational sectors to explore new

approaches to address the specific and general employability barriers faced by these young people. Projects will deliver provide support to over 6,100 NEET young people from December 2012 to March 2015.

The Print Room project delivered by The Appleby Trust will provide support to 50 young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The remaining projects do not specifically target young people with a learning disability but all young people in the NEET category including those with a learning disability are eligible to participate.

Northern Ireland European Social Fund (NIESF)

Whilst the Northern Ireland European Social Fund (NIESF) Programme, 2007-2013 is not specifically targeted at specific groups of participants, young people with disabilities are eligible to participate and do take part in projects funded under the programme in significant numbers.

Further Education

The Learner Access and Engagement NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) pilot programme, enables learners, aged 16 to 18, who are not, currently, in employment, education, training, nor Essential Skills (ES) provision, and who hold no more than one qualification at level 2 or above, to undertake mentored and supported learning.

The pilot programme is open to any eligible participant, who has been disengaged from education and who may have barriers to learning, including a physical or learning disability.

Learning Disability: Apprenticeships

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline how his Department makes apprenticeship programmes accessible to young people with a learning disability.

(AQW 28945/11-15)

Dr Farry: As part of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, Disability Support Services are available for participants with learning disabilities. Disability Support Suppliers are contracted by the Department and will work closely with Careers Advisers, Training Suppliers, employers and apprentices to provide both pre-entry and ongoing programme support.

Examples of programme support include; one-to-one mentoring, job coaching and disability awareness training for employers and colleagues of apprentices with disabilities.

A disability supplement, of up to £1,560, is payable under ApprenticeshipsNI to allow training suppliers to provide additional support, such as specialist equipment

My Department's Disability Employment Service also offers a range of employment support provision to clients with a learning disability and employers. For example, the Access to Work (NI) and Workable (NI) programmes assist people with disabilities who are either in paid employment, or who have a job to commence, through the provision of practical support associated with overcoming work-related obstacles that may result from having a disability.

Learning Disability: FE/Training/Employment

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and detail how many young people with a learning disability access further education, training or employment programmes.

(AQW 28946/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the academic year 2012/13, a total of 937 young people aged 16-19 with a learning disability started on Training for Success, Programme-Led Apprenticeships and ApprenticeshipsNI provision.

In the same year, a total of 1,063 young people aged 16-19 with a learning disability started on a Professional & Technical course at a Further Education college.

Since its introduction in 2012, a total of 21 young people with learning disability aged 16-24 have entered the Work Connect programme, and there are currently 12 of these young people on the programme.

There are currently 640 people with disabilities being supported through Access to Work (NI) of which 149 have learning disability. 31 of these are aged 16-24.

There are currently 87 18-24 year olds with a learning disability participating on the Workable (NI) programme.

The Enhanced Employer Subsidy, introduced as part of the Youth Employment Scheme, has supported 28 young people with a learning disability into employment to date.

As some individuals may be participating in more than one scheme, I cannot give a total number of people with learning disability benefitting from DEL programmes.

Learning Disability: Further Education

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail how many young people with a learning disability achieve accredited further education qualifications, broken down by type and level achieved.

(AQW 28947/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the 2012/13 academic year a total of 1,277 students, aged between 16 & 19 with a learning disability achieved accredited qualifications in the Northern Ireland Further Education Sector.

The table below provides a breakdown by course type and level of study.

Type of Course	Level of Study				Total
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	HE Level	
Entitlement Framework	61	10	36	0	107
Government Training	283	164	9	0	456
Cost Recovery	2	16	2	0	20
Mainstream Further Education	137	394	144	19	694
Total	483	584	191	19	1,277

Source: FELS

Note: Learning disability is defined through self-classification and age is at 1st July 2012.

Learning Disability: Departmental Liaison

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department is working with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education to identify and respond to specific barriers faced by young people with a learning disability at key life transitions during school, training and employment and day centre opportunities.

(AQW 29020/11-15)

Dr Farry: Over recent years we have worked on a cross Departmental basis with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Department of Education through a number of forums at both Ministerial and official level. This includes key initiatives such as Bamford and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, the latter of which has a dedicated sub group looking at the issue of transitions.

In addition, the Executive's Disability Strategy also recognises the importance of this issue in delivering on its wider priorities of social inclusion and economic success and has rightly identified transitions as a key issue.

I believe a co-ordinated and concerted approach by all key statutory bodies, including my own Department, is necessary in order to make real and sustained progress for these young people.

To that end I have engaged with a wide range of interests on this matter over recent months and undertaken a number of actions to make progress. This includes an audit of further education provision, an increase in financial support of £500k within further education, progress on the use of social clauses in public sector contracts to benefit the employment/skills needs of those with a disability and a strategic review of my Department's Disability Employment Service.

More recently, I raised this issue at the DHSSPS led Inter-Ministerial Group on Mental Health and Learning Disability. As a result it has been agreed that, under the auspices of the Executive's Disability Strategy, and in conjunction with the Office of the First Minister and other Departments, work will be taken forward to identify opportunities to improve upon current arrangements.

This work should fit well with developing initiatives being progressed, such as the Health and Social Care Board review of Day Opportunities and its proposals on a "Regional Learning Disability Day Opportunities Model".

STEM Subjects: PhD Criteria/Funding

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to (i) detail the total number of funded PhD places in STEM subjects currently available and utilised; and (ii) outline the criteria for application.

(AQW 29027/11-15)

Dr Farry: The numbers of DEL funded PhD places in economically relevant subjects are not available yet from the Universities for the year 2013/14. In the academic year 2012/13 my Department funded 516 PhD places in economically relevant subjects.

My Department provides the funding to Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster to administer the postgraduate studentship awards scheme. They select, by competition, the students to fill these awards within the limits of funding available.

DEL does, however, require some basic eligibility criteria to be met including: some residency and citizenship conditions; that the required academic entry qualification for a PhD studentship is a first or upper second class honours degree from a university in the United Kingdom or Ireland or equivalent qualifications and experience; and, candidates who already have a doctoral degree or who have been registered on a programme of research leading to the award of a doctoral degree for more than one year full time are not eligible.

Northern Regional College: Learning Difficulties

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) whether the Northern Regional College carried out an assessment into the educational needs of students with moderate to severe learning difficulties based in the Glens of Antrim area; (ii) when and how this assessment was carried out; and (iii) whether it included factors such as demand, transport and finance.

(AQW 29032/11-15)

Dr Farry: Northern Regional College has not carried out an assessment into the educational needs of students with moderate to severe learning difficulties based specifically in the Glens of Antrim area. The College works closely with health trust transition teams and the Careers Service, across the whole College catchment area, in order to identify prospective students and provide guidance on the courses and support which is available to them. This engagement takes place on an annual basis, prior to course provision being finalised

All further education colleges take into consideration all relevant factors, including potential demand, transport infrastructure and financial viability, when planning curriculum delivery. I can advise that my Department is currently examining the matter of access to transport for students with a learning difficulty and/or disability, aged 19 and over. My Department will consider a course of action and develop proposals, once this initial piece of work has been completed.

Employment: Return-to-work Programmes

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline (i) what flexibility is available for jobseekers undertaking more than one course per year and (ii) what support, if any, is available to customers to fund courses.

(AQW 29055/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) Steps to Work (StW) is the Department for Employment and Learning's main adult return to work programme.

All participants on Step One or Step Three provision can undertake one Short Accredited Training Courses (SATC) within a 12 month period. SATCs are aimed at those who are largely job ready but who may lack some specific vocational skills or qualification which would enhance their prospects of finding and sustaining employment.

My Department has no flexibility to allow participants access to more than one SATC in any 12 month period. Flexibility only exists around the timeframe permitted for delivery of the SATC.

All SATCs delivered for JobSeekers Allowance (JSA) participants must be completed within either a 2 week consecutive period, or over a number of days over two separate weeks. If a course extends into a third week JSA claimants will be deemed unavailable for work and, therefore, may face reductions or loss of benefit.

Participants in receipt of another benefits such as Incapacity Benefit (IB), Employment Support Allowance (ESA) or Income Support (IS), or those not in receipt of benefit, may also undertake one SATC within a 12 month period. Attendance on SATCs for these participants must be completed within a maximum of 6 weeks.

Step Two of the programme provides additional opportunities for participants to undertake a longer training course alongside a work placement within either the 8 week Back to Work or the 26 week Qualification strands of provision. All accredited qualifications delivered within these strands of provision must be on the Register of Regulated Qualifications.

Additional assistance is also available for those participants who have been assessed as having essential skills needs to undertake an approved Essential Skills Qualification in literacy, numeracy and ICT.

(ii) Within Steps 1 and 3 of the programme the daily rate for SATCs is £50 plus full travel costs. However, where the participant has evidence of a verified job opportunity District Managers may approve SATCs costing up to a maximum of £1000 while in exceptional circumstances a Short Accredited Course costing between £1,000 and £2,000 may be approved by Programme Management and Development Branch.

Steps 2 Success

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in regard to South Tyrone, to outline, in relation to people who are economically inactive, (i) what safeguards or flexibilities does his Department intend to build into the delivery of Steps to Success; (ii) whether his Department has developed any policies for claimants suffering mental illness who need additional support; and (iii) how this will be delivered.

(AQW 29168/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department is presently undertaking a procurement process for the delivery of the Steps 2 Success (S2S) programme to replace the existing Steps to Work employment programme. S2S is designed to assist eligible benefit claimants

move into sustainable employment. The requirements for the programme are set by the Employment Service and will be the same across Northern Ireland.

The Department has built in a series of safeguards and flexibilities to ensure that economically inactive clients in receipt of Employment & Support Allowance (ESA) who participate on S2S receive a high standard of service. These safeguards and flexibilities include:

- participation on S2S for ESA clients will be agreed between the Employment Service Adviser and the client, if this is identified as the most suitable option for them;
- the activities undertaken by the participant during their time on S2S will be agreed between the participant and the S2S Provider;
- the level of service to be delivered to each participant by Providers is defined in a Service Guarantee designed by the Department;
- the level of funding for Providers will be higher for economically inactive clients to take account of the greater needs of these clients.

Each of the Department's employment programmes is designed to meet the needs of all eligible clients, including those with disabilities/health conditions. S2S Providers will be required to have a supply chain which includes organisations that will be able to meet the needs of participants with disabilities/health conditions.

As well as the opportunity to participate on S2S the Department's Disability Employment Service provides specifically tailored programmes and services aimed at meeting the needs of people with disabilities, including mental health conditions. These programmes help people progress towards employment, move into work, and then sustain work through ongoing support and assistance. The programmes include: the Condition Management Programme (CMP), delivered by specialist teams in the five Health & Social Care Trusts and Work Connect, delivered by a consortium of seven local disability organisations, with experience in delivering employment services for people with health conditions/disabilities. S2S has been designed to complement these programmes and if participants who complete them have not found employment they can enter S2S, if they agree this with their Employment Service Adviser.

Organisations bidding to deliver S2S will be required to identify how they will meet the needs of all participants, including those in receipt of ESA. They will be required to identify how they will deliver the service to the level required by the Service Guarantee across the full contract area(s) for which they are bidding, including specialist provision.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Autism: DETI Buildings

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what provision is made within her departmental buildings to receive visitors diagnosed with autism and to cater for their needs.

(AQW 28543/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): All visitors to Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment buildings are treated with courtesy and respect by staff. Where possible, details of visitors are notified to reception in advance of their arrival. Where visitors with disabilities, including those with autism spectrum conditions, advise of additional help and support to cater for their needs, every effort will be made to ensure this is provided for them. All visitors who are attending by invitation, or notify us in advance, are met at reception and are accompanied to their destination.

As required by the Autism Act (NI) 2011, DHSSPS has led on the development of the cross departmental Autism Strategy and Action Plan, which is currently with the Northern Ireland Executive for approval. The Action Plan contains proposals for autism awareness training for frontline staff in NICS. Subject to Executive approval, it is anticipated being able to launch the Strategy and Action Plan for publication before the end of the year.

Tourist Board: Review

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail whether the current review of the Tourist Board will consider the future location of the Board's headquarters; and if so, whether the Down Public Sector Campus in Downpatrick will be considered as a location.

(AQW 28556/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Terms of Reference for the review of NITB and wider tourism structures is available on the DETI website and can be accessed via the following link: http://www.detini.gov.uk/nitb_review_brief_for_deti_website.pdf

Under the Terms of Reference the reviewer has been asked to make recommendations designed to rationalise, where it is cost-effective to do so, the provision and delivery of corporate services (including accommodation) within the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and Invest NI. I await the recommendations of the review.

Public Procurement: Sustainability Social Clauses

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the Sustainability Social Clauses that were contained in 13 departmental contracts over 2012/13; and how these are implemented.

(AQW 28628/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Sustainability Social Clauses contained in 13 Departmental contracts awarded from April 2012 to August 2013 include:

- (a) Three work placements for thirteen weeks;
- (b) Encouraging unemployed people into new business start ups;
- (c) Appointing four permanent staff;
- (d) An eight week work placement for each £500,000 of contract value;
- (e) Providing local employment in four contracts;
- (f) Disposal of waste in an ecologically sound manner; and
- (g) Protection of the environment in four contracts.

The first four sustainability clauses above (a-d) are set as performance targets in the contracts which are then monitored by the Contract Manager to ensure that targets are met.

The next sustainability clause (e) relates to a contract which was divided into four smaller contracts to appeal to Small and Medium Enterprises which provided local employment.

The remaining five sustainability clauses (f-g) relate to contracts that contain Supplies and Services Division's requirement to comply with the Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland. Two of these contractors also had International Standards Organisation (ISO) 14001 Environmental Management Accreditation which ensures that they:

- (a) minimize how their operations (processes etc.) negatively affect the environment (i.e. cause adverse changes to air, water, or land); and
- (b) comply with applicable laws, regulations, and other environmentally oriented requirements.

Sloefield Drive, Carrickergus: Land Bank

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the use of the land bank at Sloefield, Carrickergus.

(AQW 28696/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The 108 acres of land at Sloefield Road in Carrickfergus forms Invest NI's Trooperslane Industrial Estate.

The majority of this Estate has been developed and is currently occupied by businesses. There does, however, remain 17 acres available to support projects brought forward by qualifying businesses.

The available land, as with all Invest NI property held for economic development purposes, is actively marketed to both foreign and indigenous investors. The final decision on investment location, however, lies solely with the investor.

It is important to remember that Invest NI operates in the area of property as a result of market failure and as a result its primary remit is not to maximise occupancy, rental or profit. The organisation instead employs a long term strategy in respect of its property holdings.

Railway Preservation Society of Ireland: Funding

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what additional funding is available to assist the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland and their current project in Whitehead.

(AQW 28697/11-15)

Mrs Foster: An application from the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland is currently progressing through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's assessment process.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board currently has no calls for financial assistance open at the moment. However, should project promoters wish to be added to a register of interest for any future funding calls, please e-mail tds@nitb.com.

Employment: Jobs Created

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of jobs created in each constituency in the last twelve months; and (ii) the departmental funding that was available to each business that created these jobs.

(AQW 28711/11-15)

Mrs Foster: (I) At present Invest NI is only able to report on the number of jobs that have been created as a result of the Jobs Fund. Invest NI has developed new systems that will allow it to begin reporting on the number of jobs created across its full

range of interventions from the start of the next financial year. The number of jobs which have been created by the Jobs Fund in each constituency in the last full financial year are:

Invest NI Jobs Fund Jobs Created by Parliamentary Constituency Area 2012 – 2013

Constituency	Jobs Created 12-13	Assistance Paid Towards Jobs Created in 2012-13
Belfast East	80	£267,585
Belfast North	50	£164,895
Belfast South	280	£784,600
Belfast West	80	£210,500
East Antrim	20	£83,500
East Londonderry	40	£99,000
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	136	£428,500
Foyle	179	£322,301
Lagan Valley	59	£252,783
Mid Ulster	261	£1,023,078
Newry & Armagh	83	£254,679
North Antrim	67	£301,632
North Down	23	£82,031
South Antrim	100	£375,210
South Down	60	£113,400
Strangford	35	£110,700
Upper Bann	48	£105,100
West Tyrone	72	£297,208
Total	1,673	£5,276,702

Invest NI reports on the basis of the jobs promoted by the businesses it supports. The jobs promoted by constituency across Invest NI's full range of interventions for the last full financial year are as follows:

Jobs Promoted By PCA	2012-13
Belfast East	216
Belfast North	244
Belfast South	1,220
Belfast West	375
East Antrim	520
East Londonderry	166
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	491
Foyle	468
Lagan Valley	278
Mid Ulster	820
Newry & Armagh	309
North Antrim	210
North Down	103
South Antrim	256
South Down	125

Jobs Promoted By PCA	2012-13
Strangford	167
Upper Bann	519
West Tyrone	678

Sustainable Energy: Definition

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) for her definition of sustainable energy; and (ii) the origin of this definition

(AQW 28751/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) There is no single definition of sustainable energy set out in legislation. A commonly used definition of sustainable energy includes nuclear, renewable energy and energy efficiency. I would include natural gas given its low carbon contribution.
- (ii) The Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Act 2006, which extends to Northern Ireland, focuses on the United Kingdom's contribution to combating climate change and among other things to the desirability of securing a diverse and viable long-term energy supply. It is therefore reasonable to infer from this that sustainable energy covers essentially many areas of energy policy.

Unemployment: Rates

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what the rate of unemployment would be if it was consistent with full employment at current tax rates and social welfare payments.

(AQW 28752/11-15)

Mrs Foster: This is a highly complex area which does not have a definitive answer and is the subject of much dispute amongst some economists. Indeed there is not a formal definition of full employment.

Full employment does not mean zero unemployment, as there is an underlying natural rate of unemployment in an economy – for example as people move between jobs or between education and employment. Even if there were a single accepted approach to this subject it is important to note that any such rate would not be static and would change over time, for example during different periods of an economic cycle. Thus it is not possible to be definitive about what this rate is for Northern Ireland.

Historically some have associated full employment with a claimant count unemployment rate of three per cent or less. However, in 2007, both the UK and Northern Ireland claimant count rate were both well below this 3% threshold and this led the Department for Work and Pensions to state that the 3% rate was not holding up as a yardstick for full employment at that time.

Rather than focusing on a theoretical debate, it is important that we work to deliver our Economic Strategy commitment to rebuild the economy through promoting employment and improving employment opportunities and employability. In addition, the launch this week of the new Economic Inactivity Strategic Framework will help to reduce economic inactivity levels through skills, training incentives and job creation.

Local Government Reform: Invest NI

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has held with Enterprise NI and local enterprise agencies concerning preparations for the Reform of Local Government.

(AQW 28754/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have had no discussions directly with Enterprise NI and local enterprise agencies regarding the reform of local government. However Invest NI have been engaged in extensive discussions with local councils, Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SoLACE) and other representative bodies regarding preparations for the reform of local government.

Shale Gas: Geological Survey of Northern Ireland

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any assessments by the Geological Survey Northern Ireland into the feasibility of shale gas will be based on the same criteria as the British Geological Survey; and what impact the depth of the location of shale in Fermanagh will have on the feasibility of shale gas in this area.

(AQW 28805/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The criteria used by the British Geological Survey (BGS) in their recent study are specifically related to the geological characteristics of the Bowland Shale and the sedimentary basins of the north of England in which these rocks are found.

The geoscientists of the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland (GSNI) will consult with the British Geological Survey about the BGS methodology for estimating gas in place, should similar estimates for the Bundoran Shale Formation in Northern Ireland be undertaken.

There are many areas of Fermanagh where the Bundoran Shale is recognised as being too shallow to be prospective for gas production. The depth of the Bundoran Shale Formation is one of many factors which control the volumes of gas in place and would affect the shale productivity and economic viability of the resource. However, the burial histories of the sedimentary basins in Fermanagh and the north of England are quite different and the depth thresholds used by BGS as a shale gas prospectivity cut-off for the Bowland Shale would not be applicable to the Bundoran Shale.

Golf: US PGA

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to help secure the hosting of the USPGA Championship golf tournament; and for an update on progress in securing this event.

(AQW 28816/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am aware of the recent news articles relating to this however I would stress that no approach has been made by the US PGA to my Department to host a golf tournament in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board and I would be delighted to support a bid process to bring other major golf tournaments to Northern Ireland in the future.

Hosting major global events, including golf events, play a key role in realising our ambitious plans to grow tourism here to a £1 billion industry by 2020.

Investment: United States

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department has taken to reassure potential investors from the United States that Northern Ireland is safe, welcoming and open for business.

(AQW 28820/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In recent years, Northern Ireland has enjoyed a much more stable and peaceful environment providing the catalyst for continued success in securing and growing levels of inward investment to the extent that over the last five years, on a per capita basis, Northern Ireland has been the most successful region, after Greater London, in the United Kingdom for attracting inward investment projects.

While a small number of potential US investors have commented about the current situation, Invest NI, has provided assurances that Northern Ireland remains one of the most competitive places and safest places in Europe to do business, highlighting that rates of crime have dropped by 30 per cent in the last 10 years, making Northern Ireland the safest region in the UK.

These are the messages that Invest NI's overseas sales teams use in managing relationships with potential investors to overcome any lingering negative perceptions of Northern Ireland.

My Department and Invest NI are encouraged by the fact that in spite of the recent media coverage, no planned visits by potential investors to Northern Ireland have been cancelled with all recent scheduled visits taking place without disruption.

However it is impossible to measure the effects that such events have had on a potential investors' perception of Northern Ireland and their long term influence on investment decisions.

Renewable Heat Incentive: Budget

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration he has given to increasing the budget for the Renewable Heat Incentive.

(AQW 28868/11-15)

Mrs Foster: At this stage I am content that the current budget for the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) is sufficient to cover the existing level of uptake and future projections based on trends.

As the scheme develops, particularly with the proposed introduction of the domestic RHI and the extension of the non-domestic scheme to support new technologies, DETI will continue to monitor the budget requirements.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Geological Survey of Northern Ireland

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the GSNI has sought to become the regulator of hydraulic fracturing.

(AQW 28902/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No.

Sustainable Energy: Campaigns

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the success of the EnergyWise campaign will be measured in terms of changing consumer behaviour.

(AQW 28903/11-15)

Mrs Foster: 'EnergyWise' is a messaging brand rather than a specific campaign. It aims to deliver a unified approach to sustainable energy messaging across all Government Departments and Agencies. The approach was approved by the Executive in November 2010 and to date the brand has been used in two campaigns run by DETI.

In each of the DETI campaigns, research was commissioned pre and post campaign, to assess changes in public awareness and changes in public attitudes. The 'call to action' elements of the advertising were also monitored through the recording of web traffic on the 'nidirect.gov.uk' and 'nibusinessinfo.gov.uk' websites and by monitoring the number of phone calls received. This feedback enabled DETI to assess how consumers were responding to the different elements of the campaigns and in turn can be used to inform future communications work.

My Department will next use the brand, in a campaign to promote renewable heat in both the domestic and non-domestic markets, during January-March 2014. Research will once again be undertaken and the web and phone traffic monitored. Ultimately the change in the rate of applications received for the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme will be a good indicator of the effectiveness of the campaign.

Selective Financial Assistance

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration has been given by her Department to better target Selective Financial Assistance, to create employment in areas of high deprivation and unemployment.

(AQW 28906/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The recent evaluation of Selective Financial Assistance (SFA) which was commissioned by my Department gave detailed consideration to the impact of SFA during the 2004 – 2011 period and concluded that it was being delivered in a balanced and equitable fashion across Northern Ireland.

The evaluation found that SFA operated in many of Northern Ireland's most deprived communities, and supported job creation in our most deprived areas which have the greatest economic need. The evaluation was also able to demonstrate that a disproportionately high amount of SFA has been targeted at areas of disadvantage. For example:

- almost one quarter (23%) of new SFA jobs promoted were located in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods, and;
- almost half (45%) of new SFA jobs promoted were in the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods.

Whilst the evaluation made a number of recommendations to help shape the use of SFA going forward, it is notable that it did not recommend that any greater targeting of support to specific areas should occur. Analysis of Invest NI support over the last two financial years (1 April 2011 – 31 March 2013) would seem to support this approach, as it shows that during this time:

- 52% of all Invest NI Job related offers went to businesses in areas of disadvantage*
- 56% of job related assistance went to businesses in areas of disadvantage*
- 59% of job related investment went to businesses in areas of disadvantage*, and
- 59% of all new jobs promoted were in areas of disadvantage*

*Above Figures exclude Regional Start Initiative

Renewable Energy: Target

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what progress has been made on achieving the 40 per cent renewable energy target of the Strategic Energy Framework.

(AQW 29044/11-15)

Mrs Foster: We continue to make steady progress towards the 40% target. In the rolling twelve month period to end October 2013, approximately fifteen percent of electricity consumption was from renewable energy sources.

Electricity: Annual Requirement

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the annual electricity MW requirement in each local council area; and whether any monitoring takes place on that basis against the 40 per cent renewable energy target required by 2020.

(AQW 29053/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not undertake monitoring of this nature. I am further informed by Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) that there is no estimation carried out of electrical demand or consumption or monitoring against the renewable energy target in respect of individual council areas. The NIE network is not configured on the basis of council areas and it is therefore impracticable to make such assessments.

Department of the Environment

Taxis: Enforcement/Compliance

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of Belfast based private hire taxi drivers; and (ii) the number of Belfast based private hire taxi depot operators and/or licence holders that have been found in breach of licence regulations; and of these, how many incurred penalties and/or lost their licences, since October 2012.

(AQW 28533/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): Under current Regulations, when a taxi driver or taxi operator is licensed he/she can operate either private or public hire taxis. Accordingly, there are no public hire or private hire taxi drivers or operators but simply taxi drivers or operators that may drive or operate either type of taxi. As of 27 November 2013, there were 4,651 licensed taxi drivers and 477 licensed taxi operators with Belfast addresses.

During the period 1 October 2012 to 30 June 2013, the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) carried out 79 taxi enforcement operations in the Belfast area resulting in 362 private hire taxis and drivers checked for compliance with legal requirements at the roadside. Of these, 39 drivers received Fixed Penalty Notices with a further 31 drivers informed that they were liable to prosecution. In addition, follow up investigations were instigated with 8 taxi operator licence holders.

DVA also carry out compliance visits at commercial premises to ensure that operators comply with the conditions of their taxi operator's licence. The most important of these is that they use only properly licensed drivers and vehicles and maintain accurate booking records. During the period 1 February 2013 to 31 October 2013, there were 40 Compliance visits undertaken at commercial premises in the Belfast area. Of these, 15 were deemed fully compliant with legal requirements with a further 22 subject to a revisit due to minor infractions which have since been rectified. In addition, 1 operator has closed down their premises, 1 operator has received a written warning and 1 operator's licence is currently under review.

Please note that these are not validated official government statistics.

Taxis: Fixed Penalty Notices

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27263/11-15, for his assessment of whether a £30 fixed penalty ticket is a sufficient penalty and deterrent under these circumstances.

(AQW 28535/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Private hire vehicle licensees who contravene the Public Service Vehicle Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1985 and the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 by causing or permitting a vehicle to ply for hire are liable for a £30 fixed penalty ticket, or a maximum fine of £2,500 if taken to court.

The levels of Fixed Penalties which apply to this and other road transport offences have been agreed following public consultation, and ministerial and committee agreement.

The committing of an offence by a driver listed on the licence of a taxi operator may be considered in terms of determining whether an individual remains a fit and proper person to hold a taxi operator's licence; and similar considerations may apply to the retention of a taxi driver's licence. The fixed penalty ticket is therefore not the only deterrent in place as regards such offences.

A wide range of fixed penalty notices and charges apply for road traffic offences. I recognise that it is necessary periodically to review the charges for the notices, but that it is necessary to do this in a holistic way, to ensure the appropriate balance is kept between offences, and against fines imposed by the courts. My Department therefore plans to carry out a review of all current penalties for road traffic offences, including all fixed penalties. The review will also assess the scope for conditions and circumstances around the commission of an offence to be reflected in the applicable penalties. Work on this review, which is a medium term action measure in the Road Safety Strategy, will begin in 2015 and I will consider its outcomes once it is completed.

Taxis: Private and Public Hire

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27815/11-15, given there are different regulations for private and public hire taxis, for his assessment of whether it would be beneficial to differentiate between the two sectors.

(AQW 28536/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Under current Regulations, when a taxi driver is licensed he/she can operate either private or public hire taxis. Accordingly, there are no public hire or private hire taxi drivers but simply taxi drivers who may drive either type of taxi.

You will be aware that the introduction of a single tier licensing system will remove the distinction between Public Hire and Private Hire Taxis, permitting both to pick-up passengers without a pre-booking.

War Memorials

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what financial assistance is available for the conservation and repair of war memorials.

(AQW 28569/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There are 24 war memorials listed in Northern Ireland; others are protected either as part of a listed building, or because they lie within a Conservation Area.

War memorials that are listed may avail of Listed Buildings Grant-aid funding for works of repair and maintenance of the historic fabric. Grant-aid is available currently at a rate of 45%; and capped at £500K (this is subject to funding availability). Grant-aid assistance, of up to 75% of costs, is also available towards (reasonable) related professional fees.

Some memorials may also be eligible for financial assistance where they are part of a scheduled Historic Monument, though very few (ie less than 10) are known to be protected in this way. Where a memorial is part of a scheduled Historic Monument, funding may be made available for up to 100% for conservation works. Here again this is subject to funding availability.

Other non DOE sources of funding, including HLF funding, may also be available. Many of these sources may be accessed at the Funding for Historic Buildings' web site <http://www.ffhb.org.uk/>.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Video Evidence

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27716/11-15, whether photographic evidence, as stated, includes video recordings.

(AQW 28576/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Photographic evidence recorded by Driver and Vehicle Agency enforcement staff includes video recordings.

Environmental Impact Assessment: Judicial Reviews

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27485/11-15, (i) why no costs were paid to the applicant in case LIT 33530/2012; (ii) why the costs for case LIT 33380/2012 are recorded as £0 when the table confirms that his Department paid part of the applicant's costs; and (iii) whether he wishes to revise any of the figures in the table.

(AQW 28601/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The figures quoted in AQW 27485/11-15 related to the amount of money paid out by the Department up to the end of October. Further investigation has revealed that some of the figures included in AQW 27485/11-15 were incorrect. The table provided has therefore been revised and I apologise for the error.

The costs paid in case LIT 33380/2012 were £55,142 and those in case LIT 33530/2012 were £2,080.

Judicial Reviews Due to EIA Grounds 2011-13

Judicial Review	Planning Office	Litigation Reference	Date Commenced	EIA/ Habitat grounds for JR	Status	Cost
Enagh youth Forum Re: Gasification Plant, Derry	Northern	LIT 37470/2013/ KB	25/04/2013	EIA	Ongoing	£0
Belfast Office Properties Re: Permission granted for retail development at Castlebawn N'Ards	SPD	LIT 36416/2013/ KJB	04/02/2013	EIA	Ongoing	£3,264
River Faughan Anglers Ltd RE: Permission granted for the retention of extension to site office, extension to vehicle maintenance shed and improved wash out facilities, Glenshane Road, Drumahoe (Chambers Site)	Northern	LIT 35931/2012/ JMacE	01/12/2012	EIA	Ongoing	£3,791
Sandale Developments Ltd (2) Re: replacement secondary school (under consideration), Termon Road, Carrickmore	Western	LIT 34077/2012	01/07/2012	EIA	Decision Upheld but appeal lodged	£4,684

Judicial Review	Planning Office	Litigation Reference	Date Commenced	EIA/ Habitat grounds for JR	Status	Cost
National Trust JR Re: Permission granted for golf resort.	SPD	LIT 33426/2012/ KJB	08/05/2012	EIA	Decision Upheld	£10,165
Musgrave Retail Partners NI Limited Re: Supermarket permitted at Lineside, Coalisland	Western	LIT 35241/2012/ GH	01/11/2012	EIA	Withdrawn by applicant	£0
James Joseph Woods, RE 40 Dernalea Road Armagh re interconnector Re: O/2009/0792/F	SPD	LIT 32534/2012	28/02/2012	EIA	Ongoing	£58,150
Milhench Harrison Ltd Re: Permission granted under Y/2010/0127/F Erection of 3no 80Kw wind turbines. Hub height 25m rotor diameter 18m. (amended location within site).	Downpatrick	LIT 33380/2012	03/05/2012	EIA	The case was settled and announced to the Court on 19 November 2012 - the Notice Party bought the Applicant's property and DOE paid a contribution to the Applicant's costs of the Judicial Review.	£55,142
William Donnelly, Re: Variation of condition to remove rock from site, K/2008/0995/F & K/2011/0476/F	SPD	LIT 33530/2012	17/05/2012	EIA	Both Decisions Quashed	£2,080
Donald Martin Melrose and Belfast City Airport Watch Re: extension to Belfast City Airport Runway	SPD	LIT 27964/2011/ KJB	01/01/2011	EIA	Withdrawn by applicant	£220,711
Sandale Developments Ltd (3) Re: permission granted for housing under K/2008/0452/O	Western	LIT 30815/2011 & LIT30453	07/11/2011	EIA	Decision Quashed	£3,000
					Total	£360,987

Special Area of Conservation: Mineral Extraction

Mr Agnew asked Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27412/11-15, whether his Department has a requirement to review extant permissions for mineral extraction and processing that are likely to have a significant effect on a Special Area of Conservation or any other environmental designation of international importance.

(AQW 28602/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There is a general requirement under the Habitats Regulations to review any extant planning permissions which are likely to have a significant effect on a European site such as a Special Area of Conservation. I would also refer you to my answer to your previous question (AQW 25467/11-15), in which I advised that, whilst the review of old minerals permissions has not yet commenced, I am exploring options and timelines for introducing this review.

Brickkiln: Waste Licensing Compliance

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether at the time of the fire which broke out on 8 November 2013 at Brickkiln waste recycling plant at Maydown, Derry, the company was in compliance with all its waste licencing requirements and other development consents.

(AQW 28603/11-15)

Mr Durkan: At the time of the fire on the 8th November 2013:

- Brickkiln Ltd was not in compliance with the conditions of the Waste Management Licence. NIEA is taking action in response to these non-compliances in the form of an Article 16 Notice under the Waste Management and Contaminated Land Order 1997.
- Brickkiln Ltd was in compliance with Water Discharge Consent Number 119/08 for sewage effluent and Water Discharge Consent Number 119/08 for sewage effluent.
- DOE Planning was not aware of any breach of planning control.

City Industrial Waste: Fire Investigation

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 25391/11-15 whether his Department has concluded its investigation into the fires at City Industrial Waste, Mobouy Road, Derry; (ii) whether any of the fires resulted in pollution of the River Faughan SAC, the adjoining stream or the environment; and (iii) whether any criminal proceedings will follow.

(AQW 28604/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) Water Management Unit staff were on site throughout the response to both 2010 fires and repeatedly checked all surrounding watercourses, but found no significant water pollution. This was due in large part to Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) containing and recycling fire water runoff, under NIEA guidance, so that there was a negligible volume of off-site runoff. As no significant water pollution resulted from these 2010 fires it was not appropriate for NIEA to initiate criminal charges for any fire-related water pollution offence.

The fires at City Industrial Waste, Mobouy Road, Derry were also investigated by the NIFRS and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Queries regarding these investigations and any resulting criminal proceedings would need to be directed to the PSNI and the NIFRS.

Planning Applications: Environment Agency

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment whether there is a target time in place for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's response to the planning application consultations.

(AQW 28653/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency's (NIEA) consultation responses are the subject of targets set for the return of consultation responses on planning applications within certain timeframes. These include a target to return 90% of consultations concerning scoping requests under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations (to determine if an Environmental Statement is required) within 15 working days. In relation to routine planning applications the target is to return 75% within 15 working days. The target for consultations which include Environmental Impact, hydro-geological or Article 6 (Habitats Regulations) Assessments is 90% within 30 working days.

These targets are currently being reviewed and it is anticipated that new and tighter targets will be set for the period from now until the transfer of planning powers to the councils. There are ongoing quarterly meetings within the Department between Planning and NIEA senior management where consultation performance is discussed.

In the future as part of the implementation of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, in addition to transferring the bulk of planning powers to councils in 2015, I will provide greater clarity and certainty for the consultation process. For the first time, identified consultees will be statutorily required to provide a substantive response to a consultation request from a planning authority within a specified timeframe and to report on their performance in meeting their duty to respond.

All future consultation responses will have to be "substantive" providing sufficient information to allow the requesting planning authority to determine the application. A holding response would not be regarded as meeting the requirements of the duty to respond.

Details of proposed timeframes, criteria as to what would constitute a substantive response and reporting requirements will be set out in subordinate legislation which will be the subject of public consultation commencing in Spring 2014.

Tully Quarry, Ballymena: Planning Application

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment, given the process deployed in respect of the Rose Energy application, why the planning application for an anaerobic digester at Tully Quarry, Ballymena is being dealt with by the local planning office.

(AQW 28662/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Rose Energy proposal to which you refer was for a biomass plant to be fuelled by poultry bedding with a smaller amount of meat and bone meal (approximately 260,000 tonnes per annum). It would generate approximately 30MW

of electricity as output from the process of incineration. The proposal included a number of structures including an 80 m high chimney stack. The application was accompanied by an Environmental Impact Statement.

The application was declared a major application under Article 31 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 on 23 September 2008 primarily on the basis that it would be of significance to the whole or a substantial part of Northern Ireland.

In contrast, the proposal for Stream Bio-energy is a much smaller 2MW Centralised Anaerobic Digestion (CAD) Combined Heat and Power Plant that will solely process chicken litter.

Although the Department accepts that the application is important locally, it is not considered to be of regional significance and does not meet with the criteria to be made an Article 31 application. I am therefore content that this application is being processed locally by the South Antrim Area Planning Office.

Tully Quarry, Ballymena: Planning Policy Statement 18

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment, having regard to the expectations of PPS 18, for his assessment of the level of engagement with local residents by the applicant for an anaerobic digester at Tully Quarry, Ballymena.
(AQW 28663/11-15)

Mr Durkan: While I would encourage public and community consultation with all such proposals, in line with the Department's publication 'PPS18 Best Practice Guidance' as this is not a legislative requirement, applicants cannot be compelled to undertake this prior to the submission of an application.

I understand that the applicants in this case, Stream Bio-energy have since met with local residents to discuss the proposal

Planning Applications: Developer Contribution

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether consideration is being given to making a developer contribution to social and affordable housing a requirement in planning applications for all large housing developments.
(AQW 28681/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Officials from my Department have been in discussion with officials from the Department for Social Development in relation to proposals for developer contributions toward the provision of social and affordable housing units.

I have written to the Minister for Social Development on this matter and I hope that we will be able to agree to consult on joint proposals for such a system in the near future.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Enforcement Staff

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27047/11-15, whether enforcement officers are contracted to work evenings or nights or is such work deemed as overtime.
(AQW 28685/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) enforcement officers are not contracted to work evenings or nights and therefore any work undertaken outside conditioned hours is deemed overtime.

For the majority of full-time non-industrial Civil Servants including DVA enforcement officers, pay is related to a specific number of contracted hours of attendance per week, known as 'conditioned hours'. Normal conditioned hours are 42 gross per week, including a meal break of one hour a day and the 5 day week is the standard arrangement throughout the Civil Service.

Due to the nature and timing of enforcement operations, particularly in respect of the taxi and bus industry, I have asked that a review of the contractual arrangements for new enforcement staff is undertaken to determine the best workforce model to support an effective and efficient enforcement function.

On average between 1 and 2 Enforcement Officers work in Belfast each evening.

There are 14 PSV enforcement officers based in Belfast.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Enforcement Staff

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27047/11-15, what are the contracted hours of enforcement officers.
(AQW 28686/11-15)

Mr Durkan:

- (i) Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) enforcement officers are not contracted to work evenings or nights and therefore any work undertaken outside conditioned hours is deemed overtime.
- (ii) For the majority of full-time non-industrial Civil Servants including DVA enforcement officers, pay is related to a specific number of contracted hours of attendance per week, known as 'conditioned hours'. Normal conditioned hours are 42 gross per week, including a meal break of one hour a day and the 5 day week is the standard arrangement throughout the Civil Service.

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- (iii) On average between 1 and 2 Enforcement Officers work in Belfast each evening.
- (iv) There are 14 PSV enforcement officers based in Belfast.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Enforcement Staff

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27047/11-15, how many enforcement officers in Belfast work evenings.

(AQW 28687/11-15)

Mr Durkan:

- (i) Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) enforcement officers are not contracted to work evenings or nights and therefore any work undertaken outside conditioned hours is deemed overtime.
- (ii) For the majority of full-time non-industrial Civil Servants including DVA enforcement officers, pay is related to a specific number of contracted hours of attendance per week, known as 'conditioned hours'. Normal conditioned hours are 42 gross per week, including a meal break of one hour a day and the 5 day week is the standard arrangement throughout the Civil Service.

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- (iii) On average between 1 and 2 Enforcement Officers work in Belfast each evening.
- (iv) There are 14 PSV enforcement officers based in Belfast.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Enforcement Staff

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27047/11-15, how many enforcement officers work in Belfast.

(AQW 28688/11-15)

Mr Durkan:

- (i) Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) enforcement officers are not contracted to work evenings or nights and therefore any work undertaken outside conditioned hours is deemed overtime.
- (ii) For the majority of full-time non-industrial Civil Servants including DVA enforcement officers, pay is related to a specific number of contracted hours of attendance per week, known as 'conditioned hours'. Normal conditioned hours are 42 gross per week, including a meal break of one hour a day and the 5 day week is the standard arrangement throughout the Civil Service.

Due to the nature and timing of enforcement operations, particularly in respect of the taxi and bus industry, I have asked that a review of the contractual arrangements for new enforcement staff is undertaken to determine the best workforce model to support an effective and efficient enforcement function.

- (iii) On average between 1 and 2 Enforcement Officers work in Belfast each evening.
- (iv) There are 14 PSV enforcement officers based in Belfast.

City of Culture 2013: DOE Tenders/ Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) tenders awarded; and (ii) funding provided to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 28689/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department did not award any tenders to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013. A total of £817,200 was provided to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013. Funds were dispersed by way of grants. Details are provided in the table below.

Organisation	Amount	Description
Architectural Heritage Fund	£250,000	Acquisition of Great James Street Presbyterian Church and 31-33 Shipquay Street - listed buildings at risk.
City Centre Initiative	£12,500	Installation of CCTV to discourage vandalism on the Walls.

Organisation	Amount	Description
Derry City Council	£504,500	Dereliction Funding (£498,000) and publication of Island City (£6,500).
Echo Echo Dance Studio	£6,200	Installation of disabled access ramp on Hangman's Bastion.
Foyle Civic Trust	£6,000	Living History Exhibition.
Holywell Trust	£10,000	Wave on the Walls (£5,000) and European Walled Towns Symposium (£5,000).
Lumen Christi College	£28,000	Conservation Programme on the 17th century windmill in college grounds.
Total	£817,200	

Littering: Prosecutions

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many people in each council area have been prosecuted for littering in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28703/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Figures obtained from Councils in respect of successful prosecutions in the courts for littering offences are as follows:-

Litter Offence – No. of Successful Prosecutions

Council	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Ballymena	2	1	0
Belfast	91	15	44
Castlereagh	1	4	1
Coleraine	1	2	1
Cookstown	2	0	1
Craigavon	25	11	41
Down	0	0	8
Larne	3	0	2
Limavady	0	0	1
Magherafelt	0	1	0
Newtownabbey	7	7	4
North Down	0	0	1
Omagh	1	2	2
All other Councils	0	0	0
Totals	133	43	106

Councils also deal with litter offenders by issuing fixed penalty notices or on the spot fines as an alternative to seeking prosecution through the courts. Over the past three financial years 10,940 fixed penalty notices were issued by councils for littering offences.

Taxi Ranks: Report

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what was the cost of the report commissioned by his Department into the Review of Taxi Ranks and of the Introduction of Rank Exclusion Zones; (ii) what cognisance has been given to the conclusions in this report; and (iii) what action has been taken as a result of this report.

(AQW 28721/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In June 2011 my Department commissioned research into the suitability of exclusion zones for taxi ranks in Northern Ireland.

- (i) The cost of this research was £9,999. The report was published on 30 November 2011. The report can be downloaded directly from the following link: http://www.doeni.gov.uk/review_of_taxi_ranks.pdf

- (ii) & (iii) The report recommended taking no action in relation to the implementation of exclusion zones. The report concluded that, particularly within Belfast, consumers often prefer not to take rank based taxis. Therefore exclusion zones around ranks would have the effect of making consumers walk further to get their preferred type of taxi outside of the zone. Given the proximity of ranks to one another within Belfast City Centre, this would effectively close the City Centre off to all but Belfast Public Hire taxis. Given the implications for the night time economy, and the safety implications of consumers having to walk late at night to procure the taxi of their choice, the report recommended not introducing exclusion zones in Northern Ireland at this time.

The report made a number of other rank related recommendations, some of which come under the remit of DRD. Those applicable to my Department included the need to encourage rank use, and to increase public confidence in taking rank based taxis, particularly to improve in service levels in collaboration with the taxi trade. My officials continue to work closely with all taxi industry stakeholders as part of the Taxi Reform Programme, and in recent months this has involved intense engagement with Belfast Public Hire. The Department is working with Belfast Public Hire to improve customer service at ranks and encourage consumer confidence, prior to the introduction of single tier taxi licensing, facilitating the adjustment for them to the new regime.

The report also recommended the Department move to a policy of only allowing accessible taxis at official ranks in Northern Ireland, rather than only in Belfast as is currently the case. Further research is ongoing to investigate whether this would suit the needs of people with disabilities, taking account of the fact that not all disabled people are able to use a wheelchair accessible taxi. In addition this research will recommend a revised wheelchair accessible vehicle specification which would improve the service to wheelchair users across Northern Ireland. I plan to issue a consultation on this shortly, once the work is complete.

Radon: Public Awareness Campaigns

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether his Department is currently conducting, or planning to conduct, any radon public awareness campaigns in areas where there is an elevated risk of radon; (ii) whether his Department offers householders free radon tests in areas where there is an elevated risk of radon, or retests after remediation work has been carried out; and (iii) how many radon tests have been carried out by his Department over the last two years.

(AQW 28735/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Since 1988 NIEA has carried out a number of radon campaigns across Northern Ireland, offering free tests to householders in areas with an elevated risk of having high radon levels. Over 50,000 householders have been offered free tests in the course of these campaigns which included road shows, seminars, public meetings, press releases for local media, presentations to professional groups and direct visits to householders in affected areas.

The results of these campaigns were used to produce increasingly accurate radon risk maps in 1989, 1993 and 1999; culminating in the 2009 Radon Atlas which presented radon probability maps for NI at a resolution of 1km squares of the Irish Grid. By 2009, 3.3% of the housing stock in NI (approx 23,000 households) had been tested for radon, compared to 1.9% of the housing stock in the rest of the UK.

NIEA's most recent radon campaign was carried out in 2011 in the Cookstown, Armagh and Dungannon council areas, areas where the response to previous campaigns had been low. Householders in areas where the potential for radon levels to exceed the UK Radon Action level was 5% or greater were contacted by letter and offered a free radon test. Around 540 householders were invited to participate; about 35% accepted the offer. Of the 153 tests successfully completed, six homes were identified above the Action Level of 200 Bq m⁻³ and 17 measured between the Target Level of 100 Bq m⁻³ and the Action Level.

Public Health England (PHE), who issue and analyse the radon monitors on behalf of NIEA, provided the householders with a report of the results and advise on any actions necessary to reduce radon levels. The report on this campaign was published in March 2013 and is available at http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1317138226199.

NIEA are not currently planning to conduct any further radon campaigns or offer free tests but continue to offer advice to householders who contact the Agency with queries about radon and to direct them to the appropriate resources.

Waste Crime: Mills Report

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether he, or his departmental officials, have seen the Mills report, or any draft copies or sections of this report; and whether any recommendations or suggestions on altering the report or what should be included in the final version of the report were made.

(AQW 28738/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I have not yet seen the report. The Expert Reviewer, Mr Chris Mills, is currently finalising the report. Given the critical importance of the review and the complex nature of the issues he is investigating, Mr Mills requested extra time to finalise his report which he has been provided with. As part of this process, Mr Mills asked the Chief Executive of the NIEA to ensure his draft report is checked for factual and legal accuracy. My Departmental officials are providing this support to Mr Mills. I understand that Mr Mills will be providing his final report to me in the next few days.

Public Service Vehicles Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1985

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment to provide a copy of the Public Service Vehicles Regulations (NI) 1985. (AQW 28763/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Regulations in question are contained in the Bound Volumes in the Assembly Library, and can be obtained from the Library enquiry desk using the reference S.R. 1985/123. I have been advised that these can be photocopied or scanned for you as required.

Taxis: Approved Taximeter Centres

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what assurances he can give that a rigorous tendering process will be used to select the companies that will supply, fit and calibrate meter printers for taxis, to ensure that drivers receive the best price and service.

(AQW 28775/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As part of the suite of measures included in the taxi reform implementation programme, the Department is planning to work with the private sector to establish a network of Approved Taximeter Centres (ATCs) which will be authorised to calibrate, test and seal taximeters, with an authorisation process largely based on the existing model for approved tachograph centres.

On application for an approval, companies and individuals would be inspected and assessed by DVA to ensure that they meet specified standards. Approved installers would be required to comply with a number of conditions to be determined by the Department. Non compliance with these conditions could result in the withdrawal of the Department's approval and the subsequent loss of access to the marketplace. Once approved, ATCs would be subject to quality audit by DVA to ensure continued compliance with the conditions of the approval.

The Department has no plans to contract these companies and individuals as service suppliers and there will therefore be no requirement for a tender process. The Department does not have the power to regulate the price of taximeters or any fees charged by ATCs; these levels will be determined by market forces.

Planning: Back Garden Developments

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment when legislation to prevent back garden developments will be introduced. (AQW 28788/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I recognise that great care is needed to ensure that the individual or cumulative effects of back garden development do not significantly erode the character or amenity of existing residential areas. However, I am satisfied that existing policy and guidance contained in Planning Policy Statement 7 'Quality Residential Environments' and its addendum 'Safeguarding the Character of Established Residential Areas' is sufficient to ensure that siting, design, layout and density of new development is fully considered. In established residential areas planning permission will only be granted for the redevelopment of existing buildings, or the infilling of vacant sites (including extended garden areas) that respects the existing character and amenity of these areas.

I, therefore, have no plans to introduce legislative measures to prevent back garden developments.

Taxis: Temporary Licences

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment how many temporary private taxi-operator licences have been issued in each of the last two years; and what was the duration of each licence. (AQW 28809/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Taxi Operator Licensing was introduced on 1 September 2012. Regulation 17(2) of the Taxi Operators Licensing Regulations (NI) 2012 provided for the issue of temporary licences to customers who submitted applications on or before 31 October 2012. This measure was designed to enable existing businesses to continue to operate while the Department dealt with the initial influx of applications, following the introduction of taxi operator licensing in September 2012.

A total of 1,7431 temporary operator licences were issued. Operator licences do not differentiate between private and public; licensed operators can operate either type of service.

Temporary licences had no set duration and were intended as an interim measure to allow the Department time to complete the process of determining applications.

Other than for a small number of cases where applicants have exercised their rights of appeal, all temporary licences had been revoked (where the applicant failed to meet the criteria for a full licence) or replaced with a full licence by June 2013.

Please note these figures are not part of official statistics and have not been subject to data validation.

Road Safety: 20 mph Speed Limit

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the proposed Bill to set a 20mph speed limit on minor residential roads.

(AQW 28838/11-15)

Mr Durkan: While speed limits are a matter for the Department for Regional Development, as Minister with responsibility for road safety, I have an interest in the Bill as a measure with the potential to contribute to further reductions in road casualties.

Over the five years between 2008 and 2012, 797 pedestrians and 128 cyclists were killed or seriously injured in road traffic collisions in an area with a 30mph limit or lower; around 30 per cent of these casualties were children.

Speed at the moment of collision is one of the key determinants of the outcome and, where pedestrians or cyclists are involved, just a few miles an hour can make a real difference.

I do believe that we should actively consider introducing 20mph limits more broadly to where people live, particularly where vehicles come into close proximity to vulnerable road users such as children, pedestrians and cyclists. It would of course be vital to ensure that any such speed limits are suitable for the roads or areas for which they are proposed and, in particular, that they have the support of the local community, that any necessary or appropriate signage and/or other infrastructure is in place, and that limits are properly enforced. By ensuring that this is the case, there is likely to be more compliance with the lower speed limit, meaning that speeds will be reduced and the impact of any collisions will be lower.

Road Safety: 20 mph Speed Limit

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the impact on road safety of the proposed Bill to set the speed limit on minor residential roads at 20mph.

(AQW 28839/11-15)

Mr Durkan: While speed limits are a matter for the Department for Regional Development, as Minister with responsibility for road safety, I have an interest in the Bill as a measure with the potential to contribute to further reductions in road casualties.

Over the five years between 2008 and 2012, 797 pedestrians and 128 cyclists were killed or seriously injured in road traffic collisions in an area with a 30mph limit or lower; around 30 per cent of these casualties were children.

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Vehicle Licensing: Online

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that motorists can tax their cars online.

(AQW 28904/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Vehicle licensing is an excepted matter which is carried out in Northern Ireland by the Driver and Vehicle Agency within my Department, under the terms of an agreement with the Department for Transport, represented by its Agency, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in Swansea. Under that agreement, DVLA are responsible for funding the full cost of providing vehicle licensing services in Northern Ireland and for the provision of IT facilities.

At present, there are separate IT systems for Britain and for Northern Ireland. In 2002, DVLA decided, in principle, to integrate the two IT systems and, since that date, they have not invested in the development of the IT system for Northern Ireland. For that reason, when online re-licensing of vehicles was introduced in Britain in 2004, it was not made available in here. Bids for funding to develop this service for Northern Ireland motorists have been rejected by DVLA, which maintains that the most economical way of extending online licensing to NI is through the integration of the IT systems.

DVLA are nearing completion of a project that would extend the GB IT system to Northern Ireland and the introduction of that system would bring with it new services, including online licensing. However, DVLA has proposed using the integrated system to centralise all vehicle licensing services in Swansea and to close all the motor tax offices here. With the support of all Members, I have been robustly opposing these centralisation proposals. I met Mr Robert Goodwill, the relevant Minister in the Department for Transport, on 6 November to press again the case for retaining vehicle licensing services, and the associated jobs, in Northern Ireland. Mr Goodwill indicated that a decision is likely to be made early next year.

I have also repeatedly made the case that online licensing services should be made available in Northern Ireland immediately, and this is an entirely separate matter to the DVLA proposal to centralise vehicle licensing work in Swansea. I will continue to press DVLA for the retention of vehicle licensing services and jobs, and the extension of online licensing but at present I am unable to indicate when these services might become available to motorists here.

Taxis: Insurance

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 28259/11-15, whether his Department effectively underwrites invalidated taxi-insurance policies through breaches of law; and what provision exists to have the offending driver made liable for costs borne by his Department and the Motor Insurers' Bureau.

(AQW 28914/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The 6th Motor Insurance Directive requires Member States to make provision for a body to guarantee that victims of road traffic collisions will not remain without compensation where the vehicle which caused the accident is uninsured (or incorrectly insured) or unidentified. In the UK, this body is the Motor Insurers' Bureau (MIB), which functions under two separate Agreements between Government and the motor insurance industry.

The Uninsured Drivers Agreement requires the MIB to meet unsatisfied Civil Court Judgments against identified motorists who may not have been insured as required by the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981.

The Untraced Drivers' Agreement requires the MIB to consider applications for compensation from victims of "hit and run" motorists.

The Department is not responsible for underwriting motor insurance, nor does the Department incur any costs from victims of untraced or uninsured drivers. The ultimate cost of funding compensation for victims of uninsured and untraced drivers falls to law abiding motorists via their insurance premiums. The Department does not seek to recover the costs of any claims made through MIB as we are not involved in or responsible for such claims. You may wish to refer to the MIB website for details of how the Uninsured and Untraced Drivers' Agreements operate (see: <http://www.mib.org.uk/Downloadable+Documents/en/Agreements/Default.htm>)

Taxis: Insurance/Compensation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 28259/11-15, in relation to victims compensation covered by his Department in conjunction with the Motor Insurers' Bureau, over any invalidated taxi operator's insurance due to breach of regulations, (i) on how many occasions has compensation been paid to victims in these circumstances; (ii) what was the cost involved; and (iii) for his assessment of the impact of this scheme on the insurance policy premiums for all other drivers and road users.

(AQW 28916/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department is not involved in any compensation claims from victims of uninsured or untraced drivers, other than in the event of a dispute between the Motor Insurers' Bureau (MIB) and the claimant, in which case the limit of the Department's involvement is to appoint an arbitrator to review the case. At no time does the Department have knowledge of the details of any case or the parties involved, nor does the Department have sight of the sums involved. Requests for specific details regarding types of cases and sums involved should be directed to MIB.

The overall cost to law-abiding motorists of uninsured driving is estimated to be between £15 and £30 per policy per annum. I am continuing to work with my Assembly colleagues and relevant interests to do what I can to bear down on the cost of motor insurance.

Taxis: Classification

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment to list the current classifications of taxi; and what functions each class is (i) permitted; and (ii) not permitted to carry out.

(AQW 28954/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Currently taxis are licensed as one of the following:

- (a) Belfast Public Hire
- (b) Public Hire Outside Belfast
- (c) Private Hire³
- (d) Taxibus

The functions each class is permitted and not permitted to carry out is set out on NI Direct at <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/taxis-and-private-hire-services> and is summarised below:

Permitted

Belfast Public Hire – permitted to ply for hire, stand at stands anywhere in Northern Ireland & carry passengers for reward;

Public Hire Outside Belfast – permitted to ply for hire outside the Belfast City Centre limits & carry passengers for reward;

Private Hire – permitted to carry passengers for reward;

³ Wedding and funeral cars are currently licensed as private hire but are given internal plates rather than external. Therefore they are only permitted to operate in conjunction with a wedding or funeral.

Taxibus – permitted to operate as defined in their Road Service Licence (typically on fixed routes).

Not permitted

Public Hire Outside Belfast – not permitted to ply for hire inside the Belfast City Centre limits;

Private Hire – not permitted to ply for hire;

Taxibus – not permitted to ply for hire or carry passengers for reward other than as permitted by the Road Service Licence under which they operate.

Taxis: Ravenhill Rugby Ground

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 28201/11-15, AQW 28378/11-15 and AQW 27856/11-15, (i) to provide a copy of the legal advice obtained on this matter; (ii) to list the dates and times of the meetings and correspondence on the legal advice sought; (iii) whether any legal advisors were shown any video-footage; and (iv) if so, did they deem these examples of evidence as lawful.

(AQW 28955/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Following Departmental operational activity, officials sought and received legal advice on the operation of taxi services around Ravenhill Rugby Ground. As a result, it was determined that those services fell within the relevant legislation and therefore no offences were being committed.

The concept of legal professional privilege safeguards the rights of a person or organisation, including the Department, to obtain legal advice on a confidential basis and not to disclose such information in the interests of the wider administration of justice. It has been the settled view that in this context, legal advice is not disclosed and that privilege applies to the information sought in parts (i) to (iv) of the question. The Department is, therefore, unwilling to waive the legal professional privilege vested in it, and provide the information sought.

Planning Applications: Habitats Directive

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether his Department has complied with the requirements of the Habitats Directive by carrying out a review of all extant planning permissions which were likely to have a significant effect on a European Site, either individually or in combination with other development, following the designation of the River Faughan and Tributaries Special Area of Conservation; (ii) at what stage in the process of designation was the required review undertaken; (iii) whether any applications were modified, revoked or discontinued as a result; (iv) which competent authority was responsible for the review; and (v) whether the information is held and is readily accessible to the public.

(AQW 28983/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Since its designation on 9 May 2008 as a possible Special Area of Conservation (SAC) a Habitats Regulations Assessment has been carried out on all planning applications considered likely to have a significant effect on this SAC, either individually or in combination with other developments. These assessments continued to be carried out at each subsequent stage in the designation process.

As regards extant planning applications that received permission prior to designation, assessments were carried out in relation to further applications that were associated with earlier planning permission. A full review of all extant planning permissions was not carried out.

The information sought in relation to applications modified, revoked or discontinued can only be provided at disproportionate cost to the public.

Planning NI is deemed to be the Competent Authority in relation to planning applications, but assessments are carried out on its behalf by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Information held is readily available for individual requests, but the provision of all related information could only be provided at disproportionate cost to the public.

Taxis: Classification

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment how many taxi classifications are included in the single tier proposal; and what tasks each classification will be (i) permitted; and (ii) not permitted to undertake.

(AQW 29035/11-15)

Mr Durkan: It is my intention that there will be four classes of use contained within the new Taxi Licence Regulations, two of which relate specifically to conventional taxis and deal with the single tier proposals. This distinction will allow for wheelchair accessible vehicles to be licensed separately to non-wheelchair accessible taxis.

It is the Department's intention that Belfast ranks will continue to be restricted to wheelchair accessible vehicles. Consideration will be given to whether it is appropriate to roll this requirement out to other areas of Northern Ireland, or if the disabled community is better served by promoting a more mixed fleet. Beyond this specific ranking issue, there will be no difference to how wheelchair and non-wheelchair accessible taxis can operate throughout Northern Ireland.

The other two classes will allow for separate licensing of taxibus vehicles and contracted chauffeur services (including wedding and funeral cars), to allow each to operate without a roof sign or taximeter, which would be inappropriate given the services being provided.

Unlike the current regulations, the new Taxi Licence regulations will not explicitly name each class, but will simply define the permitted uses of each. The tasks each classification will be permitted and not permitted to undertake are outlined below:

Permitted

Class A (non-wheelchair accessible vehicles) – will be permitted to ply for hire, stand at stands outside the Belfast City Centre limits, carry passengers for reward, and to operate a tour service when contracted to do so;

Class B (wheelchair accessible vehicles) – will be permitted to ply for hire, stand at all stands, carry passengers for reward, and to operate a tour service when contracted to do so;

Class C (chauffeur / contract services) – will be permitted to carry passengers for reward only when a contract has been made in advance for the service; and

Class D (taxibus) – will be permitted to operate under a permit issued by DRD under the Transport Act 2011, and to operate a tour service when contracted to do so.

Not permitted

Class A (non-wheelchair accessible vehicles) – will not be permitted to stand at stands inside the Belfast City Centre limits or to advertise as wheelchair accessible, or operate a tour service when the contract requirements have not been met;

Class B (wheelchair accessible vehicles) – will not be permitted to operate a tour service when the contract requirements have not been met;

Class C (chauffeur / contract services) – will not be permitted to carry passengers for reward when the contract requirements have not been met, or to ply for hire or stand at stands; and

Class D (taxibus) – will not be permitted to operate a tour service when the contract requirements have not been met, ply for hire or stand at stands or carry passengers for reward beyond the fixed route approved in the permit issued by DRD.

Planning: Economic Development

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his plans to improve the planning system to better support economic development.

(AQO 5202/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The key aim of the planning reform programme is to enable the planning system to play its part in contributing to growing a dynamic, innovative and sustainable economy, while promoting inclusion and equality of opportunity.

Planning has a critical role to play in promoting economic development but it also has an equally important role to play in protecting the environment and both of these commitments need to be fully considered in making planning decisions.

As a result of vigorous action by my predecessor, action which I intend to continue, the planning system is now much better placed to deliver quicker decision-making and provide greater certainty on outcomes and timeframes for managing applications.

I recognise that the planning system can, and should, do much more to unlock development potential, support job creation and aid economic recovery.

I intend to continue to make prompt and sound planning decisions and to create a planning system that is fast, fair and fit for purpose. A planning system that delivers for business but not at the expense of the environment. As Environment Minister I want to help create a better environment and a stronger economy.

As I have outlined, I intend to bring forward the new single Strategic Planning Policy Statement which will be shorter, clearer and more accessible regional planning policy and consolidate existing policies into one document.

I recognise the important contribution the construction industry makes to the economy and have reinforced to Planning Officials that, where appropriate, they seek to balance the economic advantages of proposals with appropriate development.

I am keen to emphasise that front-loading the planning application process with pre-application discussions is highly beneficial, resulting in a more efficient process and predictable outcome. As such, I am committed to continuing engagement with the construction industry and other stakeholders in identifying relevant planning issues so as to ensure the submission of high quality planning applications. This in turn allows for faster processing of applications through the statutory process.

I am also committed to getting all of this right in preparation for handing planning powers to local government in 2015.

Councils: Causeway Coast and Glens

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment what action he can take to prevent the brand name of "Glens" being removed from the domain name of the Causeway Coast and Glens council grouping.

(AQW 29246/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The new councils will be able to make decisions on their names immediately after the next local government election in 2014, during the shadow period. Statutory Transition Committees will be able to make recommendations to the new councils in respect of their names. However, the final decision on the name of the new council and any related website names will be taken by the councillors elected in 2014.

Planning Application A/2009/0400/F

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 28600/11-15, (i) why his Department's Head of Planning informed the NI Ombudsman on 7 September 2012 that the application was withdrawn; (ii) why this position was adopted at that time; and (iii) whether his Department has since informed, or intends to inform the Ombudsman that the application is no longer withdrawn and that a deemed refusal was issued on 5 November 2013.

(AQW 29279/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Planning application A/2009/0400/F was deemed refused on 4 June 2010 due to the applicant failing to submit further environmental information required to forward the assessment of the proposal. While a procedural error was made in accepting the withdrawal of this application, a letter has now issued to the agent advising of the deemed refusal, with the Planning Portal updated to reflect this corrected position.

While this correction does not in my opinion, alter the conclusions expressed by the then Head Planner Anne Garvey, in her response to the Ombudsman you refer to, I have instructed my officials to advise the Ombudsman of the same.

Transport: Rural Community Transport Partnerships

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of the Environment how Rural Transport Community Associations will be affected by proposed licensing changes.

(AQO 5195/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Whilst my Department is currently in the process of developing proposals for a new bus operator licensing regime no final proposals have been brought forward or final decisions on this made.

Since 2010 officials have actively been engaged in developing proposals with a view to supporting a vibrant bus passenger transport sector. All stakeholders have agreed that the current scheme, which is 46 years old, is outdated and no longer able to support the diversity of passenger transport being delivered in the 21st Century.

In developing the policy proposals my Department has taken into consideration a number of key objectives namely:

- (i) The need to regulate for a safe, fair and fit for purpose sector;
- (ii) The need to allow a vibrant and innovative community transport sector to continue to flourish;
- (iii) The need to ensure a level regulatory playing field, with rights and duties for the various groups within the sector being kept in appropriate balance;
- (iv) The need to develop a licensing regime with clear distinctions between categories of licence and which is enforceable.

My officials are currently engaging with stakeholders on proposals for a two tier licensing regime which will replace the current licensing scheme.

The upper tier will be an unrestricted licence which allows holders to undertake any bus passenger transport activity. The lower tier licence will be available to those for whom passenger transport is exclusively non-commercial or ancillary to their main purpose or activity, such as scout or church groups.

My Department is aware of the vital role that the Rural Community Transport Partnerships play in delivering transport which addresses rural and social isolation, and is committed to ensuring that this important work is supported in any new licensing regime. We are therefore continuing our engagement to ensure that all key points have been addressed in the proposals before they are finalised.

Road Safety: Promotion

Mr I McCreagh asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the current road safety campaigns.

(AQO 5198/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department has a statutory duty to promote road safety. It does this through a wide range of road safety education activities, which include road safety public information campaigns and education programmes.

The principal objective of my Department's road safety advertising is to contribute to reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads. The road safety campaigns therefore continue to address those behaviours that contribute most to road deaths and serious injuries.

DOE has commissioned in the region of 200 independently conducted benchmarking and tracking surveys since 1994. In the surveys, the DOE advertising campaigns have produced exceptionally high public awareness levels for each TV campaign and consistently high levels of personal influence in reducing road carnage.

Oxford Economics has, based on the Department for Transport's estimated cost of each road casualty, calculated the impacts of my Department's road safety advertising campaigns. The latest Oxford Economics report concluded that 21,977 men, women and children in Northern Ireland have been saved from death or serious injury on the roads as a result of DOE's advertising between 1995-2011, compared to previous trends. The economic payback was £10 per £1 invested by DOE in advertising, excluding human costs, and £42 per £1 invested by DOE in advertising, including human costs.

The road safety campaigns play a significant part in our ambition of working towards zero road deaths in Northern Ireland. This aspiration means that we do not accept that anyone should ever die on our roads; and the above initiatives support this by encouraging the community to adopt safer behaviours on the roads. We allow and encourage all road users to sign up to a pledge supporting this at www.sharetheroadtozero.com

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.

Local Government Reform: Minority Rights

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department will protect and guarantee minority rights within the new eleven council model as part of local government reform.
(AQO 5199/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As I have said previously, I am committed to ensuring that equality of opportunity will be a key feature in the new councils. The Local Government Bill that I introduced into the Assembly on 23 September 2013, and which is currently at Committee Stage, provides for new governance arrangements for the councils. These new arrangements will ensure the protection of the rights of all people, and provide for fair, transparent and efficient decision-making.

The sharing of positions of responsibility across the political parties represented on councils will be a cornerstone of the new arrangements. I am proposing that councils will be able to select from either the d'Hondt or Sainte-Laguë divisor methods or Single Transferrable Voting to achieve this aim. Provision will also be made to ensure that, as far as practicable, the membership of committees will also reflect the political balance of the council.

The governance arrangements will also include the use of a call-in procedure to ensure a system of checks and balances is in place in relation to the decision-making process to provide protection for the rights of minority groups. For example, a number of councillors who have an issue with a specific decision will be able to join together to request that the decision is reviewed. The call-in procedure may be used where an issue has been raised in relation to the procedures followed in making a decision or where there is an issue in relation to the protection of political minorities in the local government district. I am proposing that the trigger to initiate the call-in procedure should be 15% of the total council membership. For example, in a council with 40 members, a call-in would require the support of 6 councillors.

The introduction of qualified majority voting for specified strategic decisions, and as part of the call-in procedure, will also provide a further check and balance in relation to council decision-making. Rather than a system of cross-community voting (such as the one operated by the Northern Ireland Assembly), a straightforward threshold of 80% of council members present and voting will apply.

Local Government Reform: Rates Convergence

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the progress made with Rates Convergence modelling for new councils in advance of the Review of Public Administration.
(AQO 5200/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Earlier this year, the Executive agreed to provide councils with a reform funding package of £17.8 million over the 2013 to 2015 period, with a commitment of up to £30 million for rates convergence beyond 2015. This funding is being made available for managing rates convergence as a consequence of councils merging and other boundary changes arising from implementation of local government reform.

My Department has been working closely with the Department of Finance and Personnel on potential models for administering a rates convergence relief system. The preferred model is to provide for a district rate adjustment at bill level for each ratepayer account. This involves a lower rate being applied to the individual rates bills of those ratepayers who would otherwise face increases as a result of reform. Under this model, the rate relief that will be applied in a Council area will depend on the specific rate increases faced by ratepayers as a result of the level district rates settle at in the initial years of the new council. As the rates for the new councils have not yet been set, it is too early to determine which ratepayers will be eligible for rate relief and the quantum of rate relief that will apply. While the detailed workings of this scheme have yet to be finalised, it should be noted that the district rate adjustment methodology also has the endorsement of the Institute of Rating, Revenue and Valuation who conducted an external assessment of the various options prior to Ministerial agreement.

DFP and DOE will continue to work on finalising the details of the scheme to manage rates convergence, within the cost envelope of £30m, which will protect those ratepayers who otherwise would face sudden and excessive increases as a direct consequence of councils merging or due to other boundary changes.

The primary legislative powers to give effect to a rates convergence scheme is included in the Local Government Bill. When the scheme is finalised, the details will be set out in Regulations, for Assembly approval in due course.

Local Government Reform: Update

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Review of Public Administration.
(AQO 5201/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Local Government Reform programme remains on target for 1 April 2015. The new councils will be equipped with a tested, robust and comprehensive legislative and operational framework.

The Local Government Bill was introduced into the Assembly on the 23 September and following second stage debate, on the 1st October was passed to the Environment Committee for scrutiny. An extension to Committee Stage has been granted and is due for completion by 20 February 2014. The Committee held a stakeholder event on 28 November which sought views on aspects of the Bill. This has been a major step in the legislative process that will make local government reform a reality and will provide the legislative framework necessary to give effect to the Executive's decisions on the future shape of local government.

A Commencement Order, which will bring the boundaries of the 11 new local government districts into effect for the purposes of holding the next local government elections and to allow the new councils to prepare an annual budget and strike a rate for the 2015/16 financial year, was made on the 3 October.

The Regulations which introduced the severance scheme for councillors came into operation on 1 August 2013. The main components of the scheme include a minimum eligibility period of 12 years (cumulatively), graduated yearly payments to ensure that those with longer periods of service are treated fairly and proportionately, and a cap on individual payments of £35,000.

Ten of the eleven Statutory Transition Committees are meeting, with the Belfast STC expected to be formed shortly. They are driving convergence between the merging councils and also preparing for the new incoming councils operating in shadow form next year. The work of the new Committees includes corporate, financial and business planning and also the appointment of chief executives to lead the change management process. The Department has issued guidance to the STCs, particularly to provide operational advice and direction to enable them to discharge their duties. Their work is monitored by the Regional Transition Committee, which I chair.

Councils will operate in shadow form for a period of time; that is, from the date of the elections on the 22 May 2014, until the date when the new councils assume full powers and responsibilities in April 2015. The newly elected councils, acting in shadow form, will have the statutory authority and democratic mandate to make policy decisions that will shape the direction of the new councils before they become fully operational.

The advertisement for 10 Chief Executive Posts was placed in the press on the 22 November 2013. The Belfast Chief Executive post wasn't included and will be advertised at a later date.

Planning: Enforcement

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to decrease the time taken to deal with planning enforcement complaints.
(AQO 5203/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department is mindful of its duty to enforce planning legislation and to ensure that development is managed in a proactive and proportionate manner. In determining the most appropriate course of action in response to alleged breaches of planning control, the Department will take into account the extent of the breach and its potential impact on the environment.

I have set challenging targets for enforcement for all parts of the process within our control and there has also been considerable investment in our enforcement capabilities, supporting IT systems and management information to support this work. Each local office has a dedicated enforcement team of planning officers with caseloads monitored on a monthly basis to ensure their prompt progress.

Enforcement performance is also now published within the Quarterly Statistical Bulletin which allows public scrutiny of the work done.

Unconventional Gas Exploration and Extraction: Health Impact

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment why the joint Environmental Protection Agency/Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources/Northern Ireland Environment Agency research programme into will not incorporate a Health Impact Assessment.
(AQO 5204/11-15)

Mr Durkan: In response to the public consultation on the 'Proposed Terms of Reference' for the research programme, observations were made in submissions received that:

- The Terms of Reference should examine the overall issue of human health protection in environmental decision making and ought to, as a priority, give urgent attention to the further consideration of issues associated with the introduction of Health Impact Assessment.
- Comments were made that should the Study be limited to the environment and the environmental factors that have the potential to impact on human health, it would be appropriate to carry out a separate study on the public health aspects of Unconventional Gas Exploration and Extraction (UGEE) activities.

The Steering Committee for the research programme, which includes officials from my Department, responded by stating that:

'Well planned and managed environmental-health research offers a very effective way to respond to emerging issues. The draft Terms of Reference did refer to the need to consider the role of Health Impact Assessment in regulation of UGEE projects/operations. There is now an additional requirement in the Revised Terms of Reference (Project C, Task 3) to specifically consider the potential role of Health Impact Assessment in regulation of UGEE projects/operations based on the experience in other countries and to make recommendations towards developing a protocol in the island of Ireland context.'

The Steering Committee response document, to the submissions received, is available to download from the Environmental Protection Agency (Ireland) website.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Employment: Law Graduates

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he is concerned about the decline in employment opportunities for law graduates in solicitors' offices; and to outline the action he will take to increase opportunities. **(AQW 28574/11-15)**

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I do share the Member's concern in relation to the fact that the current recession has restricted the number of places in solicitors' offices as compared with places available on the academic part of the course.

While I have no direct role in relation to increasing opportunities in solicitors' offices, I have recently met with the Law Society and was encouraged by the tentative signs of recovery it is seeing in certain parts of the market. I also note that it is overseeing the training of more solicitors now, despite the difficult times, than it has ever done before. The latest figures I have show that 116 graduates were trained in 2012, as compared with a figure of 95 in previous years.

I also understand that the Society has been proactive in accrediting a number of solicitor masters, including some in the public sector, and has brought forward initiatives to offset the cost to solicitors' firms in training an apprentice. Coupled with the recovery that solicitors are currently beginning to see, I am hopeful that the opportunities for law graduates will improve over the coming years.

Civil Service Estate: Carbon Neutral

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail any action he intends to take to make the Civil Service estate carbon neutral. **(AQW 28575/11-15)**

Mr Hamilton: I can only answer for the DFP government office estate for which I have responsibility. The NICS does not have any target to be carbon neutral and I have no plans to make the DFP office estate carbon neutral. Even if such a target existed it could only be achieved by offsetting emissions which would mean money allocated to the NI Block being sent outside NI as offsets would require to be purchased.

Rates: Commercial Town Centres

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the reassessment of commercial town centre rates prior to 2015. **(AQW 28596/11-15)**

Mr Hamilton: The reassessment of commercial town centres for rates is part and parcel of the ongoing revaluation of all commercial property in Northern Ireland.

Land & Property Services (LPS) is making good progress on the validation of the rental evidence it received and the detailed market analysis has started.

The valuation process will then follow in March next year and by late 2014 LPS will produce a draft Valuation List which will inform individual ratepayers of their new assessments, before the new bills issue in April 2015.

Rates: Commercial Ratepayers

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the arrangements in place to ensure that rates paid by individual commercial ratepayers reflect the goods sold on the property.

(AQW 28597/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: As a general rule there are no arrangements in place to vary the rates paid by reference to the amount of goods sold with the notable exception of charity shops. Charity shops' exemption is granted in proportion to sales of donated goods versus non-donated goods.

Therefore, if any charity shops are selling significant amounts of non-donated goods for a period then this should trigger a rate liability. Land & Property Services (LPS) is already in the process of reviewing all charitable exemption awards and will be writing out to all charity shops as part of this exercise. Questionnaires will be issuing to relevant premises as soon as practicable, over the coming months.

Royal Bank of Scotland: Debt Management

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action he intends to take in relation to the Royal Bank of Scotland Report into the debt management practices by Ulster Bank.

(AQW 28657/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Business Secretary has referred the debt management findings of both the RBS Independent Lending Review report and the Lawrence Tomlinson report on Banks' Treatment of Businesses in Distress to the Financial Conduct Authority and to the Prudential Regulation Authority for investigation. I understand that RBS has also commissioned an investigation.

While neither of these reports specifically covered Northern Ireland the RBS's Global Restructuring Group does operate here. I therefore raised my concerns that similar practices might have occurred here with the Financial Secretary to the Treasury when I meet him on the 4 December 2013.

City of Culture 2013: DFP Tenders/Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) tenders awarded; and (ii) funding provided to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 28690/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department of Finance and Personnel has not awarded a contract or provided funding to any organisation in Londonderry to deliver the City of Culture 2013.

Fiscal Deficit

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to (i) identify both the cyclical element and structural element of the fiscal deficit and (ii) outline how he plans to resolve the cyclical element of the fiscal deficit.

(AQW 28865/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: No such estimates are available. The methodology developed as part of the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland (GERS) report, which my Department uses to estimate the overall Northern Ireland fiscal deficit, does not separately identify the cyclical and structural elements of that deficit.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 28470/11-15, to explain the arrangement whereby £80m is still ring fenced for the Social Investment Fund; and how this relates to the budgetary timeframe.

(AQW 29106/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Executive remains committed to providing funding of £80 million for the Social Investment Fund and any funding requirements can be considered as part of a future Budget process.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Homelessness: DHSSPS Support

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support his Department offers to people who are homeless.

(AQW 28580/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Provision of health and social services for those who are eligible is the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety. These services are provided by the 5 Health and Social care Trusts.

Health services are a universal right to all citizens who are ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland. Social care services are provided on the basis on the outcome of assessment of need of individuals.

The provision of accommodation for adults who are homeless sits outside the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Services. However their health and social care needs remain the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety.

Where a young person between the ages of 16 and 18 presents as homeless Health and Social care Trusts provide suitable accommodation and support under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Chairperson

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to explain the reasons for delay in the appointment of a Chair of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) when an appointment will be made; (iii) how many applicants there were in each recruitment campaign; and (iv) how many were interviewed.

(AQW 28606/11-15)

Mr Poots: The delay in appointing a new Chair to the Northern HSC Trust has been due to the small number of applicants who responded to the initial advertisement campaign held in February 2013, resulting in the post being re-advertised in August 2013. Appointment will be made once the appointment process has been completed. Four applicants applied at each recruitment campaign. Three applicants having met the criteria were invited for interview

Marie Stopes Northern Ireland: Data Collection

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the Marie Stopes Clinic is required by law to maintain records on each client and patient, why the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) does not, following inspection of those records, produce a compendium of cumulative, but anonymised, information on the number of abortions carried out in the clinic; and whether he will request that the RQIA produce such a compendium.

(AQW 28607/11-15)

Mr Poots: Officials are working to develop a data collection process. It is the intention that any new system will collect robust and consistent information from independent providers in addition to health and social care organisations.

Officials are exploring the best way to achieve this taking into consideration views expressed during the recent consultation.

Engagement has taken place with the Information Commissioner to ensure that the data collected protects a patient's rights to confidentiality.

Any form produced must meet legislative and regulatory requirements in Northern Ireland. It will be necessary to ensure that the form protects a patient's right to confidentiality and the interests of the public, professional bodies and elected members.

The Department continues to collect statistics on the number of terminations of pregnancy carried out in Health and Social Care facilities in Northern Ireland.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Budget

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the annual budget for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 28635/11-15)

Mr Poots: The 2012/13 annual revenue budget for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust was £521.4m.

In addition, the Capital Allocation for the same year was £23.5m.

Organ Donation: Opt-out System

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to introduce an opt-out system of organ donation.

(AQW 28639/11-15)

Mr Poots: In February 2013 I announced that I would be progressing work to establish attitudes towards organ donation, including an opt-out system for organ donation. This work was taken forward by the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the initial work on establishing attitudes towards organ donation has just been completed. The report on public attitudes and stakeholder engagement in Northern Ireland was launched on 16 October 2013. I am giving careful consideration to the findings in this important report and the implications for the future development of my Department's policy on organ donation. These are important matters and we therefore need to take time to digest the report to ensure that our future policy is the right policy for the people of Northern Ireland.

I have attended a number of meetings over the past 12 months regarding organ donation, these include meetings with the Public Health Agency, NHS Blood and Transplant, representatives of British Medical Association, meetings with public representatives and most recently I attended a workshop on Organ Donation and Transplantation, which included senior medical staff who are directly involved in organ donation and transplantation.

Organ Donation: Opt-out System

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what meetings he has had in regard to an opt-out system of organ donation in the last twelve months.

(AQW 28640/11-15)

Mr Poots: In February 2013 I announced that I would be progressing work to establish attitudes towards organ donation, including an opt-out system for organ donation. This work was taken forward by the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the initial work on establishing attitudes towards organ donation has just been completed. The report on public attitudes and stakeholder engagement in Northern Ireland was launched on 16 October 2013. I am giving careful consideration to the findings in this important report and the implications for the future development of my Department's policy on organ donation. These are important matters and we therefore need to take time to digest the report to ensure that our future policy is the right policy for the people of Northern Ireland.

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Emergency Departments: Underage Alcohol-related Attendance

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the protocols applied in Accident and Emergency Departments when engaging with the relevant agencies when a child under 16 is treated for alcohol intoxication.

(AQW 28643/11-15)

Mr Poots: Children under 16 attending emergency departments under the influence of alcohol are assessed individually and in line with child safeguarding guidance. When emergency department staff identify a concern, a referral is made to the social services/safeguarding team. Appropriate further action will depend on the individual assessment and type of presentation. This may include admission to hospital, referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health or Child and Adolescent Intensive Treatment services, or to volunteer drug and alcohol intervention services.

Ambulance Service: Physical/Verbal Assault

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many attacks have been reported against Northern Ireland Ambulance Service staff or paramedics in the last twelve months, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 28647/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not collated in the format requested. The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust's untoward reporting system holds data based on the base station of the crew reporting the incident and not the location of the incident.

The following data is based on the base divisional area of staff who were assaulted during the period 1 November 2012 to 31 October 2013. There were 274 incidents broken down as follows:

	Physical Assault without a weapon	Physical Assault with a weapon	Verbal Assault	Total
Belfast	37	7	62	106
Northern	13	3	25	41
South Eastern	21	2	32	55
Southern	9	5	31	45
Western	11	2	14	27

South Down: Ambulance Service Emergency Responses

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the number of times in the last twelve months that it has taken longer than 45 minutes for an ambulance to arrive at an emergency scene in South Down; (ii) what percentage of the total number of call-outs this represents; and (iii) what action he is taking to address the length of time it is taking for ambulances to arrive at an emergency scene in South Down.

(AQW 28654/11-15)

Mr Poots: Ambulances are dispatched by the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) in response to 999 emergency calls based on the clinical need of the patient. Calls are prioritised according to the seriousness of the patient's condition as follows:

- Category A – potentially immediately life-threatening;
- Category B – serious but not immediately life-threatening;
- Category C – non-life threatening/serious.

Performance standards are set within the Local Commissioning Group (LCG) area, therefore the standards for the parliamentary constituency of South Down fall within the South Eastern LCG area.

The data below shows the number of emergency responses in South Down which were over 45 minutes, broken down per category, and the related percentage of the total number of responses made within each category during the period November 2012 to October 2013.

	Number of Emergency Responses Over 45 minutes	Percentage of Emergency Responses Over 45 minutes in relation to Total Number of Responses during the Period
Category A	8	0.3%
Category B	62	1.6%
Category C	43	3.7%

NIAS has advised that it continues to revise procedures and processes in an effort to improve performance, service provision and response capacity. Currently NIAS are seeking to use non-emergency ambulance resources more intensively to release emergency resource capacity to improve response performance to the most clinically urgent calls.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Coronary Care

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what changes have been agreed or implemented regarding coronary care in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust within the last twelve months; and whether an appropriate Equality Impact Assessment was carried out on such changes.

(AQW 28656/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust continues to deliver a range of cardiology services across its three main hospital sites. Specific changes introduced in the last twelve months are:

- the opening of a catheterisation laboratory (cath lab) at the Ulster Hospital;
- a new one-stop heart failure pilot service at Lagan Valley Hospital; and,
- roll out of a new primary percutaneous coronary intervention (PCI) service.

The South Eastern Trust is satisfied that the changes did not require equality impact assessments to be carried out.

Downe Hospital: Drainage

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money has been spent dealing with sewage and drainage problems at the Downe Hospital since it was opened in June 2010.

(AQW 28659/11-15)

Mr Poots: The total amount spent on drainage since the Downe Hospital opened in June 2010 is £24,006.87.

Dementia Strategy

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of dementia services since the implementation of the Dementia Strategy in November 2011.

(AQW 28667/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSC Board and Public Health Agency jointly lead a regional group, which includes people with dementia and their carers, to oversee implementation of the Dementia Strategy and its recommendations across NI. The group has drawn up an Action Plan which is used to report progress in the implementation of the strategy to the Department.

The action plan contains 44 initiatives which are being progressed under various headings such as Reducing the Risk or Delaying the Onset of Dementia, Raising Awareness, Promoting Early Assessment and Diagnosis, Supporting People with Dementia and Supporting Carers.

My department received an update report in June 2013 which detailed significant progress on a majority of the actions. A further update on progress is expected this month.

City of Culture 2013: DHSSPS Tenders/Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) tenders awarded; and (ii) funding provided to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 28692/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety has not awarded any tenders or provided any funding to organisations to deliver the City of Culture 2013.

Medical General Practices: Expenditure

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his Department's spend on General Practices in each of the last five years.

(AQW 28706/11-15)

Mr Poots: Expenditure by my Department on General Practices under the General Medical Services (GMS) Contract in each of the last five years is set out in the table below.

2012/13 £m	2011/12 £m	2010/11 £m	2009/10 £m	2008/09 £m
232.7	236.2	234.7	238.3	234.9

Driving Licence Application Form: Kidney Donation

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will hold discussions with the Minister for the Environment regarding the cost and possible benefits of including an option for kidney donation on all Driving Licence application forms.

(AQW 28716/11-15)

Mr Poots: Whilst I am keen to increase the number of registrants on the organ donor register, any discussions concerning amending driving licences is a matter for the Minister for the Environment, in conjunction with NHS Blood and Transplant.

Health and Social Care: Management Posts

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many management posts have been created in the (i) Health Service; (ii) Health and Social Care Trusts; and the Health and Social Board, since the creation of the Board.

(AQW 28748/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not held centrally and could only be obtained from individual Health and Social Care bodies at a disproportionate cost.

Health and Social Care Board: Chief Executive

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when a new Chief Executive of the Health and Social Care Board will be recruited.

(AQW 28755/11-15)

Mr Poots: The recruitment process for the new Chief Executive of the Health and Social Care Board will commence early January 2014.

Respiratory Health and Well-being: Service Framework

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the findings of Asthma UK's report Compare Your Care are being considered as part of the review of the Service Framework for Respiratory Health and Wellbeing.

(AQW 28756/11-15)

Mr Poots: The review of the Service Framework for Respiratory Health and Wellbeing is currently being undertaken by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB).

The HSCB have advised that the "Compare Your Care" report is being taken into account in the review. A workshop has been held to review the Asthma Standard and Asthma UK was represented at that event. In January there are two further workshops for patients and carers. These are being jointly organised by Asthma UK, Chest Heart and Stroke and the British Lung Foundation on behalf of the Service Framework Review Team. The views of patients and carers will be incorporated into the review of the framework.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Outpatient Clinics

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total number of additional outpatient clinics, including weekends and evenings, that have been arranged over the last three years under the waiting list initiative for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 28787/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been advised by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust that it held the following additional outpatient clinics under the waiting list initiative over the last three years:

2010/11		2011/12		2012/13	
New	Review	New	Review	New	Review
7,945	2,062	7,015	3,852	10,129	6,676

Ulster Hospital: Emergency Department

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the capacity of the Accident and Emergency Unit at the Ulster Hospital.

(AQW 28789/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has been commissioned to provide approximately 83,000 new and unplanned review attendances at the Ulster Hospital emergency department in the current year 2013/14.

Bangor Community Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been treated at the Minor Injuries Unit at Bangor Hospital, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 28790/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on attendances (new, unplanned and/or planned reviews) at emergency care departments is published on an annual basis and is available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3/emergency-care-stats.htm

Alternatively, information on waiting times at emergency care departments (excluding planned review attendances) is published on a monthly basis, and is available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3/emergency_care-monthly_waiting_times.htm

Fracture Liaison Service

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for his assessment of the benefits of a fracture liaison service; (ii) whether such a service is provided locally; (iii) if no such service is provided, to explain the reasons for this position; and (iv) if such a service is provided, to detail the cost of running the service in (a) 2012/13; and (b) 2013/14, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 28793/11-15)

Mr Poots: Fracture care often represents the first opportunity for clinical management of osteoporosis. Early assessment and preventative treatment will reduce or prevent further fracture; reduce suffering; and, reduce loss of independence in fragility-fracture patients.

A fracture liaison service is in place in four of the five Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts. The Northern Local Commissioning Group (LCG) is working with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to develop the best service model for patients in the Northern area. The identification and management of fragility fractures is now included in the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF). Practices are incentivised to identify patients who have sustained a possible fragility fracture and follow the relevant NICE guidance. This involves a risk assessment, DEXA scan and, if indicated, treatment. The Northern LCG has recently commissioned a direct access DEXA service for GPs in that area. It may be that this is the appropriate service model to care for patients with fragility fractures in that area (rather than a secondary care based model).

It is not possible to provide the cost of running this service; all fracture units have orthogeriatric input and the cost for this falls to the orthogeriatric service.

'The Prevention and Management of Fragility Fractures in Northern Ireland': Update

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Public Health Agency's 2009 report The Prevention and Management of Fragility Fractures in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 28794/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Public Health Agency has advised that progress against the nine recommendations contained in the report is as follows:

- **Recommendation 1** – Regional Public Awareness campaign to promote good bone health. The Public Health Agency (PHA) has a number of campaigns which contribute to good bone health, such as, healthy eating, physical activity and smoking campaigns. It is now recognised that certain groups, including pregnant women, young children and those over 65 years, are at risk of vitamin D deficiency. It is recommended that these groups take a vitamin D supplement. To this end, the PHA has produced a leaflet titled vitamin D and you.
- **Recommendation 2** – Fracture liaison service. A fracture liaison service is in place in four of the five Health and Social Care Trusts. The Northern Local Commissioning Group (LCG) is working with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to develop the best service model for patients in the Northern area. The identification and management of fragility fractures is now included in the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF). Practices are incentivised to identify patients who have sustained a possible fragility fracture and follow the relevant NICE guidance. This involves a risk assessment, DEXA scan and, if indicated, treatment. The Northern LCG has recently commissioned a direct access DEXA service for GPs in that area. It may be that this is the appropriate service model to care for patients with fragility fractures in that area (rather than a secondary care based model).

- **Recommendation 3** – All fracture units have orthogeriatric input. This is now in place.
- **Recommendation 4** – All fracture units have an information infrastructure. More consideration on IT infrastructure is required.
- **Recommendation 5** – The prevention of falls. All LCGs have supported work in this area as part of their investments in 2013/14.
- **Recommendation 6** – Directly Enhanced Service in Primary Care. This Directly Enhanced Service has been replaced by the inclusion of the identification and management of fragility fractures in QOF as outlined above.
- **Recommendation 7** – Long Term Condition Monies. This recommendation is no longer relevant.
- **Recommendation 8** – Effective medicines management. A letter to all GPs about the primary and secondary prevention of osteoporosis was issued in June 2013.
- **Recommendation 9** – Establishment of a regional implementation group. This is in place.

Hip Fractures

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of hip fractures in each of the last five years; and the average cost of a hip fracture in terms of (i) acute hospital care; (ii) subsequent care and support in the community; and (iii) respite and residential care.

(AQW 28795/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Information on the number and cost of hip fractures treated in an acute hospital setting is provided below.

Financial Year	Number of episodes	Average cost
2012/13	4,694	-
2011/12	4,346	4,974.74
2010/11	4,127	5,138.06
2009/10	3,941	5,046.57
2008/09	4,264	4,683.50
2007/08	4,747	4,016.30

Source: Hospital Inpatient System; HSC Trust Reference Cost Returns

Note: Costs are not yet available for financial year 2012/13.

- (ii) and (iii): The cost of community, respite and residential care for those patients with a hip fracture is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Health Service: Romanian/Bulgarian Nationals

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what contingency plans he has in place to deal with any influx of immigrants from Romania and Bulgaria from January 2014.

(AQW 28796/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department's responsibility rests in the provision of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

There are no specific contingency plans in place to deal with any influx of immigrants from Romania and Bulgaria. Research indicates that it is not expected that the immigration from Romania and Bulgaria will be on the same level as that of Poland and that public services are now better able to meet their needs.

As members of the European Union from 1st January 2014 Romanian and Bulgarian nationals will be entitled to move freely within the European Union. As EEA nationals, citizens of Bulgaria and Romania can enter and live in the UK without needing to apply for permission, as long as they can support themselves and their families in the UK without 'becoming an unreasonable burden on public funds'. If they wish to take up residency within NI and can meet the 'ordinarily resident' test they will be entitled to access healthcare services here in NI.

Health Service: Non-EU Immigrants

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many immigrants from non-EU countries have been treated by the Health Service in each of the last three years; and how much of the cost of these treatments has been recovered from their countries of origin.

(AQW 28797/11-15)

Mr Poots: An immigrant is a person who leaves one country to settle permanently in another. A person who has moved to Northern Ireland on a permanent and settled basis would be deemed to be ordinarily resident, i.e. living here lawfully and on a continuous settled basis, and therefore be entitled to free healthcare. Supporting documentary evidence would need to

accompany any person's claim to be ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland for example, visa, passport, proof of employment or study.

It is not possible to identify the number or cost attached to the provision of healthcare for immigrants from non-EU countries that are deemed to be ordinarily resident and entitled to free healthcare.

Lyme Disease: Diagnosis and Treatment

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the process for diagnosing Lyme Disease; and how this disease is treated.

(AQW 28813/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested regarding the number of cases diagnosed is not held, as Lyme disease is not a statutorily notifiable disease and medical professionals are not required to report cases to the Public Health Agency. The number of people receiving treatment for Lyme disease in Northern Ireland at this time is not known. Based on laboratory reports only, the PHA is aware of the numbers of cases given in the table below.

Year	Number of laboratory-confirmed cases reported to PHA
2013, to 3rd December	4
2012	2
2011	1
2010	0
2009	2
2008	0

Diagnosis of Lyme disease is complex; the symptoms are non-specific and are shared by many more common conditions. A patient feeling unwell will normally go to their GP. When a patient presents to a GP with non-specific symptoms the GP will take the patient's clinical history and will consider a range of possible diagnoses. If Lyme disease is a possible diagnosis the GP may order a blood test. In Northern Ireland serology testing for Lyme disease is undertaken by the Regional Virology Laboratory at Belfast HSC Trust.

None of the tests for Lyme disease is 100% accurate, however blood tests are only one element of the overall, holistic assessment and eventual diagnosis.

As Lyme disease is an uncommon condition in Northern Ireland, and a GP in Northern Ireland is likely to see few or no cases in the course of their career, the diagnosis and treatment of Lyme disease need to be discussed with laboratory staff and infectious disease specialists.

Lyme disease is generally treated with antibiotics, however the details of a course of treatment may vary between patients and according to the stage at which Lyme disease is diagnosed. Detailed advice on antimicrobial agents, doses, and treatment durations can be provided by a clinician practising in the area of infectious disease.

Lyme Disease: Clinical Testing

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the reliability of the clinical testing used to diagnose Lyme Disease.

(AQW 28814/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested regarding the number of cases diagnosed is not held, as Lyme disease is not a statutorily notifiable disease and medical professionals are not required to report cases to the Public Health Agency. The number of people receiving treatment for Lyme disease in Northern Ireland at this time is not known. Based on laboratory reports only, the PHA is aware of the numbers of cases given in the following table.

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Lyme Disease: Diagnosis and Treatment

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with Lyme Disease in each of the last five years; and how many people are currently receiving treatment for the disease.

(AQW 28815/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested regarding the number of cases diagnosed is not held, as Lyme disease is not a statutorily notifiable disease and medical professionals are not required to report cases to the Public Health Agency. The number of people receiving treatment for Lyme disease in Northern Ireland at this time is not known. Based on laboratory reports only, the PHA is aware of the numbers of cases given in the table below.

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Prescription Drugs: Waste Campaign

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken to reduce medicine wastage from pharmacies.

(AQW 28821/11-15)

Mr Poots: On the 20th November I formally launched the 2013/2014 "Don't Use It? Don't Order It" media waste campaign. The campaign, which is now in its fourth year, aims to influence individual patient behaviours and activities which contribute to the over-ordering and sub-optimal use of prescription medicines. The campaign involves TV advertisements and outdoor visuals; in addition leaflets have been distributed to all GP practices and community pharmacies in Northern Ireland.

The aim of the campaign is to remind people to stop and check the medicines they already have at home before ordering more, especially at this time of year when they may be placing orders to cover the Christmas holidays.

Parkinson's Disease: Specialist Nurses

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many specialist Parkinson's Disease nurses are employed in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 28827/11-15)

Mr Poots: The numbers of specialist Parkinson's Disease nurses in each Health and Social Care Trust are shown in the table below.

Trust	Headcount	WTE
Belfast	1	1.0
Northern	1	1.0
South Eastern	1	1.0
Southern	1	1.0
Western	2	2.0

Source: HSC Trusts

Parkinson's Disease/Diabetes: Medicines Management

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with Health and Social Care Trusts concerning training nurses and social care workers to be aware of Medicines Management requirements, particularly as they apply to people living with (i) Parkinson's Disease; and (ii) Diabetes.

(AQW 28828/11-15)

Mr Poots:

Nursing

Medicines management is integral within undergraduate nursing programmes and relevant post graduate programmes delivered by the universities and HSC Clinical Education Centre. Community Practitioner Prescribing is integral to the Specialist Practice Programmes of education for District Nurses and Health Visitors.

Specialist nurses working with clients who have Parkinson's disease or Diabetes would have expertise in medicines management specific to these conditions.

Additionally, all nurses in practice are required to undertake mandatory updates in medicines management. HSC Trusts also complete a range of Audits on different aspects of Medicines Management requirements.

Social Care

All 5 Trusts state that social care staff receive training which is mainly in relation to "assisting" with Medicines as required by the RQIA. This includes Domiciliary Care, Day care, Supported living Schemes or residential homes for older people or children/young people. This is accordance with RQIA Guidelines.

Regarding assistance with medication for people with Parkinson's Disease or diabetes social care staff are only trained to assist with oral medicines, which is outlined in RQIA Guidance. They are not however permitted to assist in preparation of or administration of insulin as this is not within their level of competence and remains the responsibility of the community nurse should a service user not be able to self-administer and is without family support.

Health Service: Waiting Times

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when a scheme for waiting time measurement, such as Referral to Treatment used in England and Wales, will be introduced locally.

(AQW 28832/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has no plans at this time to measure waiting time for elective care on the basis of time from referral to treatment. Current targets for elective care are based on waiting times for first outpatient appointments, diagnostic tests and inpatient/day case treatment and the data collection and reporting systems reflect these targets.

North Down: Mental Health

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to (i) prevent; and (ii) raise awareness of, mental health issues in the North Down area.

(AQW 28842/11-15)

Mr Poots: In the North Down area the Public Health Agency directly commissions a range of organisations to deliver services which prevent and raise awareness of mental health issues. These include:

- Mental health awareness raising and education programmes;
- Crisis response and counselling for high risk groups such as families affected by suicide, young men and people who self-harm;
- Personal development programmes;
- Drama based awareness/education interventions; and
- Development of community emergency response plans to respond to potential suicide clusters in the area.

In addition to these local services, residents and groups in North Down have access to a number of regional projects which include: awareness raising and stigma reduction programmes; Lifeline; Deliberate Self Harm Registry services and the Card Before You Leave (CBYL) protocol; and training on suicide/mental health awareness.

Mental health promotion also goes beyond the health and social care sector given the wide range of social factors that influence mental health and wellbeing. Emotional resilience is promoted in schools through the curriculum and the iMatter programme; job creation activity promotes positive mental health; sports contribute to good mental health and wellbeing; libraries and the arts have a role; as does the maintenance of clean, secure community neighbourhoods with good access to green spaces.

North Down: Health and Care Centre

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a new health and care centre is planned for North Down.

(AQW 28843/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is planning to deliver a new health and care centre in the North Down area.

The consultation document on “Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action” included an illustrative model of “hub and spoke” Health and Care Centres across the region including North Down.

The Health and Social Care Board, through its Local Commissioning Groups and in association with all the HSC Trusts, has been undertaking detailed analysis to determine the most appropriate locations for the various hubs and spokes and identify priorities for the associated primary care infrastructure requirements. This work is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

Following that process, an exercise will be undertaken to develop business cases and prioritise within the available funding which will determine how work on individual hubs and spokes will progress.

GPs: Practice Lists

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 27529/11-15, how many patients have been removed by GP Practices from their practice list in each month of the last three years; and for what reason.

(AQW 28849/11-15)

Mr Poots: Table 1 below details the number of patients removed from GP practice lists, at the request of the practice, by month for the three years from April 2010 to March 2013.

The figures have been presented by reason for removal – either removal due to the patient being violent, or removal at the GP’s request due to other reasons.

These other reasons mainly fall into two categories: patients may be removed from a practice list if they move out of the catchment area covered by the practice; and GP practices may apply to remove patients from their list if the relationship between the doctor and the patient has broken down.

A more detailed breakdown of the reasons for which patients were removed from their practice list is not available.

Under Regulation 20 of the Health and Personal Social Services (General Medical Services Contracts) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004 a GP Practice has the right to remove a patient from their practice list if they have reasonable grounds which do not relate to race, gender, social class, marital status, age religion, political opinion, sexual orientation, appearance, disability, medical condition or whether or not the patient has dependents.

Table 1: The number of patients removed from GP practice lists, at the request of the practice, by month for the three years from April 2010 to March 2013.

Month	Year	Number of patients removed for being violent	Number of patients removed at GP’s request for other reasons
April	2010	4	124
May	2010	3	129
June	2010	2	149

Month	Year	Number of patients removed for being violent	Number of patients removed at GP's request for other reasons
July	2010	2	159
August	2010	2	114
September	2010	3	180
October	2010	2	143
November	2010	2	163
December	2010	1	193
January	2011	2	133
February	2011	3	115
March	2011	2	168
April	2011	3	162
May	2011	2	152
June	2011	3	138
July	2011	1	150
August	2011	2	162
September	2011	2	204
October	2011	4	196
November	2011	4	315
December	2011	5	354
January	2012	1	168
February	2012	1	149
March	2012	2	274
April	2012	3	280
May	2012	1	205
June	2012	4	209
July	2012	2	189
August	2012	1	238
September	2012	3	189
October	2012	4	256
November	2012	1	257
December	2012	2	284
January	2013	4	174
February	2013	8	286
March	2013	3	262

Source: Family Practitioner Services Information and Registration Unit, HSC Business Services Organisation

Leukaemia: North-west

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are in place in the North West for children with leukemia.

(AQW 28854/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised that all children in the Western Health and Social Care Trust are managed under the care of the Regional Paediatric Oncology Unit in Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children (RBHSC). In the case of emergency presentations to Altnagelvin these patients are stabilised and transferred to the RBHSC under their guidance; overnight stays are also conducted under RBHSC guidance.

Radiography: Students

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how radiography students are placed on employment lists; (ii) whether radiography students can track their progression on employment lists; (iii) whether a radiography student can be offered a job without first undergoing an interview; and (iv) in instances where a radiography student receives temporary employment, whether they go back to the same position on the employment list when the temporary employment ends.

(AQW 28862/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) A radiography student (or other applicant) must first apply for an advertised Band 5 position and will be assessed in line with regional recruitment arrangements. If successful they will be placed on the regional waiting list.
- (ii) There is no formal mechanism to 'track progression' on the regional waiting list. Applicants will be informed if they have been successful and where requested may be advised of their position on the list, for example, top, middle or bottom range.
- (iii) In 2013, an Occupational Based Test was used as a selection method in place of an interview.
- (iv) When an individual is offered temporary employment, they are retained on the waiting list in their rank order for any permanent opportunities which arise. They will not be offered further temporary work whilst already in a temporary position. When the individual notifies that their temporary employment has ended, then they will be returned to the list for temporary work also in their original ranked position.

Genito-urinary Medicine Clinics

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 27996/11-15, how Belfast Genitourinary Medicine clinics compare with similar clinics around the UK in terms of running costs; and which of those clinics operate a walk-in service.

(AQW 28876/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department does not hold information on Genitourinary Medicine Clinics in other regions of the United Kingdom.

As set out in my response to AQW 26835/11-15, there is a facility for emergency appointments in the Belfast Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust's GUM clinic, whereby emergency cases are seen as walk-in after triage.

Stoma Care

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the reasoning behind the recent changes in the arrangements for the prescribing of stoma care appliances and accessories in primary care.

(AQW 28908/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been advised by the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board that there have been no recent changes to the arrangements for the prescribing of stoma care appliances and accessories in primary care.

The HSC Board has recently issued guidance reinforcing the existing arrangements for the prescribing of stoma care appliances and accessories to ensure that they are safely and effectively prescribed and dispensed to patients.

Stoma Care: Consultation

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consultation took place with stoma patients on the recent changes in the arrangements for the prescribing of stoma care appliances and accessories in primary care.

(AQW 28909/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been advised by the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board that there have been no recent changes to the arrangements for the prescribing of stoma care appliances and accessories in primary care.

The HSC Board has recently issued guidance reinforcing the existing arrangements for the prescribing of stoma care appliances and accessories to ensure that they are safely and effectively prescribed. The Board shared the draft guidance with a regional working group of stoma specialist nurses before the guidance was finalised and issued. As this was a reinforcement of existing guidance, no formal consultation was considered necessary.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Home Care Packages

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, as of the 28 November 2013, the number of patients remaining in hospital, nursing home or residential home in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area, where a home care package is available but no private provider can be identified.

(AQW 28910/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available centrally and was therefore requested from the Northern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. Their reply can be found below.

As of the 28 November 2013, 6 clients across the Northern Trust were waiting for a home care package.

Home Care Packages

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how long a home care package will remain available for a patient, where the package cannot be used because a Health and Social Care Trust cannot identify a private sector provider.

(AQW 28911/11-15)

Mr Poots: In circumstances where, following an assessment of need, a need for home care is identified, the allocation of a home care package will remain available for the duration of the individual's continuing eligible need.

Bangor Community Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact of the temporary weekend closure of the Minor Injuries Unit in Bangor.

(AQW 28922/11-15)

Mr Poots: I regret the inconvenience which the temporary weekend closure may cause some people, but the South Eastern Trust has advised that it is necessary because of a staff shortage. The decision to close the minor injuries unit at weekends is designed to minimise the impact on patients, as fewer people use it at weekends. The Trust has indicated that the small number of patients requiring treatment for minor injuries at weekends can be managed in the Ulster Hospital's Emergency Department.

Safeguarding: Vulnerable Adults

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what safeguarding measures are in place to protect vulnerable adults; (ii) how these compare to international best practice; and (iii) whether he has any plans to review or improve the current safeguarding practices.

(AQW 28924/11-15)

Mr Poots: Safeguarding adults at risk of harm is not the sole responsibility of one Department and this is reflected in the Programme for Government, which includes keeping adults safe from harm as a commitment.

My Department, and its arm length bodies, have a range of adult safeguarding measures in place. A generic Safeguarding People standard has been developed for inclusion in all current and future Departmental Service Frameworks. The standard requires that people of all ages are safeguarded from harm through abuse, exploitation or neglect.

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) undertakes inspections of regulated services to ensure the care provided reaches the minimum standards set by my Department for providers of residential, nursing and domiciliary care facilities and their staff. RQIA can apply sanctions where they consider standards have not been met. The RQIA also has a range of responsibilities relating to people with a mental illness and those with a learning disability.

There are also a range of legislative safeguards in place, aimed at providing protections for those who are resident in, or attend, care facilities. The Residential Care Homes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, the Nursing Homes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 and the Day Care Setting Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 require criminal record checks to be carried out on staff working in care facilities, including a check of the list of those barred from working in specified activities with adults by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). Under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007, the DBS makes barring decisions based on information provided to it by employers and a range of other bodies. Individuals found to have harmed a vulnerable adult, or placed them at risk of harm, will be considered by the DBS for inclusion in its barred lists.

The Northern Ireland Adult Safeguarding Partnership (NIASP) is the key multi-agency partnership working since 2010 to bring together organisations and communities of interest who have a significant contribution to make to safeguarding adults. The NIASP Strategic Plan 2013-18 provides a strategic approach to safeguarding adults based on local, national and international research; best practice guidance; the views of actual and potential service users; the views of NIASP member organisations and consultation with expert practitioners. NIASP is currently updating The Regional Adult Protection Policy and Procedural Guidance and the Protocol for the Joint Investigation of Alleged and Suspected Cases of Abuse of Vulnerable Adults.

Jointly with the Department of Justice, DHSSPS is taking forward the development of a Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy Framework. It will stipulate a number of policy objectives ranging from the prevention of adult abuse through implementation of good safeguarding arrangements to effective protective responses from lead protection agencies (principally the police and social services) when adult abuse occurs or is suspected. Our aim is to shift the balance of emphasis towards prevention (keeping adults safe and helping them to keep themselves safe) and away from protection (being reactive to abuse), without exposing any vulnerable adult to unnecessary risk.

The policy will be informed by national and international best practice. Our consent driven, person centered approach to delivering the outcome preferred by the adult is also found across their adult safeguarding practices.

Finally, in April 2009 my Department commissioned the Volunteer Development Agency (Volunteer Now since 2010) to develop standards and guidelines for organisations working with vulnerable adults in the voluntary, community and independent sectors.

Transforming Your Care: Housing

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he will ensure that Transforming your Care aligns with housing strategies.

(AQW 28933/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland recognised the need for coordinated delivery of government services to address health inequalities and in the area of housing. This requirement was echoed by respondents to the subsequent "Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action" public consultation.

The TYC theme "to support people to live independently at home for as long as possible" is reflected in the second theme of the DSD Housing Strategy "Facing the Future" – "Meeting housing needs and supporting the most vulnerable".

My Department has an ongoing engagement with the Department for Social Development (DSD), who have overall control and responsibility for preparing and directing social housing policy in Northern Ireland, and with other agencies, to ensure that we understand and share plans on housing.

It is important that this collaborative approach continues so that all Departments work positively together in order to improve the lives of people across Northern Ireland.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Cancelled Consultant-led Appointments

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of outpatient clinics cancelled in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, over the last four years.

(AQW 28970/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return (QOAR), which is the present methodology for the collection of consultant-led outpatient activity, was introduced by my Department's Hospital Information Branch from the beginning of 2008/09, as a direct result of a comprehensive review of collection of outpatient activity undertaken in 2007/08. Primarily the methodology changed from the reporting of the number of clinics held and cancelled to the reporting of the number of appointments held and cancelled.

Information on the number of consultant-led appointments cancelled by the hospital is published on an annual basis and is available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/outpatients.htm

The number of appointments cancelled by the hospital by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust over the last four years can be found on p.20 of the current publication.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Missed Consultant-led Appointments

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of outpatient appointments missed over the last four years in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 28971/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of consultant-led appointments missed by the patient (Did Not Attend) is published on an annual basis and is available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/outpatients.htm

The number of appointments missed by the patient (DNAs) in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust over the last four years can be found on p.20 of the current publication.

Department of Justice

Law: Mediation

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total cost of public support for (i) family mediation; (ii) the Bar Mediation Service; and (iii) collaborative law, in each of the last five years, including a breakdown of the number of individual cases involved for each.

(AQW 28615/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission (the Commission) does not currently fund Collaborative Law Mediation.

The Commission does not fund the Bar Mediation Service.

The total cost of payments made by the Commission for Family Mediation is detailed in Table A, with the volume of certificates paid detailed in Table B.

Table A – Family Mediation payments made:

	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13
Total	£1,467	£13,753	£18,033	£26,607	£8,930

Table B – Volume of certificates against which payments were made:

	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13
Total	6	29	35	51	19

Mediation: Success Rates

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice whether any research has been carried out to determine the performance and success rates of publicly funded (i) family mediation; (ii) Bar Mediation Service; and (iii) collaborative law cases.
(AQW 28616/11-15)

Mr Ford: As discussions in mediation are confidential and the results are not disclosed to either the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission or the courts, the information requested is not available.

Legal Aid: Offender Levy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27702/11-15, whether such a levy would (i) assist in off-setting the overall annual Legal Aid bill; and (ii) make offenders, particularly repeat offenders, partially responsible for their defence.
(AQW 28637/11-15)

Mr Ford: The introduction of an offender levy to contribute to the legal aid fund could be used to assist in off-setting the overall annual legal aid bill. However, enforcing the payment of contributions from offenders who have insufficient funds to pay for their own representation, would come at a cost to the fund which is currently unknown. I have asked my officials to consider this matter further and I will write to you when this further consideration has been completed.

Criminal Justice: Anonymity Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the action that his Department is taking, through the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service or relevant agency, to make all relevant people in courts, including legal practitioners and the judiciary, aware of the judgement by the Lord Chief Justice on Anonymity Orders delivered on 8 July 2013; and to confirm whether this judgement will also apply to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland.
(AQW 28642/11-15)

Mr Ford: A summary of the judgment in this case was issued on 7 August 2013 by the Office of the Lord Chief Justice to media organisations and all judges. The summary was also published on the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service website. The defendant in this case pleaded guilty on 28 August 2013 and the full judgment was published on 5 September 2013. A copy of the judgment was forwarded to the Law Society, Bar Library and the Public Prosecution Service. A further copy has also been published on the British and Irish Legal Information Institute website.

The judgment sets out the procedure for judges considering an application for an order for anonymity and is relevant to both the prosecution and the defence.

Education: Human Trafficking Resource Pack

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the success of the anti-human trafficking in schools programme; and what plans he has to expand and further develop this initiative.
(AQW 28649/11-15)

Mr Ford: On 7 August 2013, I launched an education resource pack on human trafficking in Parliament Buildings. Over 90 people attended the launch, including teachers, young people and representatives from the Belfast Education and Library Board and the North Eastern Education and Library Board.

All post primary schools in Northern Ireland have received correspondence to notify them of the pack and a number of events across Northern Ireland have been organised by members of the Human Trafficking Engagement Group to promote the resource pack.

Since its launch, the pack has been accessed 537 times on the Department of Education's C2k website and six schools have contacted my Department to say that they plan to incorporate the resource into their lessons. I am aware of a further three schools that have received presentations from my officials or members of the Engagement Group. A Further and Higher Education College is also using the resource pack with its full time students.

Building on the launch of this resource pack, my Department encouraged schools to mark EU Anti-Trafficking Day on 18 October 2013. Over twenty schools and one Further and Higher Education College held events in October to raise awareness of human trafficking.

My Department and its partners on the Engagement Group are continuing to build networks with post primary schools across Northern Ireland and the education subgroup will seek ways to further raise awareness of the issue and promote use of the resource pack, in schools.

The Engagement Group plans to carry out further assessment of the resource pack at the end of the academic year. This assessment will include both quantitative and qualitative analyses of its impact.

The Engagement Group aims to develop further plans for engagement with third level students on the issue of human trafficking during the 2014-15 business year.

City of Culture 2013: DOJ Tenders/Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) tenders awarded; and (ii) funding provided to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 28693/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice (DOJ), including its Agencies but not its arm's length bodies, has not awarded tenders or provided funding to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013.

However, the Youth Justice Agency (YJA) spent £3,558 hosting its own event for young people, as part of the City of Culture celebrations, called 'Making a Difference, Loving Our Lives: MAD lol'. The purpose of the event was to showcase all the good that young people do within their own communities that rarely gets the recognition it deserves.

Also, the Prison Arts Foundation (which is a charitable trust) is holding an exhibition of current and ex-prisoners art work at the Playhouse, Derry, during December and the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) is providing some practical support in the organisation of this event.

YJA and NIPS are both Executive Agencies of the DOJ.

Legal Aid: Expert Witnesses

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice for a breakdown of the professions, that are used as experts in legal cases, that are in receipt of Legal Aid payments through disbursements.

(AQW 28698/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is a matter for the Court to determine whether any individual can give evidence in the capacity of an expert witness. Accordingly, it is not possible to provide a definitive list of professions that are used as expert witnesses. The attached list is comprised of those who have been paid as an expert witness in the past.

List of Experts paid from Legal Aid

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ■ A&E consultant | ■ Geneticist |
| ■ Accountant | ■ GP (records report) |
| ■ Anaesthetist | ■ Gynaecologist |
| ■ Architect | ■ Haematologist |
| ■ Cardiologist | ■ Handwriting expert |
| ■ Cell telephone site analysis | ■ Interpreter |
| ■ Child psychiatrist | ■ Lip reader/Signer |
| ■ Child psychologist | ■ Mediator |
| ■ Computer expert | ■ Medical consultant |
| ■ Consultant engineer | ■ Medical microbiologist |
| ■ Dentist | ■ Meteorologist |
| ■ Dermatologist | ■ Midwife |
| ■ Doctor (GP) | ■ Neonatologist |
| ■ Drug expert | ■ Neurologist |
| ■ Engineer | ■ Neuropsychiatrist |
| ■ ENT surgeon | ■ Neuroradiologist |
| ■ Facial mapping | ■ Paediatric Neurologist |
| ■ Fingerprint expert | ■ Neurosurgeon |
| ■ Fire investigation | ■ Nursing expert |
| ■ Firearm expert | ■ Obstetrician |
| ■ Forensic scientist | ■ Occupational therapist |
| ■ General surgeon | ■ Oncologist |

- Orthopaedic surgeon
- Paediatrician
- Pathologist
- Pharmacologist
- Physiotherapist
- Plastic surgeon
- Process server
- Psychiatrist
- Psychologist
- Radiologist
- Rheumatologist
- Risk assessment expert
- Speech therapist
- Surgeon
- Surveyor
- Telecoms expert
- Toxicologist
- Urologist
- Vet
- Voice recognition expert

Legal Aid: Disbursements

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to detail how much was paid through Legal Aid in disbursements, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28699/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below details the disbursements paid under all of the Legal Aid schemes over the past three financial years. It is not possible to break down the individual components paid as disbursements.

Year	LAA	ABWOR	Children Order	Civil	Criminal	Total
10/11	£411,689	£57,281	£598,910	£3,689,427	£3,061,565	£7,818,872
11/12	£349,501	£66,260	£713,743	£4,969,259	£2,354,672	£8,453,435
12/13	£222,588	£57,782	£568,549	£5,216,098	£2,272,543	£8,337,560

Taxis: Convictions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions have been secured for (i) operating as a taxi driver without the appropriate licence; (ii) taxi driver carrying more passengers than licence or vehicle permits; and (iii) operating as a taxi without the required insurance, in each of the last three years, broken down by court division,

(AQW 28760/11-15)

Mr Ford: Offences relating to convictions for operating as a taxi driver without the appropriate licence may be prosecuted under Article 13 of the Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and previously Article 79A of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 or, as having no PSV licence, under Article 3(1) of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. Offences relating to convictions for carrying excess passengers may be prosecuted under Article 62(2) of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. Offences relating to convictions for no insurance may be prosecuted under Article 90(4) of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981.

In relation to most of these offences, information held by my Department does not specify whether a conviction related specifically to taxis, or to taxi drivers, so, for parts (ii) and (iii) of the question, it has not been possible to provide the information requested.

The table below gives the number of convictions for operating as a taxi driver without the appropriate licence/no PSV licence by court division, for 2007, 2008 and 2009. These are the most recent three years for which the information requested is available.

Table: Convictions for operating as a taxi driver without the appropriate licence/no PSV licence by Court Division

Year	Convictions by Court Division
2007	Belfast (1), Fermanagh and Tyrone (1)
2008	Antrim (1), Armagh and South Down (1), Belfast (1)
2009	Antrim (1)

(1) Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Criminal Justice: Bail

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many persons on bail, in respect of a charge, or charges, that was proceeding through the court system, were charged with committing a further offence, or offences, whilst subject to bail, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 28761/11-15)

Mr Ford: Information in respect of offences committed while on bail may be available on an individual case basis. However, information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Legal Aid Reform: Consultation Responses

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many representations his Department has received on the proposed cuts to Legal Aid; and how many of these expressed concern or opposition over the proposals.

(AQW 28774/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department has received 123 representations in response to consultations on proposals for legal aid reform. Of the 69 who expressed concern or opposition 47 were from members of the legal profession or their representative bodies. The Department has also received 11 requests to meet with the Minister of Justice and 20 items of correspondence on this subject.

Prisoners: Hospital Treatment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27906/11-15, on how many occasions has a prisoner required treatment from an outside hospital in each of the last two years; and how many of these were regarded, or latterly regarded, as vulnerable prisoners.

(AQW 28810/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service records self harm incidents (including suicide attempts) where the prisoner attended outside hospital immediately following the incident. From 1 December 2012 to 30 November 2013 there were 83 incidents and for the same period in 2011/12 there were 61 incidents.

In all but one of these incidents, the prisoner was either being supported under the Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR) procedures at the time of the incident or the SPAR procedures were subsequently commenced.

Prisoners: Support Services

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27906/11-15, what assurances he can give that all vulnerable prisoners are afforded care and access to the appropriate medical and emotional support services, within the stipulated time frame, identical to that afforded to people in the community with the same issues.

(AQW 28811/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am satisfied that the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) provides all vulnerable prisoners with access to appropriate medical and emotional support services.

As the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust are responsible for healthcare in prisons, the Member may wish to write to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in respect of the comparison between service delivery in prisons and in the community.

Prisoners: Cell Keys

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27405/11-15 whether all prisoners currently holding their own cell keys do so under strict supervision; and whether any prisoners are self-regulating, or similar, due to staff being in fear of patrolling landings or due to staff shortages

(AQW 28812/11-15)

Mr Ford: All prisoners currently holding their own cell keys are closely supervised. Staff hold a master key for all cells and remain in control at all times. There is no self regulation.

Sex Offenders: Risk Management

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what steps his Department can take to help ensure that people charged and convicted of serious sexual offences are not housed in close proximity to schools.

(AQW 28818/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department issues guidance to agencies, with responsibility for assessing and managing the risks posed by serious sexual and violent offenders, in discharging their functions under the public protection arrangements for Northern Ireland.

Convicted sex offenders are subject to a range of statutory measures aimed at reducing their risk of reoffending. These can include post-release licence conditions, sex offender notification requirements and sexual offences prevention orders which may place restrictions on residence as part of the offender's risk management. For those who present the highest level of risk, the public protection arrangements offer a combined approach to both risk assessment and management drawing on the knowledge and expertise of a range of relevant agencies to work collectively on individual cases.

Risk management plans are individually tailored to address the specific risks identified on a case by case basis. All relevant factors, including location, are taken into consideration in the approval of accommodation. The key consideration for

those agencies managing offenders must be that it is appropriate in terms of meeting an individual's ongoing supervision requirements and minimises the risk of harm to the public.

Super-injunctions: Reporting

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with his counterpart in the UK Ministry of Justice concerning the reporting of Super-Injunctions.

(AQW 28830/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no legal definition of the term 'super-injunction'. However the question has been interpreted as seeking information on orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief.

I have not discussed the reporting of such orders with the Secretary of State for Justice, or any other Minister in the Ministry of Justice.

An Injunction Order includes provision to vary or discharge the order through an application to the High Court. However, should an individual decide to initiate an appeal, they must serve the appropriate notice on all parties within 21 days (if it is an interim order) or six weeks (if it is a final order) from the date the order was filed.

Within seven days of service the appeal should be entered for hearing by lodging the following documents and fee in the Central Office, Royal Courts of Justice:-

- two copies of the Notice of Appeal, one of which must be endorsed with service details.
- a copy of the Order of the Court to be appealed and
- the requisite fee of £500.00.

Super-injunctions: Appeals

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Justice to outline the system for appealing against the application of a Super-Injunction.

(AQW 28831/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no legal definition of the term 'super-injunction'. However the question has been interpreted as seeking information on orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief.

I have not discussed the reporting of such orders with the Secretary of State for Justice, or any other Minister in the Ministry of Justice.

An Injunction Order includes provision to vary or discharge the order through an application to the High Court. However, should an individual decide to initiate an appeal, they must serve the appropriate notice on all parties within 21 days (if it is an interim order) or six weeks (if it is a final order) from the date the order was filed.

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- two copies of the Notice of Appeal, one of which must be endorsed with service details.
- a copy of the Order of the Court to be appealed and
- the requisite fee of £500.00.

Paintball Guns: Age Restriction

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice what is the current age restriction for the purchase and use of paintball guns; and whether the plans to lower the age at which a young person may have supervised access to firearms includes the use of paintball guns.

(AQW 28861/11-15)

Mr Ford: A paintball marker (gun) is defined by the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 as a firearm and as such requires to be held on a firearm certificate (FAC). To apply for a FAC, a person must be at least 18 years of age.

Paintball clubs operate as firearms clubs approved by the Chief Constable. They are marshalled and the minimum age for participants is 16 years.

The Department of Justice's recent consultation on young shooters dealt with young people having access to shotguns and airguns under appropriate supervision. I have no plans to reduce the age at which young people can access paintball guns at this juncture. The matter has not been raised with me before and if it were to be considered it would need to be the subject of consultation.

Super-injunctions: Appeals

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Justice how many appeals against super-injunctions have been successful in since 1 January 2010.

(AQW 28881/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no legal definition of the term "super injunction", however the question has been interpreted as seeking information on orders prohibiting publicity on the granting of injunctive relief. There has been one successful appeal in a case of this type since 1 January 2010.

Legal Services Commission

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice when he will bring the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission into his Department as an agency; and whether he intends to take similar action in relation to the Taxing Master and Very High Cost Cases.

(AQW 28913/11-15)

Mr Ford: The necessary primary legislation to transfer the functions and staff of the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission into my Department will be introduced in the Assembly early in 2014. The agency will be established as soon as Royal Assent is received.

I have proposed that the Taxing Master's functions in respect of the assessment of fees for legally aided assistance in civil cases will transfer to the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission. This will deliver annual savings of £3m in administration costs. I have no plans to make any other change to the office of the Taxing Master, which will remain within the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service. The Taxing Master will remain a member of the independent judiciary, as at present.

Sexual Offences Prevention Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 28349/11-15, will he reconsider this response given that any such case would be within the court system and therefore under the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service's remit and the wording of the application is stated as to the nature of the reason for the application before a District Judge.

(AQW 28915/11-15)

Mr Ford: As at 9 December 2013 there are no current applications for Sexual Offences Prevention Orders. The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service may hold the information requested in part two of AQW 28349/11-15. However this could only be obtained by a manual review of the originating hardcopy documents for each application. On this basis, the information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Sex Offenders: Convictions from other Jurisdictions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the recent discovery of two foreign national convicted sex-offenders residing in close proximity to a school, which would not have occurred if their past convictions had been known, what legislation or interim legislation will he bring forward to ensure foreign nationals are subject to the same restrictions and monitoring as Northern Ireland's nationals in these circumstances; and for his assessment of need for the disclosure of all criminal convictions, particularly sexual and violence offences, before foreign nationals arrive in Northern Ireland, if they intend to stay, and for Northern Ireland nationals leaving the jurisdiction to reside elsewhere.

(AQW 28917/11-15)

Mr Ford: Sex offenders with convictions from other jurisdictions are currently made subject to the notification requirements under Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 by virtue of a notification order. This order is made by the court on application by the police when they know that an offender with convictions for sexual offences is coming to stay in the jurisdiction, or as soon as they are made aware that such an offender is in Northern Ireland.

I have already taken steps in the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 to tighten the arrangements for sex offenders coming to Northern Ireland. On commencement, section 4 of the 2013 Act will amend the Sexual Offences Act to make it a statutory requirement for an offender with convictions from other jurisdictions to notify to the police after spending a qualifying period of 7 days within Northern Ireland. Failure to do so constitutes an offence and can result in a prison sentence of up to five years.

Other issues relating to border controls and immigration are not devolved matters.

Gifts and Hospitality: DOJ Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many entries his Special Adviser has made in the Department's Register of Gifts and Hospitality since they were appointed; and what is the total value of such entries.

(AQW 29007/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Special Adviser has registered one offer of hospitality in the Department's Register of Gifts and Hospitality since his appointment. The offer was declined.

Criminal Records: ECHR Article 8

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Justice whether he is aware of the Court of Appeal ruling in January 2013, R on the application of T, JB and AW v Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, Secretary of State for the Home Department and Secretary of State of Justice [2013] EWCA Civ 25, that the mandatory and blanket disclosure of convictions as part of a

criminal records check was incompatible with Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights on the right to respect for private life; and what action he has taken in regard to this ruling.

(AQW 29036/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am aware of the case referred to. In her 2011 Part 1 report, "A Managed Approach - A Review of the Criminal Records Regime in Northern Ireland", Sunita Mason recommended that AccessNI should routinely disclose informed warnings, cautions and details of diversionary youth conferences on Standard and Enhanced checks. She also recommended that the Department should bring forward proposals to filter out convictions which are both old and minor, and criminal information such as cautions for disclosure purposes. These recommendations were the subject of a public consultation carried out between May 2012 and August 2012. Both received broad support from respondents.

The Department had planned to run a further public consultation on the precise nature of a filtering scheme here. In view of legal advice which I sought following the ruling in November 2012 by the European Court of Human Rights that the disclosure of a caution in the case of *MM v United Kingdom* (Application No 24029/07) was a violation of Article 8 (right to privacy), and the judgment by the Court of Appeal in England and Wales in the cases you refer to, I have decided to introduce legislation as soon as possible to provide for the introduction of a filtering scheme. The scheme will be comparable to that which came into effect in England and Wales on 29 May 2013. It will also allow for the routine disclosure of informed warnings, cautions and details of diversionary youth conferences on Standard and Enhanced checks.

At this is a cross cutting issue I have obtained the agreement of the Executive to the introduction of the scheme. Work to prepare the necessary legislation is now underway.

Criminal Records: Filtering

Dr McDonnell asked Minister of Justice whether he has considered introducing a filtering mechanism to prevent old or minor convictions appearing on a criminal records check, similar to the The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975 (Amendment) (England and Wales) Order 2013 and The Police Act 1997 (Criminal Record Certificates: Relevant Matters) (Amendment) (England and Wales) Order 2013, which came into effect on the 29 May 2013 in England and Wales.

(AQW 29037/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am aware of the case referred to. In her 2011 Part 1 report, "A Managed Approach - A Review of the Criminal Records Regime in Northern Ireland", Sunita Mason recommended that AccessNI should routinely disclose informed warnings, cautions and details of diversionary youth conferences on Standard and Enhanced checks. She also recommended that the Department should bring forward proposals to filter out convictions which are both old and minor, and criminal information such as cautions for disclosure purposes. These recommendations were the subject of a public consultation carried out between May 2012 and August 2012. Both received broad support from respondents.

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At this is a cross cutting issue I have obtained the agreement of the Executive to the introduction of the scheme. Work to prepare the necessary legislation is now underway.

Policing: Part-time Reserve Support Programme

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27033/11-15, in light of the limited time until the end of the current financial year, whether his Department has finalised the administration, funding and audit arrangements for the Part-Time Reserve Support Programme.

(AQW 29108/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials from my Department have been engaging with a number of the policing charities to work on the arrangements for administering the Part-Time Reserve (PTR) Support Programme, and this work is continuing. It is anticipated that part of the monies will be disbursed in the current financial year.

Prisons: Independent Monitoring Boards

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Justice whether the independent monitoring report regarding Her Majesty's Prisons in Northern Ireland is ready for publication; and to explain the reasons for any delay in the publication.

(AQW 29154/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Annual Reports of the Independent Monitoring Boards for Maghaberry Prison, Magilligan Prison and Hydebank Wood Prison & Young Offenders Centre were electronically published on 6 December 2013, the planned publication date. They can be viewed or downloaded from www.imb-ni.org.uk.

Prison Service: Uniform Survey

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to outline (i) why HM Prison service has launched a uniform survey; and (ii) any plans to remove the letters MPM or the symbol of the crown from the uniforms.

(AQW 29190/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service has launched a uniform survey at the request of the Whitley B Committee. This Committee forms part of the Whitley Council industrial relations framework between management and Trade Union Side and it meets quarterly to deal with any issues relating to uniform or health and safety matters. The aim of the survey is to get the views of staff on the suitability of the current uniform items issued to operational grades within NIPS.

The letters MPM do not appear on prison uniforms. A note to staff on the Prison Service intranet stated specifically that the survey does not include insignia on uniform.

Human Trafficking: Child Victims

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the 17 children identified as victims of human trafficking, to provide (i) the countries of origin involved; and (ii) the average age of the children.

(AQW 29220/11-15)

Mr Ford: From 1 April 2013 to 9 December 2013, 17 minors have been referred to the National Referral Mechanism as potential victims of human trafficking, for assessment of whether they are victims of human trafficking.

To date, three of these potential victims have received conclusive determinations confirming them to be victims of human trafficking and five of the individuals have received conclusive determinations that they have not been identified as victims of human trafficking. Of the remaining cases, two have been withdrawn and decisions are still pending in seven cases.

In order to protect the identities of victims, it is not possible to provide more specific information about the three individuals who have been confirmed as victims of human trafficking.

National Crime Agency

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Justice to outline any further progress in having the National Crime Agency fully operational locally.

(AQO 5212/11-15)

Mr Ford: I set out the position on my engagement with Sinn Fein and the SDLP on this issue during Questions on 19 November. Significant progress had been made but we have not concluded our exchanges. I wrote to the parties again on 25 November impressing the urgency upon them.

I want to stress again that we need the NCA to operate in Northern Ireland in the devolved arena with all the necessary powers available to it. I have offered assurances that its operation would be with the full knowledge and agreement of the Chief Constable and would be subject to appropriate oversight from our policing architecture.

We need to resolve this matter.

Prisoners/Prison Officers: Numbers

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Justice to outline the number of prisoners and prison officers in 1998 compared to 2013.

(AQO 5214/11-15)

Mr Ford: On 1 April 1998 the prisoner population in Northern Ireland was 1507. On 1 April 2013 it was 1793.

On 1 April 1998 the Northern Ireland Prison Service employed 2824 prison staff. On 1 April 2013 it employed 1288 staff.

Criminal Justice: EU Third Pillar

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the UK Government's decision to opt out of the EU third pillar, justice and home affairs measures.

(AQO 5215/11-15)

Mr Ford: I expressed reservations to the UK Government about their intention to exercise the opt-out prior to the decision being made. I also made my views known to a Joint House of Lords Committee Inquiry set up to consider the 2014 Opt Out.

My concern is that while some measures in the list of 130 are less used than others, some of them are important tools for our criminal justice agencies. Some of the measures also help to combat cross-border crime and facilitate the excellent cooperation that exists with the Irish Republic on these matters. I expressed particular concern about the European Arrest Warrant which is one of the 130 measures that the UK will opt out of from 2014.

I am however pleased that the European Arrest Warrant is included in the list of 35 measures that the UK will seek to rejoin but I remain concerned that there is no agreed process or timetable in place for the negotiation process and the potential for an operational gap after December 2014.

I am exploring with MOJ the possibility of the UK having access to the measure that would recognise probation orders. This is not currently on the list of 35 measures

The Home Secretary and UK Ministers are aware of my views on the opt-out and I will continue to press for assurances that there will be no operational gap. My officials are also engaged with the Home Office and Ministry of Justice on this important matter.

Policing: Local Government Reform

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice to outline any discussions he has had with the Chief Constable regarding the need for Policing Districts to be co-terminus with the new council structures.
(AQO 5216/11-15)

Mr Ford: The reorganisation of local government is the responsibility of the Minister of the Environment, and I have not had any discussions with the Chief Constable on this matter to date. The proposed new council structures will not be co-terminus with current PSNI district boundaries, and this has a range of implications for policing governance and accountability arrangements, which my officials will explore with the PSNI and the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

Crime: Asset Recovery Community Scheme

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the Asset Recovery Community Scheme.
(AQO 5217/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since it was first launched in 2011, the Asset Recovery Community Scheme has awarded in excess of £1.7 million to projects aimed at fighting crime and the fear of crime. The latest award will be formally announced next week.

The schemes being supported include diversionary activities for the young, making the elderly more secure in their own homes and projects aimed at reducing drug and alcohol abuse in our communities. They are based throughout Northern Ireland and are benefitting both urban and rural areas.

Not only are these projects bringing something positive to our community but there is an added sense of justice in that they are being funded through assets recovered from criminals.

Attorney General: Troubles-related Criminal Offences

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Justice to outline any discussions he has had with the Attorney General following his public comments regarding the ending of prosecution for criminal offences arising out of the Troubles.
(AQO 5218/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have not had any discussions with the Attorney General on the comments he made recently about ending prosecutions for criminal offences arising out of the Troubles.

Prisoners: Annual Costs

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Justice to outline the average annual cost per prisoner, in each of the last three years.
(AQO 5219/11-15)

Mr Ford: As published in the Northern Ireland Prison Service's Annual Report and Accounts, the average cost per prisoner place in last three years was £73,762 in 2010/11, £71,398 in 2011/12 and £66,494 in 2012/13.

This cost is calculated by dividing the annual Operating Expenditure (excluding non-standard costs) by the average total number of places, defined as Certified Normal Accommodation.

Department for Regional Development

Cycling: Budget

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development what percentage of his budget was spent on cycling in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 26785/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The table below shows the percentage of my Department's Capital budget spent on cycling measures in each of the last ten years (2003/04 to 2012/13) and planned for 2013-14. The recently established Cycling Unit, will seek to coordinate and promote the work being taken forward in relation to cycling and as such, spend on this activity is expected to increase in future years.

Percentage of Department Expenditure on Cycling

	2003/ 04 %	2004/ 05 %	2005/ 06 %	2006/ 07 %	2007/ 08 %	2008/ 09 %	2009/ 10 %	2010/ 11 %	2011/ 12 %	2012/ 13 %	2013/ 14 %
Cycling Projects	0.34	0.25	0.21	0.29	0.24	0.22	0.17	0.07	0.32	0.24	0.48

Lurgan/Portadown: Car Parking Charges

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to abolish charges in car parks owned by his Department in Lurgan and Portadown, to alleviate the effect of charges on local businesses.

(AQW 28299/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware I have made a number of important decisions relating to parking charges including freezing the current off street tariffs, rejection of the proposal to introduce on street charging and the introduction of a cashless payment system for parking, Park Mobile. These decisions have been very beneficial to local business and were made against a backdrop of the requirement to recover costs and the need to effectively manage town centre parking, by promoting greater turnover of spaces and enhancing accessibility to businesses and services in our local towns and cities.

I have also recently announced the introduction of a new Christmas parking rate of five hours parking for just one pound, in 95 of my Department's car parks in 25 towns. Lurgan and Portadown are included in this scheme and I am confident this scheme, along with the other measures I announced, will provide a welcome boost for traders and encourage the public to continue to support their local economy by shopping locally.

I am continuing to work with my officials to explore other ways in which I can improve the parking experience to the benefit of local businesses. These include, allowing greater involvement by local councils, who may reimburse my Department, if they wish to promote free or reduced cost parking promotions.

The initiatives already in place and consideration of other potential improvements, continue to demonstrate my commitment to supporting local businesses.

A6: Dualling

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development why AQW 27642/11-15 remains unanswered.

(AQW 28398/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member I responded to Assembly Question 27642/11-15 on 19 November 2013.

A6: Dungiven–Castledawson

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 27642/11-15, whether there is a scheme planned to dual the A6 between Dungiven and Castledawson.

(AQW 28508/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has no current scheme to dual the A6 between Dungiven and Castledawson.

Dellmount/Fairfield, Bangor: Road Resurfacing

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the timescale for road resurfacing in the Dellmount and Fairfield areas of Bangor.

(AQW 28595/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is currently undertaking a footway reconstruction scheme within the Dellmount and Fairfield areas of Bangor. During the course of this work the kerb-line is being set to a height that will enable the carriageway to be resurfaced, without disturbing the new footway surface. Whilst there is currently insufficient funding available to proceed with resurfacing of the carriageway, the situation will be reviewed if extra funding is secured.

Derry: DRD Decentralisation

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to 28012/11-15, to detail (i) why there are only 64 civil servants from his Department based in Derry and (ii) whether he intends to decentralise any functions to Derry to aid economic growth in the North West region.

(AQW 28608/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's staffing structure reflects the manpower required to deliver its essential functions to the public in the most effective and efficient way.

In accordance with the terms of the question, my response to AQW 28012/11-15 was restricted to posts in non-industrial grades. I should, however, point out that in addition to the 64 non-industrial posts shown as being based in the Derry City Council area at 1 January 2013, DRD also employed 25 industrial staff in the same area on that date.

Given the need to manage and maintain the regional road network, DRD is already one of the Departments with the highest proportions of staff based at locations outside the Greater Belfast area. The Department is continuously reviewing its structure and operations to optimise economic growth across Northern Ireland. At present, however, there are no plans to decentralise further jobs within DRD to the North West or to other centres outside Belfast.

A509: Enniskillen–Derrylin

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on planned realignments to the A509 between Enniskillen and Derrylin.

(AQW 28625/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has two schemes planned for the A509 between Derrylin and Enniskillen, one at Derryhawlaght and one at Derryallen, details of which are contained in the Draft Local Transport & Safety Measures programme 2014 – 2016, which was presented to Fermanagh District Council on 18 Nov 2013.

The scheme at Derryhawlaght will involve carriageway realignment, both vertically and horizontally, over a distance of approximately 800 metres. It is estimated the works will in the region of £1.2 million. Detailed design is at an advanced stage and it is expected that land purchase will take place in 2014/15. Progression to construction will, however, be subject to successful acquisition of the land and the availability of funding.

The scheme at Derryallen will involve horizontal carriageway realignment over a distance of approximately 1,100 metres and at an estimated cost of £300,000. Whilst land has been acquired, delivery of this scheme will be dependent upon the availability of funding and its prioritisation within the works programme for the Fermanagh area.

North Down: Roads Funding

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the funding allocated for roads in his departmental budget for the North Down area.

(AQW 28626/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: £3.7m of my departmental budget has been allocated for roads in the North Down area.

Planning Applications: Roads Service

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the average length of time it takes for Roads Service to reply to a consultation on a planning application.

(AQW 28634/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not maintain details of the average length of time taken to reply to planning application consultations. Response times for consultations vary according to factors such as, the scale and complexity of the application and the quality and completeness of the information provided in the application.

However, my Department's Roads Service has a target, agreed with DOE Planning, to return 70% of all planning application consultations to the relevant Divisional Planning Office within 15 working days of receipt.

To date in the 2013/14 year, Roads Service has achieved performance of 82%.

City of Culture 2013: DRD Tenders/Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) tenders awarded; and (ii) funding provided to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 28694/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department contributed £16k to Derry City Council to support the City of Culture 2013.

The Department did not award any tenders in respect of the City of Culture 2013.

Dungiven: Park and Ride/Share

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Regional Development whether a survey on the usage of the Park and Ride facility for the 212 Service has been carried out at the stop in Dungiven; and if so, to detail the results.

(AQW 28728/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: A survey of the informal park and ride at Dungiven Castle and Dungiven Health Centre was undertaken in April 2010, as part of the planning process for the Londonderry to Dungiven dual carriageway. Approximately 26 vehicles were recorded as being parked in the morning and remaining for the whole day and approximately 14 vehicles dropped off bus passengers in the morning and 14 vehicles picked up bus passengers in the evening.

A new park and share/ride site at Magheraboy Terrace will be provided as part of the Londonderry to Dungiven dual carriageway. This site is located about 200 metres east of the Dungiven East roundabout, where the dual carriageway terminates.

Planning Application A/2011/0210/F

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 28016/11-15, what consideration he is giving to the assessment by Roads Service, on 12 April 2012, on retrospective planning application A/2011/0210/F, where it stated that the excavation works have been carried out in close proximity to Mobouy Road with the result that the structural stability of the road may be affected and that the proposed works are totally unacceptable.

(AQW 28739/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Application A/2011/0210/F relates to a retrospective planning application for the extraction of sand and gravel without on-site processing. The application is still under consideration by the Department of the Environment.

Initially, excavation works had been carried out in close proximity to Mobouy Road. However, since the matter was raised, an embankment has been constructed. My officials recently inspected Mobouy Road and there are no visible defects to suggest that the structural stability of the road has been affected.

A5: Review

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the review into the A5 scheme.

(AQW 28745/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are currently four reports being developed to inform Habitats Regulations Assessments of the potential impacts on the various designated sites arising from the project. It is proposed consultation on these reports will commence in spring 2014.

The issues and timing associated with updating the Environmental Statement are still being considered and developed, and it is not possible to finalise a programme at this time.

Car Parking: Park and Ride/Share

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what park and ride and park and share improvements are planned over the next three years.

(AQW 28852/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am aware that there is an increasing demand for Park & Ride and Park & Share facilities. This increased demand highlights the success brought about by my Department's investment in public transport in recent years and it is something that I would like to continue to build upon.

In August 2011 I endorsed my Department's 'Strategic Review of Park & Ride' report and approved the proposed way forward. The report presented recommendations for the delivery and prioritisation of Park & Ride facilities.

My Department has established a Park & Ride Programme Board with responsibility for co-ordinating and prioritising the implementation of Park & Ride projects in line with the Departmental Strategy. The Programme Board has produced a Park & Ride Strategic Delivery Programme for 2013-15 which aims to create at least 1,000 additional Park & Ride and Park & Share spaces across Northern Ireland in the next 2 years. The Programme has already delivered over 350 spaces this year.

The Programme is available on my Department's website at: <http://www.drndi.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-details.htm?docid=8996>

My Department is currently considering the options for the delivery of additional Park & Ride and Park & Share facilities post 2015, when the current programme expires. This future programme is likely to include the completion of some sites from the current programme together with the development of other new facilities. The scale of the Park & Ride proposals post 2015 will be dependent on the availability of finance.

Railways: Network Extension

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he is considering any extension of the current rail network; and when he plans to make any related decisions.

(AQW 28853/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I launched a public consultation exercise on Future Railway Investment earlier this year. The majority of those who replied, considered that the priority in spending should be given to maintaining the existing rail network and introducing measures to make best use of the current lines. There were suggestions for extensions of the network to a wide variety of destinations, and a significant volume of correspondence, in support of restoration of the line between Portadown and Armagh.

The key issue is the availability of funding. An analysis of the information gathered from the public consultation is continuing, alongside the ongoing work to determine the prioritisation of future investment in the wider transportation infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

It is planned that a report on the railways analysis will be published soon.

Reservoirs: Legislation

Mr Frew asked Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 27876/11-15, whether the reservoirs named are currently up to the standard required under the forthcoming legislation on reservoirs.

(AQW 28860/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that there is no existing statutory provision relating to the management of reservoirs in Northern Ireland. However, all of the reservoirs listed under AQW 27876/11-15 have been managed by NIW in the spirit of the GB Reservoirs Act 1975 which does not extend to Northern Ireland.

NIW understands that in view of this arrangement the reservoirs should satisfy the requirements of the forthcoming Northern Ireland legislation, subject to any changes during the Assembly process.

Public Transport: Statistics

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the 26 council areas in order of those in which people most use public transport.

(AQW 28886/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: This information is not currently available as there is no measure of the availability of public transport at Local Government District or Ward level and Translink do not record this information. However a question was asked in the 2011 Census on the 'Method of Travel to Work or Place of Study' and options included Public Transport. Results and analysis of this question is available on the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information System (NINIS). This data can be broken down into administrative geographies including Local Government District (Table KS702NI). The department will be considering this going forward.

The relevant link is: <http://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/Theme.aspx?themeNumber=136&themeName=Census 2011>

Magherafelt: Car Parks

Mr I McCreagh asked the Minister for Regional Development in which car parks in Magherafelt has the new 40p for 3 hours tariff been introduced.

(AQW 28937/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In October 2013, the 40p for one hour parking tariff was changed to 40p for three hours in Central South car park in Magherafelt. This is the upper tier of the car park on King Street and is the only car park in Magherafelt with the 40p for 3 hours tariff. Parking in the lower tier of the car park on King Street remains free of charge.

Car Parking: Park and Ride/Share

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to increase Park and Ride facilities.

(AQW 29000/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am aware that there is an increasing demand for Park & Ride and Park & Share facilities. This increased demand highlights the success brought about by my Department's investment in public transport in recent years and it is something that I would like to continue to build upon.

In August 2011 I endorsed my Department's 'Strategic Review of Park & Ride' report and approved the proposed way forward. The report presented recommendations for the delivery and prioritisation of Park & Ride facilities.

My Department has established a Park & Ride Programme Board with responsibility for co-ordinating and prioritising the implementation of Park & Ride projects in line with the Departmental Strategy. The Programme Board has produced a Park & Ride Strategic Delivery Programme for 2013-15 which aims to create at least 1,000 additional Park & Ride and Park & Share spaces across Northern Ireland in the next 2 years. The Programme has already delivered over 350 spaces this year.

The Programme is available on my Department's website at:

<http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-details.htm?docid=8996>

Lurgan/Portadown: Car Parking

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are plans to review car parking provision at Lurgan and Portadown Translink Railway Stations.

(AQO 5226/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have liaised with Translink officials who advised that they are currently looking at potential schemes for both Lurgan and Portadown as part of its Park & Ride programme.

The scheme under consideration in Lurgan would add 70 further spaces to the 145 already there. In Portadown there are currently 84 spaces; the potential scheme there aims to add another 200 spaces.

My Department also has its own Park & Ride Strategic Delivery Programme 2013-15' which is a prioritised schedule of new Park & Ride projects in the next 2 years. Portadown is included in this programme as a 'project under consideration'.

Funding has been set aside for Park & Ride in my Department's budget. However, the implementation of Park & Ride schemes will take place in a constrained budgetary context.

Public Transport: Infrastructure

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether current infrastructure is sufficient to deal with the growing numbers using public transport.

(AQO 5227/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has invested heavily to develop infrastructure to deal with the growing numbers using public transport.

In recent years, my Department has funded £560 million of capital works on railways and bus infrastructure, delivering new buses, new trains, new maintenance facilities for trains, station upgrades and platform extensions and track upgrades and continued capital investment in public transport remains a priority. The member will be aware of the new facilities provided at Newry train station.

Public transport has been a major success story in recent years. Passenger journeys across the bus and rail network are at record levels and continue to increase annually. The last year alone saw over 2 million more journeys made on public transport.

In addition, funding has been provided for rail and bus based park and ride sites and for the development of bus priority measures in Belfast.

For example, there are 50km of bus lanes operating in the greater Belfast area, which allows scope for further growth in bus patronage. Our Park and Ride sites are becoming increasingly popular. The sites on the M1 at Sprucefield and Blacks Road are approaching capacity and the flagship site at Cairnshill is regularly more than 50% full. There are plans to double the capacity at Sprucefield and provide a new large Park and Ride site at Dundonald in the near future.

Newtownabbey: Adverse Weather

Ms Brown asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Roads Service has developed a specific policy to tackle adverse weather conditions in Newtownabbey this winter.

(AQO 5228/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service operates and implements a long standing policy, which has been approved by the Assembly, which delivers winter service right across Northern Ireland, including the Newtownabbey area.

Whilst it has not developed a specific policy for the Newtownabbey area, or any other area of Northern Ireland that may be affected by adverse weather conditions, I can confirm that, for the current winter season, my Department has agreed contracts with five external snow clearance contractors and is hopeful of signing up a further three, for potential deployment in the Newtownabbey area. This will help to supplement the resources which Roads Service has already earmarked for the current winter season.

In addition my Department has entered into an arrangement with Newtownabbey Borough Council, along with 23 of the other 25 Councils, to provide salt, to allow Councils, where their resources permit, to salt busy town centre footways in times of prolonged ice and snow to help keep the local economy moving.

I am therefore confident my Department's Roads Service will be able to deal effectively with the prevailing wintry conditions in line with its policy.

Blue Badge: Renewal Backlog

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the recent back log in Blue Badge renewals that resulted in badge holders being granted a month's extension on their out of date badges.

(AQO 5230/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am pleased to report the resourcing issues, which led to backlogs at the end of August 2013, have now been resolved. Good progress has been made and I am pleased to confirm the backlog has now been cleared.

However it remains my intention to continue to grant one month's grace on expired Blue Badges.

M1/A1 Sprucefield Bypass

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the M1/A1 Sprucefield bypass.

(AQO 5231/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Sprucefield Bypass scheme has been proposed to provide grade separated linkage, between the A1 and the M1 at Sprucefield, in order to improve traffic flows in this area.

Initial feasibility work resulted in the completion and publication of the Stage One Scheme Assessment, which identified two corridors to be taken forward for further development.

At present, no funding has been identified for the Sprucefield Bypass.

Roads: Service Trenches

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he plans to lay service trenches at the sides of new road developments to prevent future road opening.

(AQO 5232/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department already seeks to minimise the risk of future road openings on new road developments by ensuring, where possible, services are located in trenches in the hard shoulder or verge.

Detailed consultation takes place with utility companies during the design stage to determine the nature and location of existing services, and any foreseeable utility company requirements.

In the event that existing services are affected by new road developments, measures are in place to allow diversion of those services away from the line of the carriageway. Where utility companies identify any future requirements, additional ducts are placed at their expense.

Car Parking: Christmas Rate

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development for an assessment of the loss of revenue by reducing car parking charges over the Christmas period.

(AQO 5233/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The special parking rate of £1 for five hours parking that I introduced, specifically for the busy Christmas period, has been warmly welcomed by trading organisations, businesses and Chambers of Commerce. This special rate is supporting businesses and facilitating shoppers, who usually wish to spend more time browsing in town centre shops during the Christmas shopping period. Shoppers should therefore have fewer concerns about receiving a parking ticket for overstaying their permitted time.

I will look closely at the full range of benefits that accrue from this scheme and consider the impact, once that analysis is complete.

Department for Social Development

Housing Executive: Common Waiting List

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 27763/11-15, whether there are targets for the number of people on the Common Waiting List for each Housing Executive District Office area.

(AQW 28328/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I assume the Member is asking whether there are targets for reducing the number of applicants on the Common Waiting List. The Housing Executive has advised that while they have no specific targets, they manage the Common Waiting List as efficiently as possible.

The Housing Executive's annual District Housing Plans represents their statutory annual consultation engagement with local government. The Plan gives a comprehensive account of the Housing Executive's performance in the District Council area over the past year. It also sets out their funding, plans and strategies for the year ahead to address any imbalances identified in the analysis of the local housing market and the Housing Executive's obligations under government policies.

The Housing Executive's District Housing Plans are based on the objectives outlined in their Corporate and Business Plans. They give details of all issues and initiatives which the Housing Executive believes will affect the local housing environment over the coming year. They provide an opportunity for the Housing Executive to report the previous year's performance and to consult with local representatives on proposed housing schemes and investment for the year to come. The Housing Executive publishes the District Housing Plans for each of the District Councils each year and they are also available on their website – www.nihe.gov.uk

Derry: Social Housing Development Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development why only 788 new builds are planned in the Derry District Housing Plan 2013, when the Housing Need Assessment states 1540.

(AQW 28489/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The data to which the question refers to relates to the District Housing Plan, which is based on March 2012 figures. At this time, the housing need projection of 1540 units refers to a five year period (2012-2017). The Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) outlined plans for 788 units over a three year period (2013/14-2015/16). The

shortfall is included in the unmet housing need prospectus and detailed by specific location. This prospectus directs housing associations' searches for sites for social new build to meet need.

Homelessness: Figures

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are registered as homeless in each constituency. (AQW 28577/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Homelessness is not the same as rooflessness which means that you are without shelter of any kind and sleeping rough. You don't have to be living on the streets to be homeless and even if you have a roof over your head you can still be homeless. This may be because your home is unsuitable or you don't have any rights to stay where you live. The figures below show the number of households registered on the waiting list as statutory homeless (Full Duty Applicants) by housing district at the 1st November. It is not possible to produce figures by constituency.

Homelessness: Reduction

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to reduce the homelessness figures. (AQW 28578/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In response to homelessness in Northern Ireland, the Housing Executive and its partners in the Promoting Social Inclusion Homelessness Partnership have been developing and producing a range of homeless prevention measures under the auspices of the Homelessness Strategy 2012/2017.

The Housing Executive launched the Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland on 1 May 2012. This followed an extensive consultation and redrafting process throughout 2011 to establish agreement among the Statutory and Voluntary Agencies who would be delivering the strategy.

The Homelessness Strategy 2012-17 sets out our strategy for tackling homelessness over the next five years and establishes the guiding principles for the development and delivery of homelessness services. At this time of economic uncertainty and financial constraints it is more important than ever that homelessness services are appropriate, timely and effective.

The aim of this homelessness strategy is that long term homelessness and rough sleeping is eliminated across Northern Ireland by 2020. The strategy aims to ensure the risk of a person becoming homeless will be minimised through effective preventative measures. Through enhanced inter agency co-operation, services to the most vulnerable homeless households will be improved.

Homelessness: Services

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development what support his Department offers to people who are homeless. (AQW 28579/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive's Supporting People Team funds a range of homelessness services that are provided by voluntary, statutory and private organisations. These services provide housing related support for up to approximately 5,000 individuals who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless.

There are two primary homelessness service delivery models:

1. Short term accommodation based services e.g. hostel accommodation for people who are homeless and have no accommodation that they can occupy and;
2. Short term floating support services. This service delivery model aims to prevent people becoming homeless by providing housing related support that helps them to remain living independently in (primarily) their own homes.

A summary of the number of supported units and level of funding 2013/14 is given in the table below:

	Units	Budget Spend 2013/14	Scheme Count
Floating Support	3,120	£6,527,315	42
Accommodation	1,836	£21,743,661	112

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority

Homeless Shelters

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the location and capacity of each homeless shelter. (AQW 28581/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are three types of homeless shelter used by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive – NIHE hostels, voluntary hostels and private single lets. The attached table shows the number of NIHE and voluntary sector hostels that are

currently used as temporary accommodation. The number of bed spaces can vary, as accommodation schemes are re-aligned to meet demand and needs as particular circumstances arise.

In addition to the hostel accommodation below, the Housing Executive also uses 1118 private sector properties (private single lets) across Northern Ireland. In general the properties tend to have 1 and 2 bedrooms but there are a number of 3 and 4 bedroom properties also used. The number of properties in the private sector is fluid and is dependent on demand.

The up to date location of the private single lets is not readily available, as it is subject to change.

District	Hostel	NIHE	Voluntary	Management	Bedspaces
Belfast West	Grosvenor House	1		NIHE	58
Belfast West	Moyard House	1		NIHE	58
Belfast West	414 Falls Rd			Simon Cty	20
Belfast East	Hosford House		1	East Belfast Mission	22
Belfast East	Inverary House		1	Inverary mgt	12
Belfast East	Templemore	1		NIHE	28
Belfast North	Antrim Rd		1	Simon Cty	10
Belfast North	Deerpark Rd		1	Womens aid	45
Belfast North	Glenalva		1	Salv Army	60
Belfast North	Thorndale		1	Salv Army	70
Belfast North	Carrick House	1		NIHE	4
Belfast North	Grainne House	1		NIHE	70
Belfast North	Centenary		1	Salv Army	118
Belfast North	Mater Dei		1	De paul	13
Belfast North	Stella Maris		1	De Paul	23
Belfast North	Simon Cliftonville		1	Simon Cty	20
Belfast North	Rosemount House		1	Rosemount mgt	20
Belfast North	Foyer		1	Flax	37
Belfast South	LIFE		1	LIFE	6
Belfast South	Ormeau Centre		1	Extern	33
Belfast South	Utility St		1	NIAD	60
Belfast South	Roseville House		1	Ark	60
Belfast South	Ulsterville Ave		1	Womens aid	0
Belfast South	Foyer		1	Simon Cty	42
Belfast West	Regina Coeli		1	Legion of Mary	20
Belfast West	Ardmoulin		1	First Homeless	42
Belfast West	Conway Court		1	Simon Cty	60
Belfast West	Morning Star		1	Legion of Mary	39
Belfast West	Springwell House		1	Springwell	18
Antrim	Greystone NIHE	1		NIHE	15
Ballymena	Chichester Pk NIHE	1		NIHE	44
Ballymena	Lighthouse		1	Lighthouse	20
Ballymena	Simon Mill House		1	Simon Cty	13
Ballymena	Virginia House		1	Womens aid	32
Ballymoney	Carnany	1		NIHE	2

District	Hostel	NIHE	Voluntary	Management	Bedspaces
Carrickfergus	New Haven	1		NIHE	27
Carrickfergus	Selah Services		1	Selah	9
Coleraine	Ballysally Estste	1		NIHE	25
Coleraine	Lodge Rd		1	Simon Cty	14
Coleraine	Mount St Mew		1	Simon Cty	16
Coleraine	Castlerock rd		1	Womens Aid	11
Cookstown	Cookstown			Womens aid	30
Castlereagh	Saintfield Rd		1	Simon Cty	22
Larne	Larne Comm Care		1	Larne Com Care	6
Larne	Curran Way		1	Simon Cty	18
Newtownabbey	Hillview House	1		NIHE	24
Newtownabbey	Loughview House	1		NIHE	15
Bangor	Balligan Gardens	1		NIHE	27
Bangor	Dufferin Ave		1	Womens Aid	7
Bangor	Central Ave		1	Simon Cty	21
Downpatrick	Glebetown Drive	1		NIHE	13
Downpatrick	Saul St		1	Simon Cty	8
Fermanagh	Enniskillen		1	Womens aid	3
Lisburn	Killaney Ave	1		NIHE	25
Lisburn	Beechland Drive		1	Womens Aid	0
Lisburn	Flush Pk		1	Simon Cty	20
Lisburn	Laburnum Walk	1		NIHE	70
Lisburn	Cloverhill Hostel		1	De Paul	18
Newtownards	Beaufort Walk	1		NIHE	15
Armagh	Linen Court		1	Simon Cty	22
Dungannon	Castlehill		1	De Paul	28
Newry	Cuan Mhuire		1	Cuan Mhuire	6
Newry	Lyne Lodge		1	Womens Aid	30
Newry	Bridge st		1	Simon Cty	17
Portadown	Edward St		1	Simon Cty	29
Portadown	Tandragee		1	Womens Aid	11
Fermanagh	Castle Erne		1	NIHE / Fold	25
Londonderry	Drummard	1		NIHE	29
Cookstown	MUST		1	MUST	16
Omagh	Omagh Town		1	Womens Aid	15
Omagh	SI -eight		1	SI-eight mgt	11
Strabane	Dillon Court		1	Dillon Crt Mgt	8
Strabane	Lisnafin		1	First Homeless	6
Londonderry Cityside	Bridge St	1		NIHE	18
Londonderry Cityside	Bradley Park	1		NIHE	15

District	Hostel	NIHE	Voluntary	Management	Bedspaces
Londonderry Cityside	Pump St		1	Womens Aid	13
Londonderry Cityside	McCrea Chambers		1	Methodist Miss	47
Londonderry Cityside	Clarendon Sh		1	Clarendon Mgt	23
Londonderry Cityside	Jefferson Ct		1	First Homeless	25
Londonderry Cityside	Foyle Valley House		1	Foyle Valley Mgt	10
Londonderry Cityside	House of the Wells		1	House of the wells	29
Londonderry Cityside	Damian House		1	First Homeless	12
Londonderry Waterside	Clooney Mews	1		NIHE	30
Londonderry Waterside	Ashleywood		1	Womens Aid	18
Londonderry Waterside	Bonds Hill		1	Simon Cty	15
Londonderry Waterside	Shepherds View		1	First Homeless	32
		21	63		2178

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Employment and Support Allowance: Support Group/Work-related Activity Group

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 28090/11-15 (i) whether moves from Support Group to the Work Related Activity Group can be actioned without assessments being carried out; and (ii) what a review consists of, outlining what information on the individual claimant is used.

(AQW 28648/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- (i) All Employment and Support Allowance claimants who are in the Support Group cannot be moved to the Work Related Activity Group without an assessment by a health care professional being undertaken.
- (ii) The WCA assessment consists of the completion of a medical questionnaire by the claimant, along with an assessment by a trained health care professional to establish the claimant's capability for work. The information used for the assessment includes the completed questionnaire and any evidence from the claimant's doctor (GP) and/or medical professional (e.g. Consultant). There may also be a requirement for a face to face assessment where capability cannot be established from the available evidence.

Housing Associations: Best Practice

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to introduce regulation to ensure that good practice tenant engagement by housing associations becomes common practice.

(AQW 28680/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The current regulatory standards ensure housing associations engagement with tenants are evaluated against best practice by the Department's Inspection team.

My Social Housing Reform Programme is also looking at regulation and tenant engagement in the provision of social housing in the future and will bring forward proposals in due course.

Housing: Housing Executive–Housing Association Transfers

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether there is a cost in transferring Housing Executive properties to housing associations.

(AQW 28695/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Each transfer scheme will be subject to an economic and technical appraisal and approval process to demonstrate that the proposed refurbishments deliver the necessary value for money and appropriate level of quality for tenants.

As with all programmes of a similar nature there will be costs attributable to the Stock Transfer process from a Project Management perspective including staff salaries (NIHE, DSD and SIB) and associated administrative costs.

To manage the Programme NIHE will appoint consultants to take forward economic appraisals for each scheme, an independent tenant adviser and an agency to undertake the tenant ballots. There will also be a number of other costs,

for example, statutory fees, legal fees and hire costs for venues for public consultation events for each scheme in the programme. All of these costs will be absorbed by the Housing Executive and will not be passed on to the Housing Associations or tenants.

The Housing Associations will also incur costs in preparing bids for schemes as part of the procurement process and subsequently the successful bidders will incur development and construction costs in taking schemes through to conclusion.

Housing Executive: Tenancy Rules

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the rules that tenants must adhere to when they become a Housing Executive tenant.
(AQW 28700/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that the tenancy rules are contained in their General Conditions of Tenancy and are also available to view on their website at www.nihe.gov.uk. When an applicant accepts an offer of tenancy, an appointment is made with them to call in to the local office for a comprehensive sign up interview. The interview is structured to include the following:

- Receive Proof of Identity
- The new tenant signs a Tenancy Agreement and is issued with the keys to their new home. This includes issuing them with a Statutory Obligations Notice. The Notice explains that they will be issued with a copy of the General Conditions of Tenancy and also includes a warning of potential possession proceedings if they or anyone residing in or visiting their home is guilty of causing a nuisance. The Statutory Obligations Notice also gives examples of nuisance, annoyance and disturbances.

All new tenants are also issued with a Home Information Pack that contains the following:

- A copy of the General Conditions of Tenancy;
- The new tenant is advised that it explains their obligations and NIHE obligations in relation to the Tenancy Agreement. They are also advised, subject to paying the rent and observing and performing all the Tenant's obligations under this Agreement, they may quietly enjoy the dwelling without any interruption;
- A Tenants Handbook – gives more details in relation to their legal rights and responsibilities as a Tenant;
- A copy of the Customer Charter – This sets out the standard of services they should receive from NIHE;
- Additional leaflets for example home contents insurance;
- Electoral form;
- Energy price tariffs;
- Telephone number of service providers including electricity providers and NIHE repairs telephone number;
- Sign a Good Neighbours Agreement and issued with same;
- Complete Housing Benefit application form;
- Advised of Rent and Rates and issued with a Temporary Payment Card.

South Antrim: Social Housing Newbuilds

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Social Development to outline any plans for social housing new builds in South Antrim.
(AQW 28709/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Table attached details the social housing new builds that are currently programmed to be delivered within South Antrim over the period 2013/14 – 2015/16.

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Units	Need Group
2013/14			
Clanmil	369-371 Antrim Road, Glengormley	21	Elderly (Cat1)
Oaklee	Ballyduff Primary School (Extension), New Mossley	30	General Needs
Trinity	Northern Trust Mental Health Resettlement (Moylinney Closure, Antrim)	24	Supported Housing
Total 2013/14		75	

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Units	Need Group
2014/15			
Connswater	Milewater, New Mossley (T)	20	General Needs

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Units	Need Group
Oaklee	4-6 Main Street, Crumlin	4	General Needs
Total 2014/15		24	

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Units	Need Group
2015/16			
Clanmil	The Old Mill, Mill Road, Crumlin	32	General Needs
Fold	Chaine Court, Ballycraigy, Antrim (T)	10	General Needs
Not nominated	Northern Trust LD	20	Supported Housing
Not nominated	Northern Trust MH	20	Supported Housing
Total 2015/16		82	

The Social Housing Development Programme is managed on the basis of a three year rolling programme. The Housing Executive is currently in the process of formulating the new draft Social Housing Development Programme for the period 2014/15 – 2016/17 which subject to my approval will be published on the Housing Executive's website early in 2014.

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Radon: Housing Executive Grants

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department provides remediation grants to householders whose homes are above the Action Level for radon gas; and how many such grants his Department has awarded over the last two years.

(AQW 28736/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Although there is no specific provision in respect of radon gas my Department makes available assistance, through the Housing Executive, to homeowners to make repairs, improvements and adaptations to their dwellings. The Housing Executive has confirmed that no grants have been sought or made to address excess levels of radon.

City of Culture 2013: DSD Tenders/Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) tenders awarded; and (ii) funding provided to organisations in Derry to deliver the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 28765/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is provided in the attached table.

Organisation	Project	Type of Project	Level of City of Culture funding (£s)	Comments on tendering process	Successful tender
Extraspace Solutions Ltd	Events Pavilion	City of Culture Resource Funding Project	4,865,000	On behalf of Ilex, DFP's Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) tendered for the provision of the demountable pavilion now known as the Venue 2013. The successful tender was Extraspace Solutions Ltd., who tendered for sub – contractor services. The Department was not involved in or holds details of the sub-contract tender. CPD also tendered for the provision of Event Management for the Venue. The successful tender, Smallworld Music Ltd., tendered for the Venue ancillary services. The Department was not involved in or holds details of the ancillary services tender.	Provision of demountable pavilion – Extraspace Solutions Ltd. Event Management for the Venue – Smallworld Music Ltd.
Sohan S Kular Ltd	Custom House, Queens Quay	City of Culture Capital Grant project – Urban Development Grant	345,000	The applicant carried out tendering for the project.	Stewart & McConnell Building Contractors Ltd
Messrs D Carlin & J Burke T/A Premier Developments Ltd	9 Artillery Street	City of Culture Capital Grant project – Urban Development Grant	103,058	Applicant carried out the build for this project himself.	Premier Developments Ltd
Mr Damien Douglas	46 Spencer Road	City of Culture Capital Grant project – Urban Development Grant	62,675	Applicant's architect carried out tendering for the project. The Department holds details of the highest, lowest and winning tender (if different from the lowest tender).	Benchmark Construction
Messrs K Burke & P O'Connor T/A Concrete Velvet Architects	155 Spencer Road	City of Culture Capital Grant project – Urban Development Grant	41,860	Applicant carried out the build for this project himself.	Concrete Velvet Architects
City Council of Londonderry	Guildhall Restoration Project	City of Culture Capital Grant Project	1,000,000	Tendering carried out by City Council of Londonderry. The Department does not hold tender competition details but has details of the successful tender.	H & J Martin

Organisation	Project	Type of Project	Level of City of Culture funding (£s)	Comments on tendering process	Successful tender
City Council of Londonderry	Waterside Greenway	City of Culture Capital Grant Project	250,000	Tendering carried out by City Council of Londonderry. The Department does not hold tender competition details but has details of the successful tender.	F.P.McCann
City Council of Londonderry	City Dressing	City of Culture Capital Grant Project	145,000	Tendering carried out by City Council of Londonderry. The Department does not hold tender details.	
City Council of Londonderry	Park'n'Ride project	City of Culture Resource Funding Project	101,242	Tendering carried out by City Council of Londonderry. The Department does not hold tender details.	
City Council of Londonderry	City Factory Art Gallery	City of Culture Resource Funding Project	141,000	This project was just for rental costs so no tendering required.	
City Centre Initiative	Restore Pilot project	City of Culture Capital Grant Project	266,000	Tendering carried out by property owners' architects. The Department holds details of the tenders on file.	This project involved 15 properties. The successful tenders were as follows: 6,8 & 10 Spencer Road –Louerne Construction; 51 – 53 Spencer Road - Michael O'Hara Building Construction 1,2,4,5&5A Bank Place & 43/43A Linenhall St – P.K. Construction 3 Bank Place – Velton Ltd 1,3,4 Union Hall Place -Benchmark Builders; 2& 5 Union Hall Place- Stewart & McConnell Building Contractors.

Organisation	Project	Type of Project	Level of City of Culture funding (£s)	Comments on tendering process	Successful tender
City Centre Initiative	Restore Mainstream project	City of Culture Capital Grant Project	95,820	Tendering carried out by property owners' architects. The Department holds details of the tender on file.	This project involved 14 properties as follows; 74A,76 & 84,98 Duke St – Irwin Construction; 4,6,&8 Castle Street - S.J.McKean; 78 Duke St - JM Jefferson & Sons Ltd;82 Duke St – Benchmark Builders; 90 Duke St - Magilligan Ltd; 96 - JA Gamble & Co Ltd; 19 William St - Benchmark; 23 William St -Hugo Gallagher.
City Centre Initiative	Shutters Up	City of Culture Capital Grant Project	15,000	This £15,000 grant was broken down into 15 x £1000 awards to individual shop owners to improve their window display as an incentive to take part in the Shutters Up pilot.	
DRD Roads Service	Park'n'Ride project	City of Culture Resource Funding Project	300,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd
DRD Roads Service	Variable Messaging Signage Boards	City of Culture Resource Funding	300,000	Tendering for this specialist equipment was carried out by DRD Roads Service. . The Department does not hold tender details.	
DRD Roads Service	Queens Quay	City of Culture Capital works	280,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
DRD Roads Service	Baronet Street Lighting and Road Resurfacing	City of Culture Capital works	24,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
DRD Roads Service	Spencer Road	City of Culture Capital works	184,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
DRD Roads Service	Foyle St	City of Culture Capital works	225,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.

Organisation	Project	Type of Project	Level of City of Culture funding (£s)	Comments on tendering process	Successful tender
DRD Roads Service	Strand Road / Police Court Link	City of Culture Capital works	150,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
DRD Roads Service	John St	City of Culture Capital works	52,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
DRD Roads Service	High St & Harvey St	City of Culture Capital works	73,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
DRD Roads Service	Lower Clarendon St	City of Culture Capital works	62,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
DRD Roads Service	Strand Rd	City of Culture Capital works	48,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
DRD Roads Service	Water St	City of Culture Capital works	65,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
DRD Roads Service	Foyle Embankment	City of Culture Capital works	220,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
DRD Roads Service	Patrick St	City of Culture Capital works	110,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
DRD Roads Service	Foyle St Foyleside	City of Culture Capital works	35,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
DRD Roads Service	Clarendon St Conservation Area	City of Culture Capital works	336,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
DRD Roads Service	Cathedral Quarter	City of Culture Capital works	50,000	Tendering not required - project carried out by DRD's Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
DSD	Queens Quay Riverside Walkway	City of Culture Capital works	458,000	Tendering not required - project carried out through DFP's Central Procurement Directorate Branch by their Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.

Organisation	Project	Type of Project	Level of City of Culture funding (£s)	Comments on tendering process	Successful tender
DSD	Baronet St	City of Culture Capital works	119,000	Tendering not required - project carried out through DFP's Central Procurement Directorate Branch by their Measured Term Contractor	Whitemountain Quarries Ltd.
Ilex URC Ltd	Waterside Theatre	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	8,021	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Void Gallery	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	106,000	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	University of Ulster	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	250,000	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	St. Columb's College	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	54,031	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	St Columb's Park House	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	31,376	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Playhouse Theatre	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	£ 79,924	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	NW Carnival	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	82,300	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Nerve Centre - Enhancement	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	80,297	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	

Organisation	Project	Type of Project	Level of City of Culture funding (£s)	Comments on tendering process	Successful tender
Ilex URC Ltd	Nerve Centre - 10 Schools	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	100,000	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	City Council of Londonderry - Mobile Digital	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	14,610	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Liberty Consortium	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	133,757	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Leafair Community Association	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	69,571	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	John Mitchells GAC	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	150,000	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Inner City Trust	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	260,870	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	In Your Space	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	68,140	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Gasyard Trust	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	£ 224,590	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Foyle Search & Rescue	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	50,000	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	

Organisation	Project	Type of Project	Level of City of Culture funding (£s)	Comments on tendering process	Successful tender
Ilex URC Ltd	Eglinton Community Association	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	243,090	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Eden Place Arts Centre	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	39,287	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Echo Echo Dance Company	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	£ 300,000	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Derry Theatre Trust	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	59,610	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Derry Print Workshop	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	49,648	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	DCC Loughs Agency	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	175,347	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Creggan Enterprises	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	176,950	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Creative Village Arts	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	140,000	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	City Council of Londonderry –Ballyarnett Country Park	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	223,000	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	

Organisation	Project	Type of Project	Level of City of Culture funding (£s)	Comments on tendering process	Successful tender
Ilex URC Ltd	City Council of Londonderry - Tower Museum	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	152,821	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	City Council of Londonderry - Brooke Park	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	147,801	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Churches Trust	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	256,423	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Centre for Contemporary Art	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	70,545	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	CAW Cultural Centre	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	68,374	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Aras Colmcille	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	14,000	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Apprentice Boys	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	89,089	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex in Partnership with Arts Council of Northern Ireland.	
Ilex URC Ltd	Londonderry Port & Harbour Commissioners	Community & Capital Infrastructure projects	399,711	No tender information is held by the Department - Project delivered by Ilex.	

North Down: Registered Carers

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many carers in North Down are over 60 years old. (AQW 28771/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not available as my Department does not hold a list of carers.

North Down: Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes in North Down have benefitted from the Warm Homes Scheme in the last twelve months. (AQW 28772/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive does not collect information at parliamentary constituency level. The North Down parliamentary constituency comprises the council areas of North Down & Ards. In those council areas a total of 469 homes have had Warm Homes measures installed during the period 1 November 2012 to 31 October 2013.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Crumlin Road, Belfast: Regeneration

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development to provide the details of any regeneration work planned for the Crumlin Road area, including a timetable for completion.
(AQW 28792/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is actively working to regenerate the Crumlin Road area of north Belfast. A wide range of initiatives are currently ongoing or planned, including the Masterplan Conceptual Framework for Girdwood Park, a Development Study for Crumlin Road Courthouse, Clifton Gateway Public Realm Scheme and assistance to a private developer for a whiskey distillery at Crumlin Road Gaol through my Department's Urban Development Grant scheme. A number of new build schemes for social housing are also planned. Further details on each of these projects can be found at Annex A.

Annex A

Conceptual Framework for Girdwood Park

The Masterplan Conceptual Framework for Girdwood Park was launched in May 2012 and represents an agreed plan for the shared development of this key strategic site in north Belfast. This plan includes a Community Hub at the heart of the site which will provide high quality leisure and community facilities and an agreed housing development for 60 units.

Development of the Community Hub is due to start in late January 2014 with a completion date end of March 2015. Full site infrastructure works will start in April 2014 with an estimated completion date of October 2015. It is hoped that construction of the housing development, which is subject to planning approval, will begin in March 2014 with an estimated completion date of October 2015.

DSD as the Accountable Department has responsibility for Peace III Priority 2 Contributing to a Shared Society, Theme 1 Creating Public Shared Spaces. Belfast City Council as lead applicant has recently been issued a Letter of Offer under this Priority for £9,595,249 in respect of The Girdwood Community Hub on the Girdwood Barracks site.

Development Study for Crumlin Road Courthouse

DSD, with ministerial support from across the NI Executive, has been working in co-operation with OFMDFM, SIB, NIEA (DOE) and BCC to identify a sustainable end use for the Crumlin Road Courthouse.

Following a procurement competition, a Consultancy Team was appointed in July 2013 to complete a Development Study. The consultants have engaged a wide range of stakeholders, carried out a comprehensive condition report on the building and conducted considerable research into potential end uses.

A number of options were presented at a consultation event on 21 November and public feedback is being sought up to and including 6 December. A full report is expected early in the New Year.

Clifton Gateway Public Realm Scheme

DSD is working with other statutory agencies and local communities to deliver a programme of environmental improvements to the public realm in targeted areas across Belfast which fall outside the City Centre.

The Clifton Gateway scheme spans the Crumlin Road from the junction of Agnes Street to Carlisle Circus and carries on through Clifton Street on to the junction of Donegall Street and York Street.

The proposed works include natural stone footpath resurfacing, installation of ornate street lighting, uprighters for historic buildings, planting of semi-mature trees and the installation of interpretive signage and sculptures.

It is estimated that work, which is subject to final approval by Belfast City Council (BCC) under the Reform of Local Government, could start in July 2014 and be completed by January 2016.

Distillery at Crumlin Road Gaol

Urban Development Grant (UDG) is a discretionary grant with the objective of promoting job creation, inward investment and environmental improvement by the stimulation of development of vacant, derelict or underused land or buildings in specific priority urban areas. DSD has awarded UDG to a developer to refurbish part of the Gaol to provide a whiskey distillery. Construction is due to commence in January 2014.

Social Housing

The Housing Executive has advised that the following new build schemes are planned for the Crumlin Road area:-

2013/14

- Lower Oldpark rehabs, 26 units – on site
- Lower Shankill Phase 1, 21 units – on site
- Girdwood Phase 1, 60 units (as above)

2014/15

- Kinnaird Terrace, 21 units
- Lower Shankill Phase 2, 12 units

Educational Underachievement Working Group

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what were the social-based policies, that as a participant in the North/South sectoral meeting on education, on 8th November 2013, he agreed as a focus for the educational underachievement working group; and what are the social interventions which he anticipates being advanced by the working group.

(AQW 28801/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As stated in the joint Assembly statement made on the 26 November in relation to on the North/South Ministerial Council Education. The Council agreed that the Education Underachievement Working Group would focus on three strands of work which should have a greater focus on social-based policies with an intended educational outcome.

The three strands of work to be taken forward are

- international benchmarking studies;
- school-based and social interventions to address underachievement; and
- the impact of pre-school placements on primary level performance.

I welcome this change in focus which complements my department priorities for improving the quality of life and life chances for our most disadvantaged children and young people.

Welfare Reform: Implementation

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development what assessment has been made of the extra money in the local economy each month as a result of not implementing welfare cuts; and what figure has been reached.

(AQW 28804/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There is no extra money in the local economy as a result of not implementing the reform of the welfare system.

Sex Offenders: Accommodation Location

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what steps his Department can take to help ensure that people charged and convicted of serious sexual offences are not housed in close proximity to schools.

(AQW 28819/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Allocations of social housing accommodation by the Housing Executive and Housing Associations are made based on rules contained within the Housing Selection Scheme.

Restrictions in the Housing Selection Scheme are in place which allows the social landlord considering the allocation of accommodation to restrict any offer of housing to a person who has been charged or found guilty of a relevant sex offence. One of the factors taken into account when applying this restriction would be the proximity of a child centred facility such as a school. Other information provided by police and/ or the Probation Board for Northern Ireland with regards to the proximity of a victim or a relative of the victim would also be considered.

Housing Associations in Northern Ireland provide specialist accommodation for people charged and convicted of serious sexual offences. Allocations to these properties are carried out according to the Housing Selection Scheme which is managed by the Housing Executive. Housing Associations take direction from the Housing Executive with regard to the suitability of any potential allocation. Risk assessments with regard to applicants and the allocation of properties would be carried out by the Housing Executive.

The Housing Executive is one of the signatory agencies of the Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland and is fully committed to co-operation with other agencies within these arrangements. The Housing Executive shares information and takes account of the risk assessment and management plans of serious sexual and violent offenders when making decisions on the suitability and reasonableness of accommodation.

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations has recently met with the Probation Board to discuss the role of housing associations in providing accommodation for ex-offenders and continues to work with statutory and voluntary agencies in this area.

Benefit Fraud: Prosecutions/Convictions

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many people were (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted of having been fraudulently in receipt of benefits, in 2012.

(AQW 28850/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is set out in the table –

Year ending 31st March 1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013	Number prosecuted	Number convicted
	570	567

The Information provided is an Official Statistic. The production and dissemination of all Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Benefits: Fortnightly Payment

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to implement fortnightly payments of benefits. (AQW 28884/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The current position is that a large number of the existing benefits already are being paid fortnightly. There are no plans to implement fortnightly payments for other current benefits that are paid monthly: namely, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Carers Allowance.

I have previously announced in the Assembly that I have agreed with Lord Freud, Minister for Welfare Reform, a number of operational flexibilities for Northern Ireland in the payment arrangements for Universal Credit. These flexibilities include proposals for twice monthly payments. The details of this are being taken forward as part of the Welfare Reform package of measures which I have developed to help reform the Welfare System and which are subject to agreement at the Executive.

Welfare Reform Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development when he will return the Welfare Reform Bill to the Assembly. (AQW 28885/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I fully intend to bring the Welfare Reform Bill back to this Assembly for Consideration Stage as soon as there is the political consensus to do so.

I told this house on the 22 October that I had concluded my work on a package of measures aimed at offsetting some of the more negative aspects of the reform agenda.

I intend to convene a meeting of the Executive Sub Committee on Welfare Reform before Christmas, to try to move forward before Treasury impose any financial penalties.

Housing Executive: Central Heating

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development what action is taken by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive when a tenant reports an air lock in their central heating system. (AQW 28936/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that when a tenant reports a problem with their central heating system the Housing Executive sends out their heating contractor to diagnose the fault and determine what remedial action is required. If the contractor finds that the reported problem is due to an air lock, the contractor determines the cause, repairs any faults, removes the air lock and ensures that the heating system is operational.

Glenowen, Derry: Apex Housing Association

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 28466/11-15, why the programmed new build scheme at The Playground Site, Glenowen by Apex is included in the Derry District Housing Plan 2013 but omitted from the current Social Housing Development Programme. (AQW 28991/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Apex Housing has not been able to progress this scheme sufficiently to achieve a start on site during 2015/16. The scheme has therefore slipped to 2016/17.

Rathmore Road, Derry: Apex Housing Association

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 28466/11-15, why the programmed new build scheme at Rathmore Road by Apex is included in the Derry District Housing Plan 2013 but omitted from the current Social Housing Development Programme. (AQW 28992/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The proposed new build scheme at Rathmore Road in Londonderry was not included in the Social Housing Development Programme as the Housing Association was not successful in acquiring the site for development.

Creggan Country Park, Derry: Apex Housing Association

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 28466/11-15, why the programmed new build scheme at Creggan Country Park by Apex is included in the Derry District Housing Plan 2013 but omitted from the current Social Housing Development Programme.

(AQW 28993/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The proposed new build scheme at Creggan Country Park in Londonderry was not included in the Social Housing Development Programme as the Housing Association was not successful in acquiring the site for development.

Buncrana Road/Springfield Road, Derry: Clanmil Housing Association

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 28466/11-15, why the programmed (i) Phase 1; and (ii) Phase 2 of the new build schemes at Buncrana Road and Springfield Road are included in the Derry District Housing Plan 2013 but omitted from the current Social Housing Development Programme.

(AQW 28994/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Clanmil Housing was unable to acquire the site.

Community Planning: Community and Voluntary Sector

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development what arrangements are in place to ensure that there is adequate Community Development Infrastructure in the community and voluntary sector to support meaningful community involvement in Community Planning in 2015 and beyond.

(AQW 28995/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Local Government Bill introduces the legislative basis for community planning, a council-led process to provide a framework for councils to work in partnership with other public service providers in their district to plan and implement a shared community vision for the economic, social and environmental well-being and development of the area. The involvement of representatives of relevant voluntary bodies in community planning is specified in the Bill.

My Department, through its regional infrastructure support arrangements, will support the Voluntary and Community Sector to help ensure that the sector functions effectively and efficiently, makes a valued and effective contribution to policy development across Government and contributes to community development and engagement across Northern Ireland.

Local Government Reform: DSD Function Transfer

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Social Development why Personnel staff from the Department for Social Development are not transferring to local government under the same terms as Planning Service staff.

(AQO 5197/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Under the Reform of Local Government the Department for Social Development (DSD) will confer on councils the powers that give authority to carry out functions in relation to regeneration and community development. The Department will also place a duty on councils to undertake responsibilities relating to houses in multiple occupation and housing unfitness (currently undertaken by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive) and will transfer responsibility for management of the Laganside Weir.

As regeneration and community development work will represent a conferral of new powers on councils, rather than a transfer of functions, DSD staff currently exercising these powers will not transfer to local government as part of the reform.

As management of the Laganside Weir is a transfer of function, staff will transfer on the basis of NICS staff transfer arrangements which are still under consideration.

As part of capacity building/preparatory work for the reform changes DSD plans to initiate work with councils over the coming months to establish a scheme that would allow councils access to DSD staff with regeneration/community development experience.

Coleraine: Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the progress being made in the two Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in Coleraine, since the Annual Report was submitted.

(AQW 29002/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Coleraine Neighbourhood Renewal Area Annual Report for 2012-13 demonstrates the commitment made by the Department to communities, to work in partnership with them to identify and prioritise needs and co-ordinate interventions designed to address the underlying causes of poverty. Currently in the 2013-14 year a total of £969,302 has already been allocated to projects in the Coleraine Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

Social Housing: Admissions Criteria

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions his Department has been involved in with regard to changing the social housing admissions criteria.

(AQW 29005/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In 2012, I announced a fundamental review of social housing allocations in Northern Ireland, delivering on a commitment set out in my Housing Strategy and Facing the Future Action Plan.

My Department commissioned independent research and three reports, prepared by the Universities of Ulster and Cambridge have been published (see link below), providing the academics' views on the future of social housing allocations.

When public comments have been received on the reports, the feedback will be considered and proposals developed, which will in turn be subject to full public consultation.

<http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hsdiv-housing/allocations-research.htm>

Regeneration: Refurbishment of Vacant Properties

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many housing associations will restore derelict homes for letting accommodation in 2014; and for an estimate of the number of properties that will be restored, and let, by January 2015.

(AQW 29049/11-15)

Mr McCausland: One of the aims of the Building Successful Communities pilots will be to address blight and stigma, for example through the provision of new or refurbished social housing. In areas where vacant properties in a community are holding back regeneration, the Department envisages working in partnership with the owner to bring those properties back into use. For properties owned by a social landlord, this could mean working with NIHE and Housing Associations to refurbish the vacant home and let it.

There are, as yet, no estimates of how many properties could be involved over the pilot period (at least three years). A Regeneration Forum, to be established in each of the six pilot areas, will be tasked with investigating the needs of the pilot area and developing an action plan specific to that location. As a result, the number of properties brought back into use will depend on the priorities identified by each Regeneration Forum. It is envisaged that the six Regeneration Fora will be established early in the New Year.

One Housing Association has been awarded funding under the Affordable Home Loans Fund to bring empty homes back into use. However, this initiative will refurbish homes for onward sale as affordable homes and not for letting.

Disability Living Allowance: Atos Healthcare

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many cases involving Disability Living Allowance claimants, who have been in receipt of DLA for five or more years, have had their award adjusted downward or removed following assessment by Atos Healthcare since it took over medical examinations; and how many were subsequently returned to the original award (i) following representations; and (ii) on appeal.

(AQW 29060/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not available as the Department for Work and Pensions IT system used by the Social Security Agency to administer Disability Living Allowance does not capture this specific level of detail.

Entitlement to Disability Living Allowance is determined by Decision-Makers in the Social Security Agency who consider and weigh up all the available evidence in reaching a decision. This includes information on the claimant's application form and reports from Health Care Professionals who the claimant has identified on the form. In a small number of cases the Medical Service Provider is requested to complete a report which gathers information on the diagnosis, the history of the condition, treatment and the severity and likely disabling effects of the condition on day-to-day living. In virtually all cases this entails a home visit to the claimant during which the report is completed.

Homelessness: Hostels

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of hostel accommodation places provided to people who were homeless in the last twelve months, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 29066/11-15)

Mr McCausland: This information cannot be supplied by constituency, the closest information that can be given is for those presenting as homeless by Northern Ireland Housing Executive District Office. The figures given provide those for the first five months of 2013/14, from April 2013 through to the end of August 2013, as the temporary accommodation computer systems was recently changed in September 2013 and reports for the months of September 2013- November 2013 are still in development and testing. Further figures provide for the period April 2012 - March 2013. Therefore two tables have been provided as follows:

Table 1: The figures for April 2012 - March 2013:

District	Voluntary Sector Hostels	NIHE Hostels	Total
Antrim	41	11	52
Armagh	4	0	4
Ballycastle	3	0	3
Ballymena	63	16	79
Ballymoney	14	2	16
Banbridge	3	0	3
Bangor	16	24	40
Belfast South/East	136	32	168
Belfast North	129	34	163
Belfast West	229	77	306
Belfast Shankill	18	4	22
Housing Service Unit	164	41	205
Carrickfergus	23	21	44
Castlereagh	60	2	62
Coleraine	122	15	137
Collon Terrace	65	31	96
Cookstown	25	2	27
Downpatrick	9	21	30
Dungannon	15	0	15
Fermanagh	2	0	2
Larne	9	4	13
Limavady	25	0	25
Lisburn Antrim Street	35	31	66
Lisburn Dairyfarm	62	38	100
Lurgan	4	1	5
Magherafelt	7	0	7
Newry	10	0	10
Newtownabbey 1	7	11	18
Newtownabby 2	7	19	26
Newtownards	6	34	40
Omagh	12	0	12
Portadown	5	0	5
Strabane	8	0	8
Waterloo Place	50	14	64
Waterside	41	33	74
Grand Total	1429	518	1947

Table 2: The figures for April 2013 -August 2013:

District	Voluntary Sector Hostels	NIHE Hostels	Total
Antrim	14	5	19
Armagh	2	0	2
Ballycastle	1	1	2
Ballymena	32	7	39
Ballymoney	9	0	9
Banbridge	3	0	3
Bangor	9	17	26
Belfast South/East	79	19	98
Belfast North	77	18	95
Belfast West	123	59	182
Belfast Shankill	8	1	9
Housing Service Unit	81	29	110
Carrickfergus	13	8	21
Castlereagh	23	0	23
Coleraine	41	2	43
Collon Terrace	43	18	61
Cookstown	5	2	7
Downpatrick	8	15	23
Dungannon	7	0	7
Fermanagh	1	0	1
Larne	9	4	13
Limavady	8	0	8
Lisburn Antrim Street	15	26	41
Lisburn Dairyfarm	36	26	62
Lurgan	2	0	2
Magherafelt	7	0	7
Newry	2	0	2
Newtownabbey 1	4	11	15
Newtownabby 2	4	10	14
Newtownards	5	11	16
Omagh	8	0	8
Portadown	5	0	5
Strabane	6	0	6
Waterloo Place	36	8	44
Waterside	36	15	51
Grand Total	762	312	1074

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development to quantify, for each of the last three years, the number of people that have stopped claiming contribution based Job Seekers Allowance as a result of being in receipt of that benefit for six months or more.

(AQW 29082/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not available. The Jobseeker's Allowance Computer System (JSAPS) does not record information that would identify contribution based Jobseeker's Allowance claims that have been terminated because benefit has been in payment for six months.

North Down: Housing Executive Budget

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what is the Housing Executive's budget for the North Down area for the next financial year.

(AQW 29089/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that its budget for 2014/15 has not yet been finalised.

Derry: Social Housing Development Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 28330/11-15, why he stated that there are 788 units in the current Social Housing Development Programme 2013/14-2015/16 when his answer to AQW 28466/11-15 states that there are 454.

(AQW 29102/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Housing Development Programme operates on the basis of a 3 year rolling programme which is reviewed annually. The purpose of the roll-on process is to re-assess housing needs, review progress with the delivery of the development programme (to meet previously identified housing needs) and establish programming requirements in response to newly identified housing needs to assemble a robust programme for the next three years.

Each year (August) the Housing Executive's Development Programme Group (DPG) invites Housing Associations to submit bids for schemes they wish to develop over the next three years. Bids received by DPG are assessed by the Housing Executive's Regional Planners against housing need at a regional, and district level and a draft programme is prepared. The draft programme is approved by the Housing Executive's Board and subsequently by DSD and the Minister for Social Development prior to being published on the Housing Executive's website.

The process of formulating the development programme is informed by the production of District Housing Plans, and the subsequent round of consultation with each of the 26 District Councils, which recurs annually during May to September. The District Housing Plans are effectively a prospectus of housing-related activity by District Council, which in each case include a section detailing planned development programme activity by Associations, together with a summary of unmet housing needs.

The published programme (January) includes both the new projects selected from the bids plus any slippage from the previous year. This composite programme represents the full extent of programmed social housing development activity for the new 3-Year SHDP

Responsibility for the actual development of social housing for rent rests with registered Housing Associations. Housing Associations typically commence work on site assembly, designing schemes and submitting planning applications post Programme publication (January). In order to obtain Housing Association Grant (HAG) associations are required to submit detailed project applications to the Housing Executive for formal approval of the scheme before the work is tendered and contractors start on site.

As the Programme year progresses, associations may lose or slip schemes due to site acquisition / assembly difficulties, procurement issues, or failure to obtain planning approval within the anticipated development timetable.

Consequently the Housing Executive is required to exercise a high degree of flexibility in the interchange of schemes between all three years of the programme. Whilst the priority is always to deliver schemes listed in the Year 1 programme, the Housing Executive is aware that delays can occur. In those circumstances, a facility exists, outside of the formal bidding process, to add new schemes to the programme throughout the year or to bring forward schemes from later years.

At the point of publication, the Derry District Housing Plan detailed the 788 units included in the SHDP for Derry City Council area at that time. The SHDP is updated weekly to reflect programme amendments and these changes are also detailed on the published programme.

At the point in time that a response was provided to AQW 28466/11-15 the 3 year SHDP 2013/14 – 2015/16 had reduced to 454 units and details of the programmed schemes were provided.

The Table below details the programme amendments within the Derry City Council SHDP over this period of time and also facilitates a reconciliation of the two figures referred to.

	Derry City Council SHDP at publication date	788
Association	Scheme details	
Apex	Londonderry Rehabs (new addition)	3
Apex	Cedar Villa replacement(units increased)	3
Apex	ESPs Phase 20D (new addition)	4
Apex	ESPs Phase 20F (new addition)	5
Clanmil	Foxhill, Londonderry (units increased)	5
Oaklee	Braehead, Nixons Corner (units increased)	4
Oaklee	Fahan Street, Londonderry (units increased)	3
Trinity	Nelson Drive, Londonderry Ph1 (new addition)	17
Apex	St Peters School Creggan (units reduced)	-3
Apex	EMI Foyleville Londonderry (need to be confirmed)	-30
Apex	Glen Court / Cedar Court (units increased)	2
Apex	Community Integration Cityside (included with St Peters)	-6
Clanmil	Bayview Terrace (site lost)	-13
Clanmil	Buncrana Road / Springtown Road Ph2 (site lost)	-125
Clanmil	Creggan Country Park (site lost)	-52
Apex	Rathmore Road (site lost)	-16
Apex	Playground site Glenowen (slipped to 2016/17)	-10
Clanmil	Buncrana Road / Springtown Road Ph1 (site lost)	-125
	Derry City Council SHDP at November 2013	454

Note: Losses to the SHDP are highlighted in yellow.

The SHDP is published on the Housing Executive's website at www.nihe.gov.uk. And is updated on a weekly basis to reflect amendments.

Gifts and Hospitality: DSD Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how many entries his Special Adviser has made in the Department's Register of Gifts and Hospitality since they were appointed; and what is the total value of such entries.
(AQW 29157/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Special Adviser has made no entries in the Register of Gifts and Hospitality since he has been appointed.

Randalstown: Environmental Works

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any correspondence his Department has received from traders in Randalstown stating their objection to further town centre environmental works.
(AQW 29233/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department received a letter from Randalstown Chamber of Trade on 18 September 2013 stating that they believed the disruption caused by the proposed environmental improvements would have a detrimental impact on their businesses, and requested that the scheme be 'shelved'.

Randalstown: DSD Funding

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Social Development what funds his Department has available for improving Randalstown town centre.
(AQW 29234/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is currently working with Antrim Borough Council and representatives from local traders and businesses to develop a Revitalisation scheme for the town centre up to a value of £150,000. The purpose of the scheme

is to improve shop frontages, address dereliction and gap sites and to support and sustain businesses through the promotion and marketing of the town centre. In addition the Department has a discretionary Urban Development Grant programme to provide financial assistance to developers and owner/occupiers in the construction of new buildings and redevelopment or refurbishment of properties within the town centre.

Funding for any schemes is subject to a satisfactory appraisal being completed and sufficient cover being available within the Department's budget.

Fusion21: Ministerial Meetings

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Social Development when he has had meetings with Fusion21 since taking office.
(AQO 5239/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Member may wish to note my answer to Assembly Question 13779/11-15 which explained when I met with Fusion 21. However, for the benefit of the Member today I will repeat it - in relation to the Glass and Glazing Federation I met with the Managing Director and the General Manager of Turkington Holdings on 16 April 2012. I also met with the Managing Director, Chief Executive and Independent Chair of Fusion 21 on 23 April 2012.

Alcohol: Legislation

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the outcomes of his licensing law consultation.
(AQW 29314/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A public consultation on "Proposed changes to the law regulating the sale and supply of alcohol in Northern Ireland" ended on 12 November 2012. The consultation included a wide range of proposals and attracted a large volume of responses from a wide variety of key stakeholders, including the alcohol industry, health bodies and the general public.

Officials have carefully considered the wide spectrum of strongly held views received in response to the proposals and briefed the Social Development Committee on this on 12 September.

I am currently considering the draft report on the outcome of the consultation before deciding the way forward on the proposed reforms.

Shankill Gateway: Public Realm Scheme

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Shankill Gateway public realm scheme.
(AQW 29319/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The proposed Shankill Gateway public realm scheme (between Peter's Hill and Agnes Street) involves the creation of distinct entrance features that portray a sense of arrival to the neighbourhood, the use of high quality materials, distinct street furniture and lighting columns that introduce style and character and provide a cohesive local appearance to the street-scape that can set the tone for the rest of the Shankill. Initial scheme design drawings are currently being prepared for further consideration and community consultation and estimated cost of the scheme cost is in the region of £3m. RPS PLC has been awarded the contract and it is planned that work will commence early in the New Year. As this scheme is due to run beyond the local government reform implementation date of 1 April 2015 Belfast City Council's endorsement of the scheme will be sought. The STC for Belfast met for the first time on 10 December 2013 and the process for project approval still needs to be established.

Housing Executive: Board Appointments

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the selection/recruitment process for applicants which led to the recent appointment of Board members of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
(AQO 5242/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The selection/ recruitment process for any appointments to the Board of the Housing Executive must be made in accordance with the Commissioner for Public Appointments Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments in Northern Ireland.

I appointed a new Board member in April this year following a public appointment competition and in November I re-appointed two members from the Housing Council to the Board of the Housing Executive to serve a second term.

Ballymoney: Town Centre Masterplan

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Town Centre Masterplan for Ballymoney.
(AQO 5243/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The consultants appointed by my Department to prepare a Masterplan for Ballymoney town centre have completed all the initial preparation and research work, carried out a public consultation exercise on the draft masterplan proposals and have submitted a draft document to the project steering group. This steering group was formed to oversee the work of the consultants and comprises officials from Ballymoney Borough Council, DRD Roads Service, DOE Planning

Service and my Department. A final draft of the masterplan is being prepared for consideration by Ballymoney Borough Council.

It is anticipated that the final version of the masterplan will be published in early 2014, subject to its endorsement by the Council.

Community Access: Newsagents

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to use small newsagent shops as community access points.

(AQO 5244/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Whilst I have no plans to expand the use of small newsagent shops as community access points, currently, many of them play an important role in providing vulnerable customers with the means to access benefit payments which have often been made to meet an emergency situation. Small newsagents shops are an integral part of most local communities, and utilising this access will be considered as part of the Departments communications plans on welfare reform.

I can also confirm that there are plans to locate internet access points in all of my department's Jobs & Benefits and Social Security offices for claimants to use and is also intended that online benefits such as Universal Credit will be available as 'mobile apps' so claimants can have access from their smart phone.

Warm Homes Scheme: Rural Areas

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister for Social Development what efforts his Department is making to ensure the Warm Homes Scheme is published widely in rural areas, to tackle fuel poverty in rural communities.

(AQO 5245/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In order to raise public awareness in rural areas, the Warm Homes Scheme is promoted at all relevant rural and energy related external seminars and presentations. Warm Homes leaflets and advice was offered at the Balmoral Show in May 2013 and at a Rural Energy Seminar on 20 November 2013.

The Warm Homes Scheme is delivered by Bryson Energy and H&A Mechanical Services. They are responsible for delivering the Warm Homes Scheme measures to at least 9,000 households annually, 40% of which are to be in rural areas. The Scheme managers produce an annual Marketing Plan outlining their proposed promotional activities and they report on these activities at their monthly monitoring meeting with the Housing Executive. These marketing activities range from press releases and adverts, to attendance at local events and direct mail promotion to target households on qualifying benefits. Each of the Scheme managers maintains a database of community groups and organisations in their area, including Rural Community Networks, and they regularly promote the Scheme to these groups.

The Scheme managers also receive referrals from two key home visiting projects, Western Home Environmental Assessment Project (WHEAP) and Maximising Access in Rural Areas (MARA).

The Rural Energy Seminar was organised specifically to explore with rural community groups any potential mechanisms to help reduce energy consumption and cut energy bills in an effort to tackle fuel poverty. The Housing Executive's Rural and Energy Conservation Units came together to organise this event in association with external partners involved in the energy industry as well as rural stakeholders who could support and promote the event. A Warm Homes stand was also featured at the event with representatives from Bryson Energy in attendance to offer advice and information on the Scheme.

Awareness of the Warm Homes Scheme is also raised through communication with the Housing Executive's Rural Residents Forum who has access to community groups, tenants and residents in their areas and can ensure that information is circulated specifically to those who are most likely to benefit from the Scheme.

The Housing Executive, through its Rural Action Plan 2013/15 aims to ensure there is a cross divisional effort to keep rural communities aware of the various grants and initiatives which are available to them. This is communicated through the Housing Executive's website; it's bi-annual publication "Rural Matters"; published reviews of its Rural Action Plan and the availability of information leaflets at local Housing Executive offices. NI Direct also contains up to date information regarding the Warm Homes Scheme and details of how to access the Scheme.

Housing Executive: Cavity Wall Insulation

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the measures being taken to address the lack of cavity wall insulation in Housing Executive properties.

(AQO 5246/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that cavity wall insulation has been installed in around 75,000 of its stock where it has been feasible to do so, apart from a small number of properties where tenants refused work. However, they have in the region of 14,000, traditional and non traditional property types which do not have cavity walls (such as No Fines, Orlits or Easiform).

Some recent developments that the Housing Executive has been involved in regarding the insulation of their properties include for example, the recently provided external wall insulation to three rural cottages outside Coleraine. It cost just under £13,000 per unit, including 200 millimeters external insulation, new doors, windows, rainwater goods and fascias and warm

deck roofs to two of the properties which had a side extension. The Housing Executive is now monitoring the performance of the dwellings over this coming winter season.

The Housing Executive is also at the start of a larger and more detailed analysis of their No Fines concrete properties. A consortium has been formed to establish the best solution to improve their No Fines concrete stock of some 5,600 dwellings in terms of external insulation to improve the thermal efficiency of the dwellings.

The project will look initially at providing external insulation to seven No Fines properties in Antrim. The outcome of this will be to provide new policy for energy improvement measures for this construction type. It is hoped that this solution can be rolled out across the UK where there are over 300,000 No Fines properties.

In relation to cavity wall insulation, a recent report from University of Ulster suggested that there may be a problem in some dwellings where mineral wool or fibre based insulation was installed. The Housing Executive commissioned their own research into this to undertake a minimum of 300 technical surveys of its own dwellings. These surveys should determine whether the cavities have blown fibre, loose bead, bonded bead, insulation board or other and identify the current condition of the insulation. The surveys began in October 2013 and will complete in March 2014. Until they are complete, the Housing Executive would have no way of knowing if there is a wider problem with cavity insulation and, if so, the extent of it.

The Housing Executive will carry out an evaluation of the results to determine if there is substandard insulation within their properties and will develop whatever action plan is indicated with new strategies and policies.

Warm Homes Scheme: Applicants

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the number of applicants for the Warm Homes Scheme to date.

(AQO 5247/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Warm Homes Scheme was first introduced in 2001. During this period information was collected detailing the number of installations. Between 2001 and June 2009 a total of 73,842 households had measures installed.

A new Warm Homes Scheme was introduced on 1 July 2009. Between 1 July 2009 and 31 October 2013 a total of 157,631 applicants contacted the Warm Homes Scheme. Of these, 66,777 were eligible for referral to the Warm Homes Scheme. This means these customers answered "yes" to the eligibility questions asked. Of these, 41,909 eligible customers had Warm Homes measures installed. It should be noted that some people decide for personal reasons not to proceed with installation of measures.

Warm Homes Scheme: Figures

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes have benefited from the Warm Homes Scheme.

(AQO 5248/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Between 1 July 2009 and 31 October 2013, 41, 909 homes have had Warm Homes measures installed.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Parliament Buildings: Public Transport

Mr Flanagan asked the Assembly Commission to outline any plans in place to increase public transport links with Parliament Buildings.

(AQW 28867/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey: At present, Translink has not made the Assembly Commission aware of any plans in place to increase public transport links with Parliament Buildings.

However, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission remain consortium members of the Stormont Area 'Workplace Management Plan' group who meet to discuss a number of transport related issues including increasing public transport links within the Stormont Estate.

Currently, the following services are available;

Metro Services

- 20A
- 23
- 29

Goldline (direct from Europa bus station)

- 208

Ulsterbus

- 6B

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 20 December 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Social Investment Fund

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will announce the projects that have applied successfully for funding from the Derry Social Investment Fund Steering Group.

(AQW 27842/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): A significant number of SIF projects have been cleared internally through the economic approval process. Discussions have commenced with steering groups to inform them of successful projects, budgets and to discuss implementation.

Derry: Jobs Promoted/Created

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 27446/11-15, for a breakdown of (i) the total number of jobs created in Derry in 2012/13; (ii) the number of jobs created in each firm; (iii) the total number of jobs promoted in Derry in 2012/13; and (iv) the number of jobs promoted in each firm.

(AQW 28009/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Research and monitoring across government departments, Derry City Council and the private and community sectors indicates that 1,180 jobs were promoted in 2012/13. An additional 10 jobs have now been accepted following a meeting of the Jobs Sub-Group, held on 8 November 2013, and these have been added to the total jobs promoted figure.

The full jobs created figure is not yet available and this will require monitoring job figures at a later stage. Due to commercial sensitivities it has not been possible to provide information on a firm by firm basis; however, the jobs were generated in the construction, hospitality, community, business and cultural sectors.

Multiple Deprivation Measure

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in instances where statistical data is being used to determine levels of deprivation, the basis of which is then used to allocate a range of funding measures, what account is taken of the different levels of tax free welfare benefits that are paid.

(AQW 28419/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure is the official measure of spatial deprivation. The measure was introduced in 2010 by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency and overseen by a steering group comprising representatives from all departments and other relevant bodies.

The measure provides information on seven domains of deprivation, including income deprivation, and an overall measure comprising of a weighted combination of the seven domains. The measure used the most recent data available at the time.

The income deprivation domain comprises a count of people living in households in receipt of income-related benefits and tax credits, including Income Support; State Pension Credit; and income-based Jobseeker's Allowance. The measure thus counts people and not the level of benefit. Those in receipt of multiple benefits were counted only once.

The usage of the measure in the allocation of funding is the responsibility of individual departments.

Equality Commission: Monitored Workforce

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, with the Report of the Northern Ireland Workforce 2012 due, what steps they will take to ensure that the Equality Commission gives sufficient emphasis to the emerging trends of recruitment in both the public and private sectors when deciding what action is required to address emerging imbalances in the workforce.

(AQW 28480/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Equality Commission intends publishing in early December the annual summary of monitoring returns for 2012, together with a summary of the change over time in the overall composition of the monitored workforce.

The Equality Commission's engagement with employers extends beyond the annual monitoring exercise. Employers also carry out three-yearly comprehensive reviews under Article 55 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998, looking at persons in employment, applicants, appointments and those who leave. The Reviews consider employment practices with the purpose of determining whether appropriate affirmative action measures should be implemented.

The Commission, in its engagement with employers, provides support and expertise to help them with all equality related issues.

We await the analysis to be presented in the annual monitoring report for 2012 and our officials will liaise closely with the Equality Commission on any follow-up action to the report.

Child Poverty

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an estimate of the percentage of children who will be living in both absolute and relative child poverty in each year until 2020.

(AQW 28683/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We do not have departmental projections. However, a report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) on Child and Working-Age Poverty in Northern Ireland from 2010 to 2020 in May 2013 has been published by OFMDFM which contains projections. This is available online.

Strategic Investment Board: Land and Property Assets

Mr McCarthy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what information is held by Strategic Investment Board on surplus and disused public land; and how this information is shared.

(AQW 28932/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) Asset Management Unit (AMU) has developed an asset database to record information, such as location, size, occupancy and running costs, for land and property assets held by central government which are in use or not for immediate disposal. Departments can access the database directly. It is the intention to develop this database to incorporate surplus land and property assets.

In parallel, AMU has been working to digitally map the Land and Property Services database of surplus land and property. To date, just over 1,000 land and property assets have been mapped, and this work is ongoing.

Departments have a duty to identify surplus land and property and dispose of it with the least possible delay; to assess the current and strategic use of assets; and to identify potential future surplus assets for disposal. This process is managed by DFP Land and Property Services.

A list of central government land and property assets currently on the open market is available on http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/lps/index/property_valuation/valuation-public-sector-bodies/disposal_of_surplus_public_sector_property.htm

Taxis: Disability Strategy

Mrs Cochrane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to their disability strategy, for their assessment of the accessibility of Public Hire Taxis in Greater Belfast for people with a disability.

(AQW 29059/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive's Disability Strategy "A strategy to improve the lives of disabled people – 2012 to 2015" has a specific priority 6 to "Eliminate the barriers people with disabilities face in accessing transport ensuring measures are in place to allow personal mobility for people with disabilities".

In taking forward the delivery of the Disability Strategy, departments will consider and take forward action under the strategic priorities. All departments will be expected to report annually on the actions they have taken to support the delivery of the Strategy.

We understand that, currently, only taxis licensed as Belfast Public Hire are required to be wheelchair accessible. The specification for a wheelchair accessible vehicle is contained in the Public Service Vehicles (Conditions of Fitness, Equipment and Use) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995, and was carried forward from previous taxi legislation. All Belfast Public Hire taxis must meet this specification in order to operate.

In recognition that the specification had not been reviewed for some time, and may no longer be suitable for the carriage of more modern wheelchairs and their users, the Department of the Environment is undertaking a review which is due for completion shortly. We understand DOE plans to consult on the recommendations of the Review in early 2014.

Goods, Facilities and Services: Legislation

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 28825/11-15, to answer the question that was asked.

(AQW 29470/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have nothing further to add to our answer to AQW 28825/11-15.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Single Farm Payment: Applications

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the procedures her Department follows in processing Single Farm Payment applications which involve land that is the subject of more than one claim.

(AQW 28892/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): In line with EU Regulations, administrative checks are in place to identify land that is the subject of more than one Single Farm Payment application. Under the Regulations, penalties are applicable to the business which has incorrectly included the land on its claim.

In order to resolve a duplicate field issue, the Department writes to both businesses explaining that each of them must acknowledge which is the rightful claimant and which is not.

Where both businesses insist they are the rightful claimant the Department will investigate to establish which has control of the land. This can only be resolved by looking at the particular arrangements between all those concerned and, if necessary, clarifying the position on the ground to determine to what extent each business satisfies the SFP scheme requirements.

In circumstances where one party to a duplicate field case ignores repeated correspondence the Department has no option other than to progress the matter in favour of the party which is actively pursuing their claim on the land.

SFP will only be paid when claims are fully validated and duplicate field issues resolved.

Single Farm Payment: Duplicate Field Enquiries

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many Single Farm Payment applications involving duplicate field enquiries her Department processed in (i) 2012; and (ii) 2013.

(AQW 28893/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: For the 2012 year, 706 Single Farm Payment applications involving duplicate field enquiries were processed.

For the 2013 year, 1,610 Single Farm Payment applications involving duplicate field enquiries were processed. Of these, 394 remain to be resolved.

Single Farm Payment: Duplicate Claims

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what process her Department follows in determining the ownership of land that is the subject of duplicate claims for Single Farm Payment.

(AQW 28894/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In duplicate field cases, the Department is required to establish which of the claimants involved in the duplication meets the SFP scheme requirements.

In line with the EU requirements, DARD has to ensure that SFP is paid to the claimant that has the land at his/her disposal on 15 May and is undertaking agricultural activity on that land throughout the scheme year. While ownership may indicate that the land is at the owner's disposal, it does not demonstrate that the owner is undertaking agricultural activity on the duplicated land.

In circumstances where there is a disagreement the Department will investigate which claimant meets the eligibility rules. This may on occasion involve checking out who owns the land and any contractual agreements that exist between the owner and the other claimant(s) involved in the duplication. This could involve contacting Land and Property Services for details of land ownership or it could involve asking the landowner to provide evidence of ownership.

Single Farm Payment: Duplicate Claims

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department can take to ensure that genuine Single Farm Payment applications are not unduly delayed by duplicate claims on the same land.

(AQW 28895/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Administrative checks are carried out on all claims received with all land claimed by farm businesses accepted as genuine.

Where duplicate field areas are identified the processes outlined in response to AQW 28892/11-15 are followed as quickly as possible in order to resolve the duplicate field query.

In some instances, legal proceedings are underway between the parties and the Department is unable to determine the rightful claimant until it has been notified of the outcome of the proceedings.

National Dairy Council

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, was suitable support from the Republic of Ireland Government in removing restrictions on Northern Ireland milk entering the Republic of Ireland market not forthcoming, whether she will request that the United Kingdom Government consider the same stance in regard to cheese coming into the United Kingdom from the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 28907/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I understand that to help differentiate products at retail level the south's National Dairy Council has introduced a labelling mark for milk and cream coming from farms in the south. This mark is additional to that required under EU rules and its inclusion on products is a commercial matter.

I fully support consumers' right to information to allow them to choose to buy local produce. However, I am very concerned that pressure is being exerted on retailers in the south to market only products labelled 'Farmed in the Republic of Ireland' and about any loss of business by our milk processors here in the North. That is why I raised my concerns about restrictions on competition in the dairy sector with Minister Coveney at the recent North South Ministerial Council meeting and we have agreed to continue to work together on this matter.

Both the north and the south have for many years benefited from free trade in milk and dairy products. Also, we are both heavily reliant on external sales, particularly to Britain. In light of this it could be very damaging for both of us if a similar campaign was replicated by the dairy industry in Britain. I do not therefore propose to ask the British Government to adopt the stance you suggest in relation to exports of cheese.

I have consistently made the point that a joint approach to the marketing of products from the island of Ireland would benefit all farmers. I strongly believe that fostering all Ireland trade would benefit producers both north and south and that neither us should be protectionist.

Bovine Viral Diarrhoea

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the time period in which Bovine Viral Diarrhoea could be eradicated if the legislative proposals, currently being finalised, were introduced.

(AQW 28930/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Following my decision to legislate for BVD, further work is now underway to finalise a robust programme to achieve a high level of success in eradicating this disease. It is most likely that the compulsory programme here will be predicated on the current voluntary scheme, which anticipated a 6 year programme including 3 years tag and test combined with 3 years of monitoring. Until the details of the proposed compulsory programme are finalised it is not possible to put a time frame on future eradication. In addition, it must be recognised that the success of any programme is very much dependent on the level of compliance and farmer's willingness to quickly and responsibly dispose of persistently infected animals.

However, I do not wish to introduce a programme which will run indefinitely, next year when I announce the detail of the compulsory programme, I will also be advising of the timeframe in which the programme will be reviewed. I wish to see a clear exist strategy for this programme, I do not want farmers having to tag and test calves any longer than necessary.

Bovine Viral Diarrhoea

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the wider trade implications for the farming industry if Bovine Viral Diarrhoea is not eradicated.

(AQW 28931/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Two of our key trading partners, within Ireland and Scotland, have already compulsory BVD eradication schemes in place and well underway. To ensure that our animal health status is on par with them, every measure should be taken to reduce the risk that our farming industry could be at a competitive disadvantage when exporting live cattle. The introduction of compulsory testing for Bovine Viral Diarrhoea will put our herd keepers on an equal footing to those in the south and Scotland.

Cattle movement in 2011 and 2012 from here to the south of Ireland for breeding and production was approximately 6000 animals each year. However this year the figure to date has dropped to 2,950. While it is not clear if this is a direct result of the south's introduction of compulsory BVD legislation earlier this year, there is anecdotal evidence that some buyers (without any legal obligation) are requesting a negative BVD test result before importing cattle.

In addition, given the progress being made with BVD eradication programmes in other EU Member States, BVD is expected to feature as a trade issue in the forthcoming EU Animal Health Regulation. A preliminary disease listing and categorisation paper listing BVD as a disease likely to affect trade was submitted, for discussion, by the Commission to a recent EU CVOs meeting.

Animal Welfare: Horses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking over the recent discovery of multiple cases of cruelty and neglect and fallen equine stock on Clogher farmland; and what other Departments or agencies have a role in this matter.

(AQW 28953/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since 2 April 2012 District Councils have been responsible for the enforcement of the powers in the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 in respect of non-farmed animals including horses. My Department provides annual funding to enable Councils to undertake this work and my officials provide advice and guidance to support Council officials. In undertaking this new role Councils have decided to adopt a collaborative approach and have 5 regional offices covering the north.

This incident is the subject of an ongoing investigation by the Council's Animal Welfare Officers in Southern Region, and I understand they are liaising as necessary with their counterparts in Monaghan Local Authority. You will appreciate that I cannot comment further on an ongoing case.

The enforcement roles under the new Welfare of Animals Act 2011 are as follows: DARD in respect of farmed animals, Councils in respect of domestic pets and horses, and the PSNI in respect of wild animals, animal fighting, and welfare issues where other criminal activities are involved. Where appropriate, enforcement action may involve a multi-agency approach involving a combination of DARD, PSNI and Council Officers. If a case involves a cross-border dimension then the appropriate agencies in the south may also be involved.

The animal welfare contact points for DARD, the Councils' Animal Welfare Officers and the PSNI are published on my Department's website and similar information is available on the NIDirect website and local Councils' websites. I would encourage anyone with concerns about animal welfare to contact the relevant authority.

Broadband Improvement Project

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 25684/11-15, for an update on the procurement for this project.

(AQW 28982/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Procurement for the NI Broadband Improvement Project concluded on 8 November and I understand that the tender is currently being assessed.

Assuming that the evaluation is satisfactory and, pending necessary approvals, it is anticipated that a contract will be awarded by the end of 2013 with implementation commencing in 2014 and ending in 2015.

Forest Service: Relocation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many posts will be moved to Fermanagh as a result of the relocation of the Forest Service headquarters; and how many members of staff have agreed to relocate.

(AQW 28998/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There are approximately 60 Forest Service Headquarter posts under consideration for relocation to Co. Fermanagh.

A human resources strategy is being developed which includes a detailed questionnaire to each member of staff and when analysed will confirm the number of staff who agree to work in the relocated headquarters.

Animal Welfare

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she is taking to end the abuse of animals.

(AQW 29011/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In my reply to you in February (AQW 19179/11-15) I advised that the welfare of animals here is protected by the Welfare of Animals Act 2011. The Act includes significant new powers to protect animals from unnecessary suffering, including domestic pets and horses. It allows action to be taken before an animal actually suffers, as opposed to after the event. The Act also recognises that causing unnecessary suffering to any animal is a very serious offence and it contains tough penalties which reflect this.

Enforcement of the powers in the new Act is undertaken by my Department in respect of farmed animals; Councils, for the first time, in respect of domestic pets and horses; and the PSNI in respect of wild animals, animal fighting, and welfare issues where other criminal activities are involved.

Since the Act was introduced I have brought forward several Statutory Rules and Codes of Practice to safeguard and promote the welfare of both farmed and non-farmed animals. During 2012 I introduced the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2012, which lay down the standards for the protection of animals kept for farming purposes, and the Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations 2012.

From 1 January 2013, it has been an offence for a person to dock a dog's tail or allow someone else to dock their dog's tail. The Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations, which came

into operation on 1 April 2013, provides commercial dog breeders with clear standards which they must meet to ensure the welfare of all breeding bitches, stud dogs and pups in their establishment. I am confident that the new enforcement powers and penalties will act as a deterrent to those taking part in illegal dog breeding activities.

At present, Regulations regarding the welfare of animals at the time of killing are progressing through the legislative process. Next year I plan to bring forward legislative proposals in relation to the welfare of animals in petshops, animal boarding establishments, riding and other establishments.

The animal welfare contact points for DARD, the Councils' Animal Welfare Officers and the PSNI are publicised on my Department's website and similar information is available on the NI Direct website and local Councils' websites. I would encourage anyone with concerns about animal welfare to contact the relevant authority.

Fertiliser: Prices

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what actions her Department is taking to help to reduce the price that farmers pay for fertilizers.

(AQW 29014/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Fertiliser prices are determined by local, national and international market forces and I have no powers to intervene in commercial transactions.

I am, of course, aware that fertilisers represent a significant cost for farmers and that prices have increased significantly in recent years. Therefore, it is important that fertilisers, both inorganic and organic, are used as effectively and efficiently as possible (to benefit business performance as well as the environment). To this end, my Department has taken a number of steps to help farmers make best use of fertilisers and manures. Training is available on nutrient management planning (including the interpretation of soil analysis and the maintenance of optimum soil pH for efficient fertiliser uptake), matching fertiliser applications to crop demand and maximising the benefits of organic manures. Training is also available on drainage and grassland management, again to ensure effective use of fertilisers. As well as training, my Department has also provided financial support through the Manure Efficiency Technology Scheme to enable farmers to improve nitrogen utilisation from slurry. Through all of these measures, farmers have been able to match their nutrient applications more closely to crop demands and, thus, help mitigate the impact of rising fertiliser prices on their businesses.

Milk: Prices

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what actions her Department is taking to increase the price that farmers receive for the milk they produce, that is currently being bought at 17 pence a litre.

(AQW 29015/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The price that farmers receive for their milk is a commercial matter and therefore not something in which I can directly intervene. However, I believe that farmers should receive a fair price for the milk that they produce.

Whilst the basis of the 17 pence per litre which you quote is unclear, I am pleased that in recent months the market for raw milk and dairy products has been strong. As a result the average producer price for raw milk (after deduction of transport charges) during the period January to October 2013 was 30.76 pence per litre which compares with 25.06 pence per litre during the same period in 2012.

To assist dairy farmers to maximise their financial return from milk production my Department funds research, education, training and technical support. Financial assistance is also available to the dairy sector under the Rural Development Programme and a range of support measures are available to dairy processing companies from Invest NI to help them remain competitive.

The dairy sector has the potential to grow further in a sustainable way and to exploit opportunities arising from the predicted world population expansion. In this respect the Agri-Food Strategy Board's report Going for Growth has set challenging growth targets and I am pleased that the Board recognises the need for all parts of the supply chain to be sustainable and profitable. Development of the Executive response to the report is at an advanced stage and we hope to announce the way forward in the near future. I will continue to work with my Executive colleagues to help support the industry's plans for expansion.

Horse Passports

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) to outline the current position on the passporting and micro-chipping of equine animals; and (ii) whether she will make this a mandatory requirement to assist in the detection of stolen animals and in identifying abandoned animals and dumped carcasses with a view to prosecution.

(AQW 29031/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Under Commission Decision 2000/68/EC passports for equine animals have been mandatory since 2005 and under Commission Regulation 504/2008 micro-chipping has been mandatory for equine animals issued with passports since 1 July 2009. The Horse Passports Regulations (NI) 2010, on the identification of equidae implement Commission Regulation (EC) No. 504/2008 in the north of Ireland.

Wind Turbines: Grants

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what grants or finance are available for farmers who wish to install a wind turbine on their land.

(AQW 29045/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At present clusters are not open for calls. Axis 3 has reached 100% commitment for this programme which means it is unlikely that there will be any further calls.

However, grants were available up to £50,000 to farm families wishing to diversify away from agricultural activities under Measure 3.1 (Farm Diversification) for standalone renewable energy initiatives, including wind turbines. Applications were subject to the criteria set by the programme operating rules including the EU requirement that 100% of the output is sold to the grid and none is used to reduce farm or farm household running costs.

Organic Farming: Funding

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what grants or finance are available for farmers who wish to switch to free range or organic farming.

(AQW 29046/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department does not offer funding to assist with meeting the criteria for free range production methods. However DARD does deliver the Organic Farming Scheme which provides payments to help farmers with the additional costs and loss of income that occurs during the conversion period to organic production. The Scheme is now closed to new applications. The recent Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014 – 2020 consultation asked whether the next Agri-Environment Scheme should include an Organic Management Option. The consultation responses will be considered as part of the ongoing development of the next Agri-Environment Scheme.

APHIS: Upgrade

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans are in place to advance and upgrade the Aphis System.

(AQW 29097/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A decision has been taken to replace the current Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS) through open procurement. The system will provide similar functionality while optimising use of technology to ensure that the Department and the wider Agri-food sector have access to a system that is modern and meets business needs for the future. The new system will be known as the NI Food Animal Information System (NIFAIS).

Work on the NIFAIS Programme commenced in July 2011. Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) from across the Department have been involved in preparing a detailed specification for NIFAIS. Negotiations on an APHIS exit agreement with the incumbent supplier are well advanced. As the NIFAIS system is particularly complex, DARD proposes to use the competitive dialogue process to select the most suitable supplier. Specifications are being produced based on outputs to maximise the opportunities for innovation and flexibility with the NIFAIS system.

The Programme are currently reviewing and revising the Outline Business Case to ensure it reflects any strategic changes that have occurred and ensure the projected costs accurately reflect the current development costs for such a complex system. On re-approval of the business case the programme will advertise the procurement opportunity in the Official Journal of the European Union and commence the formal procurement process.

NIFAIS will form a critical element of many DARD front line business processes and interface with key departmental and industry systems.

The aim of NIFAIS is to be a flexible, innovative IT solution that supports efficient and effective delivery of current and future food animal information services. It will meet DARD and industry needs and be capable of adapting to ensure compliance with legislation, technological development, NICS structures and standards.

During the procurement and implementation of NIFAIS, APHIS will continue to support the industry and will be developed accordingly by the current supplier until NIFAIS is fully operational.

APHIS: Paper Documentation

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans are in place to improve the paper forms filled in when selling livestock through the Aphis System; and what problems the Department are aware of with the carbon copies of these forms.

(AQW 29098/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There are currently no plans to change the paper documentation required to record animal movements. However, movement documents will be reviewed as part of the NIFAIS (NI Food Animal Information System) project. NIFAIS is the replacement computerised database for APHIS.

Queries regarding copies of the original movement documents e.g. amended or illegible copies, are processed and investigated by my staff. In the case of simple queries, my administrative staff in the local DARD Direct Office may contact

the seller or buyer for clarification. In the case of more complex documentary concerns, the matter may be passed on to my enforcement staff for detailed investigation.

Farming: Livestock Notification

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in instances where a farmer is late in notifying her Department regarding livestock, why late or no notification status is put on that animal until its processing is complete.
(AQW 29099/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Under European Union (EU) and north of Ireland legislation farmers are required to make certain notifications, births, deaths and movements to and from the herd, to the competent authority within fixed time periods. These rules are in place to support livestock traceability. If a farmer is late in notifying DARD then a status is applied to the animal to indicate that the notification was received late. Some statuses may restrict the animal's movements e.g. the status applied because of a late birth notification.

If an incomplete or partially illegible notification is received by DARD, a status may be applied to an animal as it may only be possible to process part of the notification. This procedure enables DARD to monitor incomplete information and, if appropriate, to restrict the movement of the animal until this is rectified. The information is recorded on the APHIS database and actions taken by DARD to ensure robust livestock traceability. When the required information has been received and processed by DARD, the "late" or "no notification" status may be removed; provided the notification is deemed to have been received within the appropriate time period.

Farming: Livestock Movement Licence

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why herd keepers need vet certificates to export animals to the rest of the UK for slaughter.
(AQW 29100/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There is currently a licensing regime for movements of livestock from the north to Britain and vice versa, for both slaughter and breeding and production. The licensing regime has existed for many years and is a reflection of the fact that the north is part of a separate epidemiological unit from Britain and the differing animal health and disease statuses in each.

The issue of licences, and therefore the subsequent need for veterinary certificates to export, are laid down in the Diseases of Animals (NI) Order 1981 and the Importation of Animals Order (NI) 1986 for moves from Britain to here, and in the Animal Health Act 1981 and the Importation of Animals Order 1977 for moves from here to Britain.

These arrangements have served the agriculture industry here well in preventing the incursion of diseases which are endemic in Britain and, for example, specifically protecting our cattle herd and sheep flock from Bluetongue after there was an incursion into Britain in 2007.

The arrangements also allow us to maintain trade if Britain is affected by an animal disease when we are not, an example of this being the north's ability to continue trading when Britain was affected by Foot and Mouth Disease in 2007.

Our current licensing and veterinary certification arrangements exist to protect our animal health status and ability to trade.

Store Lambs: Importation from Republic of Ireland

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why sheep farmers cannot import store lambs from the Republic of Ireland.
(AQW 29101/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There is no legislative impediment which would prevent the importation of store lambs from the south of Ireland.

Intra-Community trade in sheep is governed by Council Directive 91/68 which sets out the conditions which have to be met to allow a legal movement. This directive was last amended on 31 August 2013 but that amendment would not prevent store lambs being imported from the south of Ireland.

Farming: Ear Tags

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an estimate of the number of ear tags that are lost each year through wear and tear.
(AQW 29120/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department are unable to determine the number of ear tags lost each year through wear and tear. The table below gives the number of duplicate replacement tags, to replace lost tags, used in cattle and sheep in each of the last 3 years.

	2011	2012	2013 to 11/12/13
Cattle replacement tags	217,904	218,868	203,685
Sheep replacement tags	2357	2741	3116

For cattle this means that approximately 7% of cattle ear tags are replaced annually.

For sheep the flock keeper can either replace the lost tag with a matching replacement tag (see above table) or the flock keeper can apply a new tag set. The flock keeper must record the details in the flock register in accordance with the legislation to ensure traceability is maintained.

- Tags are replaced for a number of reasons;
- They are lost from the animal's ears
- They become illegible
- They are removed for welfare reasons e.g. an infected ear
- In some cases, the ear tag numbers of older cattle moving to other Member States for breeding and production, do not contain sufficient characters in their number to meet the requirements of the importing country. Therefore the tags have to be updated and replaced.

Agricultural Crime

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of recorded incidents of agricultural crimes, including livestock and machinery thefts, in each constituency, in each of the last two years; and of these, how many have seen (i) property recovered; and (ii) prosecutions or pending prosecutions.

(AQW 29125/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Responsibility for tackling crime, including agricultural crime, lies primarily with the PSNI and the Department of Justice. My Department does not hold the information you ask for.

I understand that the PSNI records statistical information on crime.

Farming: Livestock Theft

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what assurances she can give that no livestock which may have been stolen, particularly if it is not tagged or incorrectly tagged, can be presented for slaughter in an abattoir; and (ii) what assurances she has obtained from her counterparts in the Republic of Ireland in respect of same.

(AQW 29127/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The theft of livestock from farms is an issue that I take very seriously. The PSNI, who take the lead on these issues in the north, notify DARD of all reports of stolen livestock. This information is immediately communicated to the DARD Meat Inspection Teams in all the abattoirs in the north. The PSNI also notify An Garda Síochána who communicate with the abattoirs in the south. This two-way communication process ensures vigilance both north and south.

Cattle keepers must notify DARD in writing, within 7 days of becoming aware that an animal is missing believed lost or stolen. The ear tag numbers are removed from the keeper's herd on my Department's database the Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS) and moved into a special "lost/stolen" cattle herd on APHIS. If a lost/stolen animal re-appears its ear tag number cannot be moved out of this herd on the database, until DARD has carried out a detailed tracing investigation..

When a bovine animal is moved to an abattoir it must be accompanied by a movement document on which its details must be recorded. It is the responsibility of the Food Business Operator to ensure that the animal presented for slaughter matches its details on the movement document and on APHIS. If an animal is not recorded on APHIS in the presenter's herd or if there are discrepancies with regard to tagging or the animal's description then it cannot be slaughtered until they are resolved. The Official Veterinarian also carries out checks on 10% of the animals.

Cattle with no ear tags or incorrect ear tags are ineligible for slaughter for human consumption. If an animal is declared ineligible for slaughter for human consumption it is not allowed to leave the abattoir alive. It is destroyed on the premises and disposed as animal by-product.

Within EU legislation for animal identification and movement, and the rules for the entry of animals into the human food chain, effective controls must be fully and consistently implemented in all Member States. My officials regularly liaise with colleagues in the south to co-operate on policies for livestock traceability. The Identification and Traceability Working Group meets under the North South Ministerial Council arrangements and is a key part of the implementation of the All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy

Gifts and Hospitality: DARD Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many entries her Special Adviser has made in the Department's Register of Gifts and Hospitality since they were appointed; and what is the total value of such entries.

(AQW 29161/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Special Adviser has not received any gifts or hospitality.

Woodland Register

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development where Northern Ireland ranks in terms of trees per acre. (AQW 29164/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since 2012 estimates of the area of woodland in the north of Ireland have been based on the Woodland Register, which was established by Forest Service in response to the Forestry Act 2010.

The area of woodland in hectares and the percentage of woodland in the north of Ireland in comparison with the south of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England and the average of 27 countries in the European Union (prior to 1 July 2013), is given in the table below.

	Area of woodland (ha)	% of land
North of Ireland	111, 000	8.2
South of Ireland	679, 485	9.9
Scotland	1, 410, 000	18.1
Wales	305, 000	14.7
England	1, 300, 300	10.0
European Union – 27	157, 000, 000	37.0

Bovine Tuberculosis: Badgers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the proposed pilot scheme for the trapping, testing, vaccination and release of non-infected badgers to prevent the spread of Bovine TB, including an estimated commencement date. (AQW 29205/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: On 3 July 2012, I advised the Assembly Committee that I asked my officials to develop a “test and vaccinate or remove (TVR)” wildlife intervention research project. The aim of this wildlife intervention research will be to test the effectiveness of this approach on the level of TB in badgers and in cattle in the north.

The TVR study design is complex and there are a number of preparatory phases that must be completed before the main elements of this research project can get underway. However, substantial preparatory work has already been undertaken.

We commissioned the then Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) to provide computer modelling outputs to inform the TVR design, using our farm business, TB disease and badger ecology data. This information has helped us to design the overall TVR study.

A badger sett survey is also required before any TVR research can commence and this work is already well underway in two 100km² areas. Good progress has been made with this work. I am pleased to report that we have received permission to survey some 81% of the Banbridge / Rathfriland area and 82% of the area near Castlewellan.

Work is also ongoing in relation to the preparation of the Outline Business Case. Subject to the necessary financial approval and securing the necessary licences and funding, it is hoped that the intervention element of TVR fieldwork will begin in mid 2014.

Rural Development Programme: Agri-environment Schemes

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the correspondence that she has received over the past 6 months requesting the transfer of funds from pillar 1 to pillar 2 in order to support the delivery of agri-environment schemes in the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme. (AQW 29254/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In the past six months I have received correspondence requesting the transfer of funds from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2, to support the delivery of agri-environment schemes in the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme, from 354 individuals and one letter from the RSPB on behalf of 69 farmers and agri-businesses. The majority of individual responses were made using the template provided by the RSPB on their website under the ‘Vote for Nature’ campaign.

Rural Development Programme: Wildlife-friendly Farming

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she will make a decision on the transfer of funds from pillar 1 to pillar 2 of the Rural Development Programme, to help wildlife friendly farming. (AQW 29255/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A decision on the transfer of funds from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2 of the Common Agricultural Policy must be notified to the European Commission by Member States before 31 December 2013. I intend to make my decision in advance of that date.

Farm Inspections: Aerial Photographs

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what the target time is for her Department forwarding aerial inspection photographs to farmers and their local departmental office; and what is the average time taken.

(AQW 29268/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There is no requirement for the Department to forward aerial inspection photographs to farmers and the Department has not done so in 2013.

The Department is considering the provision of maps based on ortho-photography, which show what was found at inspections and will seek to provide these for inspections in future years. In the interim, farmers will have the opportunity to visit their local DARD Direct offices to view their inspection maps on DARD's systems and to use this information and the details provided in the inspection report to accurately complete their 2014 Single Application Form.

Farm Inspections: Remote Sensing

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what duty her Department has to tell farmers or landowners that an aerial inspection (i) will take place; or (ii) has taken place on their land.

(AQW 29269/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has no requirement to notify land owners or farmers that an aerial inspection has taken place or will take place. The Department issued letters to affected farm businesses in December 2013, informing them that their land was subject to control with remote sensing. Land owners will not be notified, unless they are also claimant farmers that have had an inspection by control with remote sensing.

Strathmore/Mount Vernon Streams: Repair Work

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what upgrade or repair work has been carried out in the last five years to the (i) Strathmore Stream; and (ii) Mount Vernon Stream culverted watercourses.

(AQW 29287/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) **Strathmore Park Stream** - Rivers Agency completed works, at a cost of £219k, from May to August 2009 to repair structurally unsound culverts on the Strathmore Park Stream. The works extended from the junction of North Circular Road and Coolmoyne Park, in a generally southerly direction through gardens of properties in North Circular Road and Slievemoyne Park, beneath the eastern end of Slievemoyne Park, beneath Antrim Road to terminate at the junction of Antrim Road and Old Cavehill Road.
- (ii) **Mount Vernon Stream** - Rivers Agency completed extensive works, at a cost of £569k, during 2009/2010 which involved substantial culvert replacement on the Mount Vernon Stream. The works extended from the Antrim Road through the grounds of the Landsdowne Court Hotel, eastward beneath Landsdowne Road, Landsdowne Drive and Landsdowne Park to outlet into an open reach of this watercourse at the rear of No 1 Landsdowne Park.

Strathmore/Mount Vernon Streams: Flooding

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many instances or reports of flooding in the last five years have been attributed to the (i) Strathmore Stream; and (ii) Mount Vernon Stream culverted watercourses.

(AQW 29288/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In the last 5 years Rivers Agency have reports of one incident of flooding of a garden during December 2012 possibly connected to Strathmore Stream, and one incident of a garden flooding during November 2010 possibly connected to Mount Vernon Stream. Other potential sources of flooding have been identified for both these flooding instances.

Strathmore/Mount Vernon Streams: Repair Work

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans her Department has to upgrade or carry out repair work to the (i) Strathmore Stream; and (ii) Mount Vernon Stream culverted watercourses.

(AQW 29289/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) **Strathmore Park Stream** - Rivers Agency completed works during August 2009 to repair structurally unsound culverts on the Strathmore Park Stream. Rivers Agency has no current plans to undertake further works on this reach of this watercourse.
- (ii) **Mount Vernon Stream** - Rivers Agency completed extensive works during August 2010 which involved substantial culvert replacement on the Mount Vernon Stream. Rivers Agency has no current plans to undertake further works on this reach of this watercourse.

North Antrim: Forest Service Revenue

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much revenue her Department received from the Forest Service in North Antrim, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 29299/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Forest Service is an Agency of the Department and all Agency income and expenditure is contained within the DARD Estimates and accounted for through both the DARD and Agency Resource Accounts.

The Forest Service revenue in the North Antrim constituency comes from its operating activities in the area. This was £1,102,000 in 2010/11, £718,326 in 2011/12 and £466,605 in 2012/13.

Single Farm Payment: Delays

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the nature of any issues that have been identified by her Department that will delay the receipt of the Single Farm Payment for any eligible farmers; and should delays be identified, when will affected farmers receive their payment.

(AQW 29454/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Single Farm Payment (SFP) scheme is fully funded by the European Union and the rules governing its administration are set in European Council legislation. These rules provide that payments can only be made on fully verified claims. The findings of verification checks on individual claims must be fully taken into account in order to calculate the correct amount of SFP due in each case. The Department has no discretion to vary the rules detailed in the European Council legislation.

A Single Farm Payment can only be made to a farm business when the verification checks have been completed. Delays can be experienced for a wide variety of reasons. Where a claim is the subject of an On the Spot Check, or land eligibility inspection, the claim will be processed as soon as the land has been inspected and the inspection results finalised. In such cases, it is anticipated that the majority of inspected claims will be processed by the end of February 2014.

The payment of SFP claims can also be delayed by factors outside the Department's control. These factors are varied and include:

- Bank details not supplied by the farm business;
- Ownership of the farm business and/or SFP entitlements are subject to probate proceedings;
- Disputes between landowners and tenants as to which is the correct claimant under the scheme;
- Queries arising from farm businesses claiming areas of eligible land greater than the Maximum Eligible Area (MEA) held by the Department;
- Two or more farm businesses claiming the same parcel of land; and
- Farm businesses have not supplied all of the necessary information to enable a claim to be processed.

The Department has established processes for resolving these issues but is largely and often wholly dependent on the provision of information from the farm business or the completion of legal procedures. These processes are followed as quickly as possible by the Department in order to finalise claims for SFP in an expeditious manner.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Foyle: DCAL Capital Projects

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the major capital projects funded by her Department in the Foyle constituency in 2011.

(AQW 28877/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Spend is recorded by my Department according to financial years. For the purpose of this answer I will, therefore, detail major capital projects funded by my Department in the Foyle constituency from the 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012.

The Department allocated £251k towards Derry's Live Site which was located in Waterloo Place. Live Sites are big screens in city centres reaching out-of-home audiences through large community screens.

Foyle: DCAL Capital Projects

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the major capital projects that will be funded by her Department in the Foyle constituency in (i) 2014; and (ii) 2015.

(AQW 28918/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Budgets are allocated according to financial years. For the purposes of this answer, I will, therefore, detail the capital position for the years ended 31 March 2015 (2014/15) and 31 March 2016 (2015/16). As I was happy to announce recently, my Department will invest at least £2m in Daisyfields and Showgrounds in Derry in 2014/15 as part of the City of

Culture legacy programme. The Executive has not yet set budgets for 2015/16 but I have already made it clear that City of Culture legacy will play a prominent part in my own Department's proposals.

Gifts and Hospitality: DCAL Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many entries her Special Adviser has made in the Department's Register of Gifts and Hospitality since they were appointed; and what is the total value of such entries.
(AQW 29008/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: None.

Language Diversity Unit: DCAL

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail how many people are employed in the Language Diversity Unit.
(AQW 29203/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is no Language Diversity Unit within DCAL.

A total of fourteen staff are currently employed within Languages and Waterways Ireland Branch.

City of Culture 2013: Legacy

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 28717/11-15, which stakeholders were consulted; and what were the dates of the consultations.
(AQW 29260/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My officials are working closely with stakeholders in the North West to discuss plans for future support and development of the culture, arts and leisure sectors. Officials regularly meet with our primary stakeholders, Derry City Council and Culture Company.

A series of informal meetings have also been held with organisations in the City throughout 2013. Examples of recent meetings between officials and organisations in the context of legacy plans include the Chief Executive's Forum on 26 September; Ilex on 4 October; Voluntary Arts Ireland on 8 October; Derry Visitor and Convention Bureau on 15 October; Playhouse on 30 October; Nerve Centre 13 November; DSD 13 November; Walled City Tattoo representatives on 26 November; and North West Volunteer Centre on 3 December.

Officials are also working closely with DSD Community Engagement Officers in the context of the Waterside, Triax, Outer North and Outer West cultural strategies. My Department is represented on the Community Engagement Steering Committee which last met on 28 November 2013.

Boxing: Independent Working Group Report

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of the report of the Independent Working Group Examining Boxing in Ulster, what steps she will take to assist and facilitate local boxers who aspire to fight for the UK to attain their ambition.
(AQW 29342/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The report of the Independent Working Group (IWG) states that "the Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA), the British Amateur Boxing Association (BABA), the Amateur International Boxing Association (AIBA) along with associated bodies/organisations should work together to identify the implementations of the Good Friday Agreement for national representation and work to implement any recommendations including devising a plan to accommodate Ulster boxers who might represent Team GB at elite level."

The IABA has publicly stated that they will examine the findings in the report and take some time to consult with its membership before delivering a response in the New Year.

My Department and Sport NI will be available to provide practical support to the IABA as they take forward their considerations of the IWG recommendations, including the recommendation on national representation.

Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club: Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given that the report of the Independent Working Group Examining Boxing in Ulster has substantiated the claims of Sandy Row Boxing Club that incidents of sectarianism and racism have occurred, what plans she has to provide funding for which the Club will be eligible.
(AQW 29343/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department has a responsibility for the general provision of funding for the development of sport in the north of Ireland. As part of this, Sport NI established the Lottery funded Boxing Investment Programme to meet an identified need in boxing, and which had a clear focus on improving facilities and building capacity in the sport. Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club (ABC) was eligible to submit an expression of interest for this funding; however, in order to progress to the next stages of the programme, all clubs, including Sandy Row ABC, were required to be affiliated to a recognised governing body. This is a standard requirement for all Sport NI funding programmes.

Boxing: Sectarianism

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action her Department is taking in response to the Independent Working Group's report on sectarianism in boxing.

(AQW 29370/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I welcome the Independent Working Group's report and acknowledge its findings and recommendations.

However, responsibility for action on the findings rests in the first instance with the Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA) who commissioned the report. The IABA has publicly stated that they will examine the findings in the report and take some time to consult with its membership before delivering a response in the New Year.

My Department and Sport NI, an arms length body of DCAL, will be available to provide practical support to the IABA as they take forward their considerations of these recommendations.

Irish Amateur Boxing Association

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action her Department will take to ensure that the review of existing practice for complaint and investigation in the Irish Amateur Boxing Association takes place.

(AQW 29384/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I welcome the Independent Working Group's report and acknowledge its findings and recommendations.

Responsibility for action to review the existing practice for complaint and investigation procedures, rests wholly with the Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA), who commissioned the report.

The IABA has publicly stated that they will examine the findings in the report and take some time to consult with its membership before delivering a response in the New Year.

My Department and Sport NI, an arms length body of DCAL, will be available to provide practical support to the IABA as they take forward their considerations of these recommendations.

Boxing: Protestant Participation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action is being taken to address the chill factors, identified in the report by the Independent Working Group Examining Boxing in Ulster, which discourage people from the Protestant community getting involved in boxing.

(AQW 29385/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I welcome the Independent Working Group's report and acknowledge its findings and recommendations.

Responsibility for action to address the issues raised in the report rests, in the first instance, with the Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA). The IABA has publicly stated that they will examine the findings in the report and take some time to consult with its membership before delivering a response in the New Year.

I am aware of the ongoing work of the IABA, through its Club Development Manager, to promote and develop boxing in all areas and across all communities in the north of Ireland. In ongoing support of this, my Department and Sport NI will be available to provide practical support to the IABA as they take forward their considerations of the recommendations made.

Commonwealth Games 2014: DCAL Support

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support, financial or otherwise, her Department will provide to the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Team for the 2014 Glasgow games.

(AQW 29397/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for entering competitors from the north of Ireland, into the Commonwealth Games 2014, rests with the NI Commonwealth Games Council (NICGC) which has not yet selected local competitors for the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) provides support to athletes through SportNI, who are investing £543,129 in Commonwealth Games sports through its Athlete Investment Programme in this current financial year. The Sports Costs strand of the Programme, which contributes to the implementation of agreed training and competition programmes, is made to the Governing Body which in turn selects the most suitable athletes. Athletes may apply directly to Sport NI for the Living Costs strand of the Programme which contributes to essential living and travel costs.

This funding is not solely for preparation for the Commonwealth Games, but also in respect of other competitions that take place during the investment period.

An ongoing investment programme in the development of high quality facilities, such as the Aurora Complex in Bangor and the stadia projects, provide athletes with a professional training environment.

Commonwealth Games 2014

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans she has to profile and showcase Northern Ireland during the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

(AQW 29399/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department is constantly considering opportunities to showcase the diversity and the very best of culture from across the island. Officials from the Department continue to liaise with their counterparts in Scotland regarding the Glasgow 2014 Cultural Programme.

I am aware that a number of governing bodies have mentioned proposals to invite teams/athletes from other countries to preparation camps ahead of the Glasgow Games. However their main focus will be on preparing our athletes for the Games.

The World Police and Fire Games was a huge success and demonstrated that we can deliver major games in the north of Ireland. Whilst, 'Events' are the responsibility of DETI, as part of the WPFPG legacy, my Department is considering how we can build on that success and opportunities for hosting future major sporting events.

Department of Education

Woodlands Speech and Language Unit

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education, in light of the closure of Woodlands Speech and Language Unit, what plans have been put in place for students who may have been referred for speech and language places in the current year; and what action his Department has taken to set up the new classes and required resources.

(AQW 28845/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Western Education and Library Board (WELB) has confirmed that any students who currently attend Woodlands Speech and Language Unit will finish their placements there. New provision at Ebrington, St. Anne's and Ballykelly Primary Schools will commence from September 2014.

WELB has advised that meetings have taken place to progress arrangements for accommodation needs in the new settings and it plans to engage with staff in the near future.

Schools: Outdoor Sports Facilities

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what collaboration has taken place with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that there are adequate outdoor sporting facilities for use by community and sporting groups and local schools in Bangor.

(AQW 28925/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the responsibility of the Department of Education to ensure that schools are designed to provide an appropriate learning environment for the delivery of the curriculum. The provision of adequate outdoor sporting facilities for use by the community is not the responsibility of the Department.

However, when planning new or improved play and sporting facilities at schools the Department's Building Handbook for Primary and Post Primary Schools does provide design advice to enable all school facilities to be used by the community. The local management and arrangements for the use of such facilities by the community is a matter for a school's Board of Governors.

Education and Skills Authority: Senior Management Posts

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 28317/11-15, how many of these posts are currently filled.

(AQW 28963/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A Chief Executive (Designate) has been appointed. Three individuals have accepted offers of a Director post.

Salary ranges for each of the posts in the senior management structure are set out below:

Chief Executive (Designate)	£145,000 - £150,000
Director of Operations & Estates	£81,460 - £108,618
Director of Education Quality & Strategic Planning	£95,039 - £126,717
Director of Children and Young Peoples Services	£81,460 - £108,618
Director of Finance & ICT	£81,460 - £108,618
Director of HR & Workforce Development	£81,460 - £108,618

Education and Skills Authority: Senior Management Salaries

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 28317/11-15, what is the salary attached to each post. (AQW 28964/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A Chief Executive (Designate) has been appointed. Three individuals have accepted offers of a Director post.

Salary ranges for each of the posts in the senior management structure are set out below:

Chief Executive (Designate)	£145,000 - £150,000
Director of Operations & Estates	£81,460 - £108,618
Director of Education Quality & Strategic Planning	£95,039 - £126,717
Director of Children and Young Peoples Services	£81,460 - £108,618
Director of Finance & ICT	£81,460 - £108,618
Director of HR & Workforce Development	£81,460 - £108,618

Common Funding Scheme: Small Schools

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education how he intends to protect strategic small schools in the long term through his revision of the Common Funding Formula.

(AQW 28979/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: One of the recommendations in the Independent review of the Common Funding Scheme was to remove all small schools support factors from the current funding formula. While I accepted this recommendation in principle, I decided not to implement it at this time. The small schools support factors in the current formula will be retained for the 2014-15 financial year.

I already have an extensive area based planning process underway designed to ensure that schools are planned strategically to deliver sustainable, high quality education. I want to see more progress on area planning.

We have a Sustainable Schools policy that sets out the criteria and quality indicators to help managing authorities to assess schools' sustainability.

I will provide further clarification within existing policy on the circumstances as to when a small school will need to be retained and how it will be supported.

Primary Schools: Appointment of Head Teachers

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the appointment of headteachers to the primary sector over the last three years, what percentage of applicants met the essential criteria; and what percentage of posts had to be readvertised.

(AQW 28981/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools have advised that the figures for the appointment of Principals to the primary sector over the last three years are:

Employing Authority	% of applicants who met essential criteria	% of posts that had to be readvertised
BELB	100	11
NEELB	71.52	21.43
SEELB	86	11
SELB	97.64	5.88
WELB	100	Nil
CCMS	97.34	3.9

Please note in respect of the BELB figures for % of applicants who met essential criteria, these relate to only 8 out of 9 appointments as figures are not held by the BELB and they were not in a position to obtain these within the timescale.

Schools: Newbuilds

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of (i) planning fees; (ii) architects; (iii) consultants; and (iv) other associated costs for school new builds in the last ten years which have not been built.

(AQW 29022/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is not possible, without incurring disproportionate expense, to provide the breakdown of costs on new school builds in the way requested. However, costs have been provided as detailed below.

The costs for new build schools included in Capital Announcements but where construction work has not yet commenced are detailed in the table below. The information provided covers all costs incurred since the commencement of planning up to 31 March 2013.

School Ref No.	Scheme	Total spend to 31 Mar 2013 £000s
306-6551	Braidside IPS, Ballymena	36
104-6596	Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain	67
124-0291	Colaiste Feirste, Belfast	2,717 - includes site purchase of £2.35m
306-6561	Corran IPS, Larne	13
203-2277	Craigbrack, Mullabuoy, Listress PS, Derry	16
223-0138	Dean Maguirc College, Carrickmore	133
503-2585	Edendork PS	91
242-0229	Foyle & Londonderry College	15,073 - includes site purchase of £14.5m
204-6638	Gaelscoil Ui Dhochartaigh, Strabane	40
504-6637	Gaelscoil Ui Neill, Coalisland	45
506-6553	Portadown IPS	26
303-6562	Holy Family PS, Magherafelt	155
523-0278	Holy Trinity College, Cookstown	227
123-0009	Little Flower Girls SS, Belfast	153
242-0065	Loreto College, Omagh	43
142-0022	Methodist College, Belfast	221
206-6552	Omagh IPS 03/04	486 - includes site purchase of £400,000
342-0058	Rainey Endowed, Magherafelt	70
503-1387	St Bronagh's PS, Rostrevor	519
503-6435	St Clare's Abbey PS, Newry	654
423-0107	St Columbanus College, Bangor	671
203-2737	St Columbkilles's PS, Carrickmore	247
203-6116	St Conor's PS, Omagh	112
503-6675	St Joseph's & St James, Newry	0
542-0045	St Louis GS, Killeel	672
503-6043	St Mary's PS, Banbridge	85
303-0625	St Mary's, Cargan, Glenravel PS, Ballymena	0
542-0056	St Mary's, St Paul's, St Michael's, Lurgan	0
542-0038	St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	619
523-0076	St Patrick's College, Banbridge	243
542-0268	St Patrick's GS, Armagh	378
542-0304	St Pat's Boys/Girls Acad. Dungannon	621
203-1898	St Paul's PS, Irvinestown	26
503-1160	St Teresa's PS, Lurgan	186
503-1103	Tannaghmore PS, Lurgan	207
142-0264	Victoria College, Belfast	376
201-6068	Artigarvan PS, Strabane	112
301-3315	BallyKelly PS, Limavady	169

School Ref No.	Scheme	Total spend to 31 Mar 2013 £000s
231-0015	Belmont Special School	3
331-6676	Castletower Special school	10
221-0305	Devenish College	59
501-1575	Dromore Central P.S.	337
201-0382	Ebrington PS, Derry	151
101-6485 111-0003	Glenwood P.S./Edenderry N.S. Belfast	226
201-2245	Eglinton PS, Derry	154
201-6152	Enniskillen Model PS	132
421-0046	Glastry College, Ballyhalbert	697
421-0086	Knockbreda HS, Belfast	1189
431-6516	Knockevin Spec School, Downpatrick	323
231-6662	Limegrove/Glasvey (Rossmar) Special School	6
541-0057	Lurgan College	434
201-2261	New Buildings PS, Derry	92
321-0207	Parkhall College, Antrim	956
541-0067	Portadown College	243
101-0307	Springhill P.S. Belfast	128
101-0252	Strandtown PS, Belfast	308
421-0029	The High School, Ballynahinch	385

To the end of the 2012/13 financial year £3.8m has been spent on the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus. However, of this total amount circa £600k relates to the "carrying cost" of the Department owning the Lisanelly site (i.e. site security and utilities). Please see the table below for a breakdown of expenditure.

Area of Spend	Total Spend to 31/03/13
Development of Exemplar Designs and Programme Director costs	£2,754,337.76
Development of Strategic and Outline Business Cases	£116,600.97
Legal Advice for input to Business Cases	£32,344.88
Decontamination Survey Costs	£260,818.27
Holding Costs (Security and Utilities)	£614,505.63
Total	£3,778,607.51

Hospitality/Conferences/Public Relations: DE Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the cost of hospitality in his Department in each of the last five years; (ii) the cost of conferences and similar events held by his Department; and (iii) the spend on public relations, including press staff.

(AQW 29025/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) The costs of hospitality by the Department in each of the last five years is shown in the following table.

Financial year	£'000
2008-09	74
2009-10	57
2010-11	26

Financial year	£'000
2011-12	19
2012-13	27

(ii) The costs of conferences and similar events held by the Department is shown in the following table.

Financial Year	£'000
2008-09	149
2009-10	49
2010-11	26
2011-12	7
2012-13	9

(iii) The spend on public relations, including press staff by the Department, is shown in the following table.

Financial Year	£'000
2008-09	189
2009-10	184
2010-11	204
2011-12	227
2012-13	184

In addition to the expenditure detailed above, Communication Consultants are engaged on the Lisanelly Shared Educational Campus project in Omagh through the Integrated Design Team, to provide planning and stakeholder engagement services for the project. The Integrated Design Team was appointed through open OJEU competition in March 2010. A small element of the contract would include the provision of occasional PR services on behalf of the project. This expenditure is not invoiced separately.

Community Education Initiatives Programme

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what actions he is taking, or considering, to work with community groups, such as Community Network groups, to ensure that disadvantaged areas are given local services to benefit education in the community.

(AQW 29042/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have allocated £2 million pounds to a Community Education Initiatives Programme in this and the next financial year. The aim of the programme is to identify and allocate resources to community-based initiatives which have a specific focus on positive educational outcomes. The intention is to join up community-based and school-based activity in a more coherent way, promoting partnership working between voluntary and community organisations and schools in order to provide educationally focused programmes in communities with particular concentrations of educational disadvantage. The funding will be allocated through the Education and Library Boards to the Neighbourhood renewal Partnerships, Belfast Area Partnerships and Super Output Areas with high levels of educational disadvantage.

In addition, my Department works closely with the Department for Social Development in relation to education-related Neighbourhood Renewal Projects which target children in the most disadvantaged areas, providing additional support to address educational underachievement.

North Down: Funded Preschool Places

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of free pre-school funded places in North Down in each of the last five years.

(AQW 29065/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of funded pre-school places in the North Down constituency, in each of the last five years is follows:

Provision in North Down District Council Area⁴

PROVIDERS	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Statutory nursery	468	468	468	468	468
Voluntary/private	304	314	359	390	396
Total	772	782	827	858	864

Education and Skills Authority: Projected Savings

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Education what are the projected cost savings based on the current plans for management bodies to be included within the Education and Skills Authority.

(AQW 29092/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: According to the Full Business Case for the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), completed by my Department and approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel in June 2013, ESA will save £185 million over the ten year period following its establishment. This calculation was arrived at by comparing the costs, over this period, of establishing and maintaining ESA with the costs of the alternative: restoring and maintaining existing structures.

Children: Internet Safety

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education what action his Department and its arm's-length bodies are taking to protect children from abuse through the internet.

(AQW 29148/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Action taken to protect children from abuse through the internet is part of the overall approach to eSafety within the education sector. Action taken has two objectives, namely, to offer a safe environment within which pupils can use the internet and for pupils to learn about potential dangers and how to keep safe.

Boards of Governors of grant-aided schools have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils. In the exercise of this duty schools are required to have in place eSafety policies covering the safe and effective use of the internet and digital technologies. The eSafety policies must operate in conjunction with other school policies including Behaviour, Child Protection, Anti-Bullying and Acceptable Use.

DE Circular 2007/1 – 'Acceptable Use of the Internet and Digital Technologies in Schools' provides advice on the matters which must be addressed by schools in ensuring safe and appropriate use of the internet. The circular also drew attention to useful sources of advice from expert organisations involved in child protection. Additional guidance was issued to schools in September 2011 in DE Circular 2011/22 - Internet Safety. This provided advice on arrangements for preventing access to inappropriate material, the educational use of materials from blocked sites and the provision of information to parents. It also provided information about security considerations for those schools that have set up their own networks outside C2k's centrally managed service.

DE Circular 2013/25 – 'eSafety Guidance' was issued on 6 December 2013 and provides guidance on eSafety in the context of the new C2k contract, Education Network (NI) and also non C2k networks. The C2k managed service includes an eSafety Zone, which provides advice and guidance for teachers.

The C2k Education Network service provides schools with a fully managed ICT service thus ensuring pupils' safety while using the internet in school. This service operates a rigorous internet filtering policy which blocks access to sites classed as unsuitable. The service has in place internet monitoring, web and email filtering as well as physical controls such as firewalls and password protection.

ICT plays a central role in the Revised Curriculum with 'Using ICT' set as a cross-curricular skill, statutory across all key stages. While development of ICT skills can be introduced across all subject areas, at post –primary level, the 'Learning for Life and Work' Area of Learning and at primary level, the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding Area of learning, provide direct opportunities to allow pupils to develop strategies to promote their personal safety.

Information about on line safety is targeted directly to pupils. The homework diary inserts prepared and distributed through the 'iMatter' Programme include internet safety under the topic 'Keeping Yourself Safe'. Pupils are alerted to sources of advice and support if they have concerns about a contact over the internet. Advice is available to schools from the Boards' Child Protection Support Service for Schools (CPSSS) and from PSNI.

The 'iMatter' Programme's 'Message of the Month' will highlight 'eSafety Day' in February 2014 .

In other education settings where provision is made by the Education and Library Boards account must be taken of guidance issued by the Department.

⁴ Figures as at conclusion of Open Enrolment procedure

Integrated Education: DE Commitment

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education why his Department's corporate plan 2012/15, or the 2013/14 revision, contain no reference to integrated education; and whether he will reaffirm his commitment, as required by statute to encourage and facilitate integrated education.

(AQW 29149/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has a duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education (that is to say the education together, at school, of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils) and takes that duty seriously. Indeed work is currently progressing regarding the future development of integrated education.

The corporate plan sets out the high level actions to deliver on specific targets in 2013/14. There is a particular emphasis on Programme for Government targets, which identify progressing shared education as a key area. The work to progress shared education will take full and careful consideration of the Department's duty in relation to integrated education.

The Department's priority of raising standards and closing the performance gap applies across all schools. This in no way takes away from the Department's focus on encouraging the development of integrated education.

Integrated Education: DE Legal Obligation

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has to fulfil its legal obligations in respect of integrated education.

(AQW 29150/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department takes its statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education (i.e. the education together, at school, of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils), very seriously, and will continue to do so.

To help with the facilitation of integrated education, my Department will continue to provide funding to the Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) to assist the development of integrated schools for public benefit. Funding of £646k has been allocated for 2013/14.

I have met with NICIE officials, twice in recent months, to discuss proposals to further promote and facilitate the development and growth of integrated education. I remain willing to consider further innovative approaches which will facilitate the development of the sector.

The Department of Education will also continue to provide funding to help schools with the process of transformation to integrated status. This supports schools in the initial stages of the transformation process and with the employment of a teacher, from the minority community in the school, to assist with religious education. The budget available for 2013/14 is £185k.

I recognise the vital and valuable contribution that integrated education, together with all other types of education, makes to building a peaceful and stable future for our children.

Going forward, the Department of Education will ensure that it continues to have a rigorous approach to its duty to integrated education.

Primary School Curriculum: Computer Coding

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education whether he has given any consideration to the introduction of computer coding into the primary curriculum.

(AQW 29185/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The revised curriculum has been designed to provide flexibility for schools to develop experiences that suit the needs of their pupils. Embedding mandatory, cross curricular skills and keeping prescribed content to a minimum, allows schools to choose the most appropriate approach to take to ensure that pupils are engaged and challenged, to reach their full potential.

Computer Science, which includes computer coding, is a specialised field and the flexibility already in place within the revised curriculum, enables schools to teach Computer Science in any Key Stage, including at primary school level, if they feel it appropriate.

At this time there are no plans to make computer programming mandatory in the revised curriculum. However, should schools feel it meets the needs of their pupils, there is sufficient flexibility in the curriculum to allow them to teach it.

In order to contribute to the skills gap in the ICT sector, the Department has commissioned the development and delivery of a bespoke computer programming continuum of practical pupil engagement activity covering Key Stage 2 – Post 16. The programme, co-financed by Department of Education, the Department for Employment and Learning and Invest NI, 'IT's Your Choice – A Computer Programming Continuum for Schools', was launched into schools in September 2013 and will engage approximately 10,000 pupils annually. This programme is being delivered as part of the ICT action plan which forms part of the Government's delivery of the Economic Strategy and aligns to the STEM Strategy 'Success Through STEM'.

Schools: Relationships and Sexuality Education

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education whether his department holds any information on (i) young people being shown abortion videos as part of their Relationship and Sex Education; and (ii) how often organisations such as Precious Life are given access to schools.

(AQW 29191/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not hold any information on young people being shown abortion videos or how often organisations such as Precious Life are given access to schools.

Legislation sets out the minimum content to be taught in schools as Areas of Learning (AOLs) for each Key Stage. The teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education is covered by the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding Area of Learning at primary level and the Personal Development strand of the Learning for Life and Work Area of Learning at post-primary level. While the specifics of what is taught under each Area of Learning, including topics such as abortion, is a matter for each teacher/school, the Department does require each school to have in place a RSE policy on how it will address the delivery of RSE. This policy should be subject to consultation with parents and it must be endorsed by the school's Board of Governors.

The Department does not prescribe the resources that should be used by a school in its delivery of the curriculum. It is a matter for teachers/schools to determine the resources they use to enhance their delivery of the curriculum and this includes any decision to bring external organisations such as Precious Life into the classroom.

Schools: Relationships and Sexuality Education

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education whether he has given any consideration to an immediate review and subsequent change in the Northern Ireland Curriculum on Relationship and Sex Education.

(AQW 29192/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Reading this question in conjunction with other questions you have raised I am assuming that this question about a review and change to the curriculum would relate to prescribing specific teaching about abortion in our schools.

The revised curriculum which has been taught to all pupils of compulsory school age since 2009/10 is less prescriptive, with the minimum to be taught detailed in legislation as Areas of Learning (AOLs) for each Key Stage. It provides our teachers with greater flexibility to make decisions on how best to interpret and combine minimum requirements to provide a broad and balanced curriculum and adapt their teaching to meet the needs of individual pupils. In line with this flexibility the Department does not prescribe the specifics of what should be taught or the resources that teachers should use in their delivery of any aspect of the curriculum for each of the Areas of Learning.

The Department considers that the existing Minimum Content Regulations provide appropriate cover for the delivery of this element of RSE in the classroom. The Department has no plans to review or change its current policy of giving teachers/schools the flexibility to decide how to best deliver the curriculum to meet the needs of their pupils.

Schools: Relationships and Sexuality Education

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education whether he is aware of best practice in Relationship and Sex Education; and whether he has given any consideration to a minimum Relationship and Sex Education package issued by Education and Library Boards, to include stringent, standardised guidelines to be followed by all schools.

(AQW 29193/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: An ETI report published in 2011 on the provision of Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) in our post-primary schools does give evidence of best practice and cites helpful case studies. Overall the report provides a summary of the characteristics associated with best practice. One example is that there is a need for clear, informed and purposeful leadership from the Principal and the senior management team, ensuring that RSE has a significant role in the curriculum provision. The Department has decided to issue a letter to schools in the New Year, as it is some time since the report was published on the ETI website and they will make schools aware of the good practice characteristics identified in the report.

Regarding the latter part of your question I can confirm that the Department has not given any consideration to a minimum RSE package with stringent standardised guidelines to be followed by all schools.

The delivery of RSE within schools needs to be taken forward in a way that recognises and respects the ethos of individual schools and that involves the whole school community (including parents) in planning, delivery and review. All schools should have in place a policy for the delivery of RSE in their school. Parents should be consulted about the policy and it should be endorsed by the Board of Governors of the school.

In addition, a key strength of the revised curriculum is the flexibility it provides for our teachers to make decisions on how best to interpret and combine minimum requirements to provide a broad and balanced curriculum and adapt their teaching to meet the needs of individual pupils. This flexibility was introduced as a result of the feedback received during consultation with for example teachers, pupils, the business sector and parents.

Guidance on RSE is provided by the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). This guidance makes schools aware of the wide range of resources available and provides a checklist to help schools determine which resources to

use that are consistent with their school's morals and values framework. CCEA is currently taking forward work to revise RSE guidance and it is intended that new guidance will be available during 2014/15.

Schools: Relationships and Sexuality Education

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education to outline the reasons why Relationship and Sex Education is taught in Religious Education and not in subjects such as learning for life or biology.

(AQW 29195/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All schools are required to have in place a RSE policy which sets out how the school will address RSE within the curriculum. A school's policy should be subject to consultation with parents and it should be endorsed by the Board of Governors of the school.

The main Areas of Learning within the revised curriculum for the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) at primary level and the Personal Development strand of the Learning for Life and Work Area of Learning at post-primary level.

However, I am aware from a report published by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in January 2011 about RSE provision in post-primary schools, that a variety of delivery models are used by schools. These range from provision as a module within Personal Development, as a discrete topic or a cross-curricular approach. The report indicated that over 83% of schools use more than one delivery method. A copy of the ETI report is accessible at <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/surveys-evaluations/surveys-evaluations-post-primary/surveys-evaluations-post-primary-2011/report-of-an-evaluation-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-in-post-primary-schools-2.pdf>.

If a cross-curricular approach to the delivery of RSE is being taken by a school, the revised curriculum includes a number of other Areas of Learning, such as Religious Education or Science, which could provide opportunities to develop pupils' knowledge and skills in this area. However, as with all aspects of the revised curriculum, the specifics of what is taught and how it is taught is a matter for each teacher/school.

Literacy and Numeracy: Delivering Social Change

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail as of 1 December 2013 (i) the number of school teachers employed in post-primary schools under the signature project to provide numeracy support; (ii) the number of school teachers employed in post-primary schools under the signature project to provide literacy support; (iii) the number of unfilled signature project posts; and to detail (iv) the number of primary school teachers employed under the signature project prior to the 1 December 2013.

(AQW 29198/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As of 1 December 2013, under the Delivering Social Change Improving Literacy and Numeracy Project, a total of 135.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) teachers are employed in post-primary schools. These teachers have been employed either to provide direct support to pupils or to fill the post of a more experienced teacher released to provide the direct support. It is therefore difficult at this time to specify exactly the number of schools providing numeracy and/or literacy support as a number of schools are providing both.

As advised by the participating schools or the WELB for the centrally appointed teachers;

- (i) There are 72 FTE of teachers employed in post-primary schools to provide numeracy support.
- (ii) There are 54 FTE teachers employed in post-primary schools to provide literacy support.
- (iii) There are 45.2 FTE unfilled posts in the primary and post primary sectors as of 1 December 2013.
- (iv) There are 86 FTE teachers out of a total of 100.7 FTE teaching posts employed in primary schools.

Interviews took place in early December to appoint further teachers to the Signature Project.

North Eastern Education and Library Board: New Capital Developments

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) all primary schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area identified as requiring new capital development; and those identified as being priorities.

(AQW 29199/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In my statement to the Assembly in January 2013, I announced the following Primary Schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area to advance in planning:

- St Mary's Primary School/Glenravel Primary School;
- Braidside Integrated Primary School;
- Corran Integrated Primary School, Larne;
- Craigback Primary School/Mullabuoy Primary School/Listress Primary School.

I had also announced a proposal to meet the needs of children in the Islandmagee area however following discussions with the NEELB the project announced at that time has been withdrawn. The NEELB is considering an alternative solution in that area.

The Department continues to work with all the managing authorities on the strategic planning of the schools' estate, including the potential for future capital investment. There will always be greater demand for investment than funds available and at such time as any future capital announcement is made it will take account of strategic priorities identified across all sectors.

Teachers: Work Days Lost and Flu-related Illnesses

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education how many work-days were lost as a result of flu-related illnesses amongst the teaching profession in each of the last three academic years.

(AQW 29216/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of work days lost as a result of flu-related illnesses amongst the teaching profession in each of the last three academic years is as follows:

- 2010/2011 – 13,398
- 2011/2012 – 11,143.5
- 2012/2013 – 14,945

Schools: Pupil Spend

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the average spend per (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary pupil in the (a) maintained; (b) controlled; (c) integrated; (d) Irish medium sectors, in each of the last six years.

(AQW 29348/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold information on average spending per pupil. Such information would require disaggregation of central costs – e.g. administration and services such as transport, meals, Curriculum Advisory and Peripatetic Service etc. - which are not disaggregated at school or phase levels. In addition, overall expenditure will include grant-aided recurrent funding (and other non-public funds including voluntary contributions etc.), as well as capital expenditure - which, by its nature, is not regular or consistently applied across schools from year-to-year.

Every grant-aided school covered by the Common Funding Scheme receives a fully delegated budget for its day-to-day recurrent funding needs, distributed under the current Common Funding Formula arrangements. A breakdown of the budget allocations for the requested groups is provided below:

Average CFF Budget Per Pupil funding - 2008/09 to 2013/14

Primary	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	2013/14 £
Controlled (1)	2,599	2,856	2,941	2,946	2,950	2,936
Maintained (2)	2,668	2,942	3,037	3,043	3,051	3,036
Integrated (3)	2,769	3,024	3,086	3,078	3,079	3,058
Irish-medium	3,041	3,371	3,489	3,514	3,585	3,616

Post-Primary	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	2013/14 £
Controlled (1)	3,901	4,010	4,076	4,060	4,042	4,020
Maintained (2)	4,078	4,206	4,275	4,254	4,230	4,211
Integrated (3)	4,268	4,344	4,394	4,367	4,347	4,336
Irish-medium	4,010	4,164	4,236	4,216	4,196	4,192

Data source: Common Funding Formula 2008/09 to 2013/14

Notes:

- (1) Excludes Controlled Integrated schools
- (2) Includes Catholic Maintained and Other Maintained, except Irish Medium
- (3) Includes Controlled Integrated and Grant-maintained Integrated schools

Schools: Home-to-school Transport

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the average spend on home to school transport per (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary pupil in the (a) maintained; (b) controlled; (c) integrated; (d) Irish medium sectors, in each of the last six years.

(AQW 29349/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The tables below show the average spend on Home to School Transport per (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary pupil in the maintained, controlled, integrated and Irish medium sectors, in each of the last four years. Data in the format requested is not available for the 2007/08 and 2008/09 years.

Primary

Year	Maintained	Controlled	Integrated	Irish Medium
2009/10	£783	£802	£737	£926
2010/11	£816	£810	£649	£862
2011/12	£745	£701	£651	£1,129
2012/13	£751	£696	£729	£1,227

Post-Primary

Year	Maintained	Controlled	Integrated	Irish Medium
2009/10	£667	£668	£646	£602
2010/11	£651	£654	£638	£828
2011/12	£639	£623	£616	£594
2012/13	£644	£644	£611	£603

NB. Data provided by the Education and Library Boards. Controlled Integrated schools are recorded under the Integrated heading, while Controlled Irish Medium (IM) schools are recorded under the Irish Medium heading. Figures for the Integrated sector include both Grant Maintained Integrated and Controlled Integrated schools. Some Boards record IM Units attached to Maintained schools under the Maintained heading, while others record such Units under IM.

Educational Psychologists: Waiting Times

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, during the period 1 September 2012 to 30 April 2013, what was the average waiting time between a pupil being referred to an educational psychologist and having their first appointment, broken down by Education and Library Board.

(AQW 29350/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have confirmed that the average waiting time between a pupil being referred to an educational psychologist and having their first appointment, during the period 1 September 2012 to 30 April 2013, is as follows:

BELB	33 days
NEELB	90 days
SEELB	278 days
SELB	60 days
WELB	75 days

These figures refer to Stage 3 (non-statutory assessments) as outlined in the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (COP).

With regard to the waiting time for an assessment in terms of statutory requirements, at Stage 4 of the COP, the ELBs consider the need for a statutory assessment of special educational needs which will include an assessment by an educational psychologist. ELBs have 16 weeks from the date that the ELB notifies the parents that it is considering making an assessment or from the date that the request to carry out an assessment is received by the ELB from the parent or the school to complete the assessment.

Early Years: Child Spend

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how much on average was spent per child on early years services, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 29352/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold information on average spending per child as some funding (for example costs of central administration, capital) cannot be disaggregated to obtain an average amount spend per child on early years services.

In 2013/14 the Department has invested over £213 million¹ in a range of early years education and learning services. Further information on the range of early years education and learning services funded by the Department, including the number of children and families taking part, are detailed in the Learning to Learn framework available on the DE website.

Investment in the range of early years education and learning (excluding capital and costs such as central administrative expenditure which cannot be disaggregated by school sector) is detailed for each of the five years to 2012/13 in the following table.

¹ All nursery schools who meet the Extended Schools eligibility criteria, which are indicators of social disadvantage, are eligible for additional funding to provide a range of activities outside of the normal school day which aim to respond to the needs of pupils, parents and their families as identified by school principals.

Provision	2008/09 £m	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m	2011/12 £m	2012/13 £m
Nursery Schools	17.067	17.614	17.940	18.287	18.268
Nursery Classes/Units within Primary Schools ¹	18.629	19.547	20.196	21.162	21.719
Voluntary/Private pre-school settings	10.267	10.418	13.032	14.057	14.818
Sure Start	17.561	20.666	21.935	21.600	22.352
Toybox	0.016	0.340	0.340	0.348	0.356
Early Years Fund	2.495	2.553	2.612	2.425	2.479
Foundation Stage ² (Yr 1 & 2)	103.96	113.108	117.788	118.731	120.744
Total	£169.995	£184.246	£193.843	£196.610	£200.736

1 Common Funding Formula (CFF) Budget - identifiable funding only - other funding for these year groups/pupils cannot be disaggregated from the schools' overall budget

2 Identifiable funding only – includes core per pupil AWPU funding for all years, plus Foundation Stage funding within CFF for 2009/10 to 2012/13. There were separate earmarked funds for Making a Good Start and Foundation in the 2008/09 year only, subsequently incorporated into the CFF from 2009/10.

Education: Legal Cases Lost by DE

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 25026/11-15, to provide details of each case the Department lost. (AQW 29355/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of the cases lost by the Department of Education between May 2007 and July 2013 are:

- Henry Bros (Magherafelt) Ltd, FB McKee & Co Ltd and Desmond Scott and Philip Ewing Trading as Woodvale Construction Co v Department of Education;
- Loreto Grammar School, Omagh v Department of Education;
- Colma McKee on behalf of the Board of Governors of Coláiste Feirste v Department of Education; and
- Lynda O'Connor, Richard Kehoe and Catherine McLucas v Department of Education.

Legal Action: ELBs/HSCTs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 28762/11-15, on how many occasions each Education and Library Board has taken legal action against a Health and Social Care Trust in respect of these circumstances, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 29364/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have advised that no legal action has been taken over the last three years against a Health and Social Care Trust.

North Down: Oversubscribed Preschools

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education whether extra capacity is available for over-subscribed nursery schools and units in the North Down Borough Council area.

(AQW 29371/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: For admission to pre-school in September 2013, 99.8% of children, whose parents engaged with the pre-school admissions process to the end, obtained a funded pre-school place. There were sufficient pre-school places in North Down to meet overall demand.

If the Managing Authority of an oversubscribed nursery school or unit wishes permanently to increase its capacity, it can bring forward a development proposal to request an increase to the number of places available in the setting. Decisions on Development Proposals take into account the current and projected future demand for pre-school provision in the area, including provision available in other pre-school settings.

The Learning to Learn framework includes an action to introduce temporary flexibility in class size for nursery schools and nursery units up to a maximum class size of 30 in certain circumstances. I am introducing temporary flexibility in class size to help address demand within an area where statutory settings, which could accommodate extra places, wish to do so. All requests will be considered on the basis of overall capacity in the area. Officials are currently working with Education and Library Board staff to develop a system for enabling Nursery Schools and Nursery Units to apply for temporary flexibility in class size for the September 2014 intake.

Schools: Republic of Ireland Pupils

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many pupils residing in the Republic of Ireland attend schools in Northern Ireland; and what arrangements his Department has in place to monitor and recoup any costs associated with these pupils. (AQW 29386/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of pupils residing in the South attending schools in the North is shown below.

School type	Total pupils
Primary (Years 1-7 only)	132
Post Primary	275
Total	407

Source: School census 2012/13

Note: In addition to the figures above there are also less than 5 pupils attending nursery/reception classes in primary schools who are resident in the Republic of Ireland.

A number of children resident in the South attend primary and post primary schools and pre-school providers in the North and vice versa. This is reflective of the way people in border areas live and avail of services including education.

There is an understanding with the Department in the South where we meet the costs of educating children from the South attending schools in the North, and they meet the costs of educating children from the North attending schools in the South.

Integrated Education: Transformation

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education which (i) statutory; and (ii) sectoral bodies are responsible for providing support to (a) Irish Medium; (ii) nursery; (iii) Catholic Maintained; and (iv) Grammar schools that wish to explore transformation. (AQW 29389/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Support to any grant-aided school (with the exception of special schools) wishing to explore transformation, and those schools that have already transformed, is available from a range of organisations. The statutory bodies which can provide support include the Education and Library Boards. Each Education and Library Board has arrangements in place to support schools that have transformed or wish to transform.

The Transferors Representative Council (TRC) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) can also provide advice to schools that wish to undertake, or have already undertaken, the transformation process.

Sectoral bodies which can provide support to any grant-aided school (with the exception of special schools) that wish to undertake, or have already undertaken, the transformation process include the Integrated Education Fund (IEF), and the Council for Integrated Education (NICIE). Transforming schools can apply to the IEF for a grant to help with the additional costs of the transformation process. NICIE can provide support through the provision of training, and has developed a support programme which guides schools through the planning and implementation processes to help the school to achieve full integration.

Once a school has transformed, the Department of Education can provide support through the allocation of additional resources to assist with the transformation process. This funding is available to schools during the first five years of transformation. Funding of £185k has been made available for 2013/14.

The Department may also reimburse a school's Boards of Governors for the fees charged by the Electoral Reform Services in connection with holding the transformation ballot of parents.

Full details of the advice and support available to schools is contained with the Department's document entitled "Transformation – An Information Pack for Schools".

Integrated Education: Transformation

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education which (i) statutory; and (ii) sectoral bodies are responsible for providing support to (a) Irish Medium; (ii) nursery; (iii) Catholic Maintained; and (iv) Grammar schools that have undertaken transformation.

(AQW 29390/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Support to any grant-aided school (with the exception of special schools) wishing to explore transformation, and those schools that have already transformed, is available from a range of organisations. The statutory bodies which can provide support include the Education and Library Boards. Each Education and Library Board has arrangements in place to support schools that have transformed or wish to transform.

The Transferors Representative Council (TRC) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) can also provide advice to schools that wish to undertake, or have already undertaken, the transformation process.

Sectoral bodies which can provide support to any grant-aided school (with the exception of special schools) that wish to undertake, or have already undertaken, the transformation process include the Integrated Education Fund (IEF), and the Council for Integrated Education (NICIE). Transforming schools can apply to the IEF for a grant to help with the additional costs of the transformation process. NICIE can provide support through the provision of training, and has developed a support programme which guides schools through the planning and implementation processes to help the school to achieve full integration.

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The Department may also reimburse a school's Boards of Governors for the fees charged by the Electoral Reform Services in connection with holding the transformation ballot of parents.

Full details of the advice and support available to schools is contained with the Department's document entitled "Transformation – An Information Pack for Schools".

Integrated Education: Transformation

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education to outline the support available to schools from the relevant statutory and sectoral bodies once they have transformed.

(AQW 29391/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Support to any grant-aided school (with the exception of special schools) wishing to explore transformation, and those schools that have already transformed, is available from a range of organisations. The statutory bodies which can provide support include the Education and Library Boards. Each Education and Library Board has arrangements in place to support schools that have transformed or wish to transform.

The Transferors Representative Council (TRC) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) can also provide advice to schools that wish to undertake, or have already undertaken, the transformation process.

Sectoral bodies which can provide support to any grant-aided school (with the exception of special schools) that wish to undertake, or have already undertaken, the transformation process include the Integrated Education Fund (IEF), and the Council for Integrated Education (NICIE). Transforming schools can apply to the IEF for a grant to help with the additional costs of the transformation process. NICIE can provide support through the provision of training, and has developed a support programme which guides schools through the planning and implementation processes to help the school to achieve full integration.

Once a school has transformed, the Department of Education can provide support through the allocation of additional resources to assist with the transformation process. This funding is available to schools during the first five years of transformation. Funding of £185k has been made available for 2013/14.

The Department may also reimburse a school's Boards of Governors for the fees charged by the Electoral Reform Services in connection with holding the transformation ballot of parents.

Full details of the advice and support available to schools is contained with the Department's document entitled "Transformation – An Information Pack for Schools".

Schools: Pupils' Religious Background

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage of Catholic and Protestant pupils at (i) controlled; (ii) Catholic maintained; (iii) other maintained; and (iv) voluntary grammar schools.

(AQW 29393/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The most up-to-date validated figures for pupil's religious information relate to the 2012/13 school year, these are detailed in the table below. Updated 2013/14 figures will be available following the completion of the annual school census which is currently being undertaken.

Community background of pupils in primary schools by management type -2012/13

Management type	School type	Protestant	Catholic	Other
Controlled	Primary	70.1%	6.2%	23.7%
	Prep dept	65.5%	6.8%	27.7%
	Total	70.1%	6.2%	23.7%
Voluntary	Prep dept	44.7%	11.0%	44.3%
Catholic Maintained	Primary	0.8%	96.9%	2.3%
Other Maintained	Primary	10.6%	82.0%	7.4%
Controlled Integrated	Primary	44.0%	28.4%	27.6%
Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI)	Primary	32.6%	42.9%	24.5%
Total		35.3%	50.7%	13.9%

Community background of pupils in post-primary schools by management type - 2012/13

Management type	School type	Protestant	Catholic	Other
Controlled	Secondary	81.9%	2.4%	15.7%
	Grammar	76.8%	8.1%	15.1%
	Total	80.2%	4.3%	15.5%
Voluntary	Grammar	28.8%	60.9%	10.2%
Catholic Maintained	Secondary	0.9%	97.8%	1.3%
Other Maintained	Secondary	0.0%	91.9%	8.1%
Controlled Integrated	Secondary	66.8%	15.6%	17.6%
Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI)	Secondary	42.4%	41.6%	16.0%
Total		38.4%	38.4%	9.9%

Source: NI school census

Note:

1. Figures for primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 - 7 classes.
2. The other category includes 'other Christian', 'non Christian' and 'no religion/religion not recorded'.

Schools: Republic of Ireland Pupils

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what financial support the Republic of Ireland Government provides for the teaching of pupils from their jurisdiction in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 29438/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would refer the member to the answer I provided to his question, AQW 13582/11-15, published in the Official report on 20 July 2013. The arrangements have not changed.

Education: Cross-border Survey

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education when his Department will release the report on the extent of cross-border education and its associated costs.

(AQW 29439/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The purpose of the survey commissioned by the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) was to gauge attitudes towards, and future demand for, cross-border education and to identify any obstacles that may be faced by parents and pupils in the border region.

As the survey was commissioned by the NSMC, and as yet, it has not had the opportunity to consider the results, it is intended that a report of the outcomes will only be made public once the Council has completed its considerations and authorised publication.

Moy, County Tyrone: Shared Education

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Shared Education Project in Moy, County Tyrone. (AQW 29453/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware that the SELB and CCMS, as the school managing authorities, are currently working on the details for a proposed Shared Education Project in Moy.

Once my Department receives the details of the proposal it will consider the next steps.

Education: North Coast Campus

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed North Coast Educational Campus, Coleraine. (AQW 29472/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In the first instance it will be for the NEELB as the managing authority and the two integrated schools, to determine and agree the best way forward including any proposals to co-locate schools and share facilities.

I am aware that the concept of a campus for the North Coast is being considered. Department officials have met with some of those involved and been appraised of their proposals. It will be for the NEELB, as the planning authority for the area, working in conjunction with the two integrated schools to determine the next steps in developing this, or any other area solution for the North Coast area.

Education and Library Boards: Staff

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of full time equivalent staff employed by each of the Education and Library Boards as of 1 December 2013.

(AQW 29473/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of people employed in the Education and Library Boards as of 1 December 2013 is as follows:

	Non teaching staff (FTE)
BELB	3344.03
WELB	1853
NEELB	3875.4
SEELB	3385.06
SELB	4518.24

Notes:

- Figures include Headquarter staff, school based non-teaching staff, out centre and youth club staff. Teaching staff are not included.
- WELB figure is rounded up to nearest whole number.
- SEELB figure excludes all casual staff who are employed on a nil hours basis.

Education and Library Boards: Staff

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the total number of full time equivalent staff employed by each of the Education and Library Boards in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 29474/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of full time equivalent staff employed in the Education and Library Boards in each of the last 5 years is as follows:

	As at 1/12/08	As at 1/12/09	As at 1/12/10	As at 1/12/11	As at 1/12/12
BELB	3079.14	3001.59	3080.32	3066.65	3143.61
WELB	1883	1875	1860	1846	1820
NEELB	3850.2	3778.4	3782.7	3786.6	3845.9
SEELB	3273.78	3265.01	3256.11	3227.72	3246.10
SELB	4579.49	4472.82	4411.83	4369.26	4399.63

Notes:

- Figures include Headquarter staff, school based non-teaching staff, out centre and youth club staff. Teaching staff are not included.

- WELB figures are rounded up to nearest whole number.
- SEELB total excludes all casual staff who are employed on a nil hours basis.

Education and Library Boards: Staff

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether he intends to allow the Education and Library Boards to increase their staffing levels.

(AQW 29475/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware that the Education and Library Boards are generally in a state that is unsustainable. They remain in this state in the protracted absence of ESA. I therefore continue to press urgently for progress on the Education Bill.

In the meantime, my Department is currently considering proposals for a modest increase in staff in a number of priority areas.

Education Bill: Update

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Education Bill; and the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority.

(AQW 29476/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education Bill completed its Committee Stage on 8 April, 2013. The depleted state of existing structures means that it is now very urgent that the Executive agrees the Bill's progress to Consideration Stage. The establishment of the ESA can then follow at the earliest opportunity after the legislative stages of the Education Bill have been completed.

Education Bill: Amendments

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) whether his Department has drafted a paper on a proposed way forward on the Education Bill, and (ii) if so, the options contained within it.

(AQW 29477/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are a number of amendments to the Bill which I intend to move at consideration stage, subject to the prior agreement of my Executive colleagues. I hope that the Executive will agree these amendments in the very near future.

Education: OECD Country Background Report

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to place, in the Assembly Library, a copy of the submission by his Department entitled the Country Background Report prepared for the OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education Northern Ireland, United Kingdom referred in para page 2 of the Report.

(AQW 29488/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A copy of the Country Background Report had been placed in the Assembly Library. The Report is also available from the Department's website at <http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/curriculum-and-learningt-new/curriculum-and-assessment-2/assessment.htm>

Education: Generalisability Study on Levels of Progression

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education (i) when his Department tasked CCEA with conducting a Generalizability Study on Levels of Progression; and (ii) if such a study has not been conducted, to explain why.

(AQW 29489/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has not tasked CCEA with conducting a Generalizability Study on Levels of Progression. There are no extant reports which are specific Generalizability Studies of the Levels of Progression. If a Generalizability Study was to be commissioned by the Department, it is not clear how the relevance of such a study to the nature and purpose of the Levels of Progression and assessment of the cross-curricular skills would be determined and defined.

The primary purpose of the Levels of Progression is to support learning and teaching in the classroom by providing a common framework for the ongoing, formative assessment of pupil progress and to articulate clear expectations for student achievement at the end of the Key Stages.

To this end, the assessment arrangements are based on ongoing teacher observation and assessment. Teachers form rounded, holistic judgements about the Level that a pupil has attained, based on the pupil's performance as a whole, across a range of work. This form of assessment can potentially have a high degree of validity as teachers are able to obtain an in-depth picture of pupil performance through their daily observations in the classroom.

The quality assurance process of internal standardisation and external moderation is intended to strengthen the reliability of teacher assessments and comparability of results throughout the school system. This is accompanied by the provision of training, exemplification of standards and exemplar tasks to promote confidence amongst schools in the standards being applied.

Education: Generalisability Study on Levels of Progression

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education to publish any extant reports on the generalizability of the levels of progression provided to his Department by CCEA.

(AQW 29490/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has not tasked CCEA with conducting a Generalizability Study on Levels of Progression. There are no extant reports which are specific Generalizability Studies of the Levels of Progression. If a Generalizability Study was to be commissioned by the Department, it is not clear how the relevance of such a study to the nature and purpose of the Levels of Progression and assessment of the cross-curricular skills would be determined and defined.

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Department for Employment and Learning

Steps 2 Success

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline (i) the delivery partners for Steps2Success by contract area; and (ii) why locally based companies are not widely represented.

(AQW 28384/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

- (i) The procurement process for the delivery of the Steps 2 Success employment programme has been carried out by the Department for Employment & Learning under the guidance of the Central Procurement Directorate of the Department of Finance and Personnel. Following the evaluation of responses to Stage 1 of the two stage procurement process for Steps 2 Success the following organisations have been selected to bring forward bids to Stage 2:

Contract Area 1: Andersonstown, Bangor, North Belfast, Falls, Holywood Road, Knockbreda, Lisburn, Newtownards, Shaftesbury Square, Shankill.

Name of Organisations

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ■ Avanta Enterprise Ltd | ■ Pertemps People Development Group |
| ■ EOS Works Ltd | ■ Reed in Partnership |
| ■ Ingeus UK Ltd | ■ Sencia Ltd |

Contract Area 2: Antrim, Ballymena, Ballymoney, Carrickfergus, Coleraine, Foyle, Larne, Limavady, Lisnagelvin, Newtownabbey, Strabane.

Name of Organisations

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ■ Avanta Enterprise Ltd | ■ Pertemps People Development Group |
| ■ EOS Works Ltd | ■ Reed in Partnership |
| ■ Ingeus UK Ltd | ■ Sencia Ltd |

Contract Area 3: Armagh, Ballynahinch, Banbridge, Cookstown, Downpatrick, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Kilkeel, Lurgan, Magherafelt, Newcastle, Newry, Omagh, Portadown

Name of Organisations

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ■ Avanta Enterprise Ltd | ■ G4S |
| ■ Reed in Partnership | ■ Maximus Employment & Training Ltd |
| ■ Sencia Ltd | ■ South West College |

- (ii) All bids received were assessed by a panel of senior staff in the Department under the direction of the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD). At Stage 1 bidding organisations were not required to submit information on members of their supply chain. The supply chain delivery partners will not be known until the conclusion of Stage 2 of the procurement process. CPD on behalf of the Department for Employment and Learning let all bidding organisations know the results of Stage 1 on Monday 18 November 2013. The results were subsequently published on the Department for Employment & Learning website on 29 November.

Since the procurement exercise is ongoing it may prejudice the outcome of the competition if further information is released at this time.

Disability: Access to DEL Information

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline how his Department informs young people with a disability and their families, how they can access information regarding guidance and support available to them.

(AQW 29019/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) aims to ensure that clients with a disability can access information to the Department's key programmes and services as follows:

Careers Service

The Careers Service provides access to impartial guidance and support to all including those with a disability and their families through a network of professional qualified careers advisers who are based in JobCentres, Jobs and Benefit Offices and Careers Offices throughout Northern Ireland.

To ensure that pupils in education have access to appropriate careers guidance, the Careers Service has Partnership Agreements in place with 98% of post primary schools including special schools. Careers advisers attend Transition Plan meetings for year 10 pupils with a disability and their parents. These meetings enable the young person and their parents/guardians to access information and guidance regarding the options and support available to them on leaving school.

To improve access the Careers Service has also established working relationships with statutory, voluntary and community sector bodies across Northern Ireland who have a shared interest in supporting clients vulnerable to social exclusion.

The Careers Service has developed "A guide for Parents – How to help your child with their future careers plans", to assist parents/guardians to support their children in future planning and to provide information on the different aspects of careers information, advice and guidance. Careers advisers also attend parents' events to provide careers information advice and guidance.

Young people with a disability can also contact the Careers Service via a single contact telephone number or through the Careers portal on Nidirect.

Disability Employment Service (DES)

Young people and their families can access information on DES services and programmes through the Jobs & Benefits office/ JobCentre network and local disability organisations who deliver on behalf of my Department.

DES staff are keen to deliver information on its services on request and have attended events such as the NAS Adult and Parent group this year to inform parents and young people with disabilities. DES' Occupational Psychology Service staff have also assisted some discrete learning students by facilitating visits to Jobs & Benefits offices in advance of leaving college, and have also engaged with Education Board Transition Officers in Western Education Board to provide information on DES programmes and services.

Pathways to Success

Collaboration and Innovation Fund (CIF)

CIF is one of the employment initiatives developed under the Executive's 'Pathways to Success' strategy for young people aged 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Individual CIF projects use a range of methods to provide young people, including those with disabilities, with information on their activities including the distribution of leaflets, advertising in public areas and through public bodies, social media, web sites, recruitment events, liaison with other community groups and cold calling at young people's homes.

Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS)

The Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) was extended to all areas of Northern Ireland in July 2013.

LEMIS is a community-based employment-focused initiative aimed at those furthest from the labour market. LEMIS Mentors meet clients with a common employability barrier in their local area. Benefit recipients on Incapacity Benefit/Employment Support Allowance and Severe Disablement Allowance are included in the priority client group.

Community Family Support Programme (CFSP)

The Community Family Support Programme (CFSP) is an initiative designed to help families make life changing decisions to enhance their prospects and support them to become full participants in society.

Professional support workers engage and consult with parents of children and young people to promote early intervention and high quality parenting and to identify solutions to address their specific needs. This includes help for young people that may have a disability and their families to access a range of support and specialist provision.

Training for Success (including Programme Led Apprenticeship)

My Department provides Pre-Entry Training Support referral for school-leavers with a disability who indicate a preference for Training for Success. Clients are referred, after parental/ guardian consent, by my Department's careers advisers to contracted specialist support providers specialising in disability and learning support. This ensures that support needs in training are identified and put in place as soon as possible after commencement of training to ensure they are given every opportunity to overcome difficulties.

Specialist support providers such as Disability Action and Sensory Learning Support etc are contracted by my Department to work in conjunction with Training Suppliers delivering these programmes

Further Education

My Department has helped fund two online tools which are designed to help provide information and guidance to existing and potential students with a disability, to encourage them to access and benefit from further education (FE).

The online tools are:

- an information resource hub on the CollegesNI website to signpost services for existing and potential learners, to improve access to information about college provision, services and the availability of learning support services; and
- access guides entitled "DisabledGo" for students with disabilities which provide information on campus layout and on hearing systems, lighting levels and signage. The guides help disabled learners, visitors and staff to access college premises and make best use of facilities.

FE colleges provide advice and guidance to all students enrolling with a learning difficulty or disability on the support and assistance available to them through their student services network.

Higher Education

"Access to Success aims to widen participation in higher education by students from under-represented groups, including disabled persons, through a number of projects which include an awareness raising campaign to promote the benefits of higher education and a campaign to raise aspiration and educational attainment. The strategy also aims to expand the outreach activities of higher education providers to promote higher education as 'a real possibility' to young people with disabilities and learning difficulties, their parents and advocates.

To assist persons with a disability or learning difficulty to access Higher Education and fulfil their potential, my Department makes available funding through Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) to help pay the extra costs which may be incurred in attending a course of study, as a direct result of a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty. DSA can help with the cost of major items of specialist equipment, travel and other costs. My Department provides information on the support available through an annually produced "Guide to the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) in Higher Education".

In addition, my Department funds a register of freelance professional and non-professional support providers in each of the two Northern Ireland universities who are recruited and trained to assist students with disabilities. The support needs of each student are assessed and they are "matched" with a support provider(s). Disabled students can avail of a range of support providers including dyslexic coach, note-taker, proof-reader, typist, campus assistant, library assistant and/or sign language interpreter. The role of the support provider is to provide one-to-one support to the student and also to ensure that the student receives all the additional assistance he/she needs.

In addition to specific programmes and services information my Department uses the NI direct website www.nidirect.gov.uk to provide information on the full range of services, information and support provided by my Department including how to access these services.

My Department also has a range of freely available promotional literature detailing its services and appropriate contacts. This is distributed through the 35 local Jobs & Benefits offices and JobCentres and to various voluntary and statutory organisations through Northern Ireland.

South West Regional College: Cookstown Campus

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 27902/11-15, to detail (i) the titles of the courses delivered at the Cookstown campus of South West Regional College which were included in the audit; (ii) any additional funding allocated to the courses; and (iii) the numbers enrolled in each course in each of the last two years.

(AQW 29051/11-15)

Dr Farry:

- (i) As my Department did not hold the specific information relating to the titles of the individual courses provided under the audit, officials sought the information required from South West College (SWC).

As a result of the information provided, my Department has determined that, at the point when the audit was undertaken, SWC was delivering four courses for students with a learning difficulty and/or disability aged 19 or over, not six as previously advised as part of the audit.

These courses were as follows:

- NOCN Level 1 Certificate In Skills Towards Enabling Progression (Step-UP) (QCF)/On Board PLP (Full-time)
- NOCN Level 1 Certificate In Skills Towards Enabling Progression (Step-UP) (QCF) (Part-time)
- CCEA Level 1 Award in Creative Craft (QCF)/ON Board PLP
- Recreational Cookery/On Board PLP

Whilst SWC did run a further two unaccredited courses during this period, this provision was not primarily delivered for students with a learning difficulty and/or disability aged 19 or over. I apologise for any confusion this may have caused. These two courses were:

- Fabric Crafts
- Recreational IT For Beginners

These two courses were offered as discrete provision in conjunction with the Beacon Centre, and were eligible for supplementary funding from the Department's Additional Support Fund.

My officials instructed SWC to carry out a new audit of provision covering the 2012/13 academic year, in order to provide the Department with a complete list of provision for students with a learning difficulty and/or disability, across all campuses. This information is attached at Annex A which has been placed in the Assembly Library and on my department's website at <http://www.delni.gov.uk/>. The information provided is for the entire 2012/13 academic year, and not solely at the point of the audit (April 2013).

- (ii) The Additional Support Fund (ASF) is provided to further education colleges to help them to meet their obligations under the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SEND0) to provide access to those wishing to avail of FE provision, but who have a learning difficulty or disability. The level of support is determined on an individual basis, based on the needs of the student and not the nature of the disability.

SWC received £250,049 from the Additional Support Fund to help to deliver these classes for the period covered by the audit of provision (2012/13). It is not possible to break this figure down on a campus by campus basis.

- (iii) In 2011/12, SWC has indicated that they provided two courses at the Cookstown Campus for students with a learning difficulty and/or disability aged 19 or over. The course titles and enrolment figures are set out in the table below.

In addition, the table also provides details on the numbers of enrolments on the four courses identified under part (i).

2011/12	No of enrolments
Asdan Entry Level Certificate in Personal and Social Development - Year 1	22
NOCN Entry Level Award In Progression (Entry 3) (QCF)	6
2012/13	
NOCN Level 1 Certificate In Skills Towards Enabling Progression (Step-UP) (QCF)/ On Board PLP (Full-time)	7
NOCN Level 1 Certificate In Skills Towards Enabling Progression (Step-UP) (QCF) (Part-time)	28
CCEA Level 1 Award in Creative Craft (QCF)/ON Board PLP	8
Recreational Cookery/On Board PLP	14

Enrolment information supplied by SWC.

Knowledge Economy Index Report

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the third Knowledge Economy Index Report, and its findings which state that the local knowledge economy, in key areas such as software, aerospace and biotech, is growing faster than in the rest of the UK and that jobs in the knowledge economy are paying 25 percent more than the average wage

(AQW 29052/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Knowledge Economy is an important and growing component of the Northern Ireland economy which represents research intensive sectors where new ideas, new products and new processes are key determinants of competitiveness.

The report provides an ambitious vision for the Northern Ireland economy in 2030 and it will be essential that business and government work together in partnership to realise this vision. The report demonstrates that good progress has been made over the last year with the evidence showing that growth has been achieved in fourteen out of the twenty one indicators that make up the Index. However, whilst our performance over the last year has improved, Northern Ireland is ranked tenth out of the twelve UK regions which indicates the challenge we face if our economy is to grow and match the best performing regions in the UK.

It is clear that skills, employability and innovative capacity will be essential if we are to grow our knowledge economy and to close the gap with the best performing regions in the UK. The Department's Skills Strategy will be essential to realising this ambition as it identifies skills as a crucial ingredient in both rebalancing and rebuilding our economy. At the heart of the Strategy is the desire to up-skill the existing workforce and to increase the number of people with higher level skills within the workforce.

The higher education sector makes a key contribution to the achievement of economic prosperity in Northern Ireland. It does so in part by providing a supply of highly qualified graduates across a range of disciplines with the skills and attributes sought by employers. It is also widely recognised that higher skills generate higher returns to individuals in terms of employment and wages.

The Department's Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland – 'Graduating to Success', aims to create a higher education sector which is more responsive to needs of our economy and sets out the importance of ensuring that higher education learners undertake higher level courses in economically relevant subjects.

To support growth in our local economy my Department has committed to increase the number of directly funded PhD places. Under "Graduating to Success" we have set a target of doubling the number of postgraduate awards to 1,000 by 2020. This will further strengthen Northern Ireland's research and development skills base and the introduction of these places will have a vital role to play in our economic competitiveness. These new places will be focussed on areas of economic relevance to Northern Ireland as determined with reference to the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy, DETI and MATRIX.

Graduating to Success also feeds into the implementation of the overarching Skills Strategy and reinforces the need to increase the proportion of those qualifying from our Higher Education Institutions with graduate and post graduate level courses in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects.

I have also increased the funding available to the universities for economically relevant Masters course which has enabled the universities to increase recruitment in areas such as graduate conversion IT software development courses. I have also introduced a new higher education research funding model which rewards world-leading and internationally excellent research whilst providing a premium for research in STEM and priority skills areas.

Universities: Northern Ireland Students in GB

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many local students attended universities in other parts of the United Kingdom in each of the last three years.

(AQW 29087/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled at universities in other parts of the United Kingdom in each of the last three years is detailed in the table below:

Academic Year	England	Scotland	Wales	Total
2009/10	11,225	4,605	515	16,345
2010/11	11,690	4,520	515	16,725
2011/12	12,500	4,440	570	17,510

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

1. The latest available data are for the 2011/12 academic year.
2. Enrolments include undergraduate and post graduate students and fulltime and part time students.
3. Figures for NI domiciled first year enrolments at the Open University have been excluded from the above table. Although the Open University is defined as an English Institution it is likely that any NI domiciled enrolments will not be based in England.
4. For information the number of first year Northern Ireland domiciled student enrolments at the Open University is provided in the table below: -

Academic Year	NI Domiciled enrolments at Open University
2009/10	4,625
2010/11	4,865
2011/12	4,820

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

South East Regional College: Enrolments

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people are currently enrolled in courses at the South East Regional College.

(AQW 29133/11-15)

Dr Farry: The latest available validated and published data held by DEL relate to the 2012/13 academic year. The College itself has provided DEL with an in-year total of 12,130 people enrolled in courses at the South Eastern Regional College thus far in the 2013/14 academic year (source: South Eastern Regional College Management Information System).

South East Regional College: Budget

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the current budget for the South East Regional College.

(AQW 29135/11-15)

Dr Farry: The further education recurrent block grant allocation for South Eastern Regional College for the 2013/14 academic year is £24,626,910. The college will also receive £5.9million, ring fenced to meet its obligations under a Public Private Partnership contract agreement, for accommodation at its Lisburn, Downpatrick, Ballynahinch and Newcastle campuses. In addition, £9.5million has been made available sector-wide for specific purposes including widening participation in further education and the promotion of innovation. This amount is allocated through demand-led ear-marked funds, and as such cannot be disaggregated to college level at this stage in the academic year.

South East Regional College: Staff

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many staff are employed by the South East Regional College.

(AQW 29140/11-15)

Dr Farry: Further education colleges are employing authorities in their own right and are responsible for all matters relating to staff. My Department does not hold the information on the number of staff employed by individual further education colleges.

Therefore, I have asked the Principal and Chief Executive of South Eastern Regional College to respond to the Member directly on this matter.

South East Regional College: Courses

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many courses are on offer at the South East Regional College.

(AQW 29142/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not hold the information requested by the Member, as information relating to the number of courses on offer is a matter for individual colleges.

I have asked the Director of South East Regional College to respond to the Member directly on this matter.

Apprenticeships: Programme Led

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the reason why Programme Led Apprenticeships are only available to Level 2 qualification.

(AQW 29219/11-15)

Dr Farry: Programme-Led Apprenticeships were introduced in 2009 in response to the difficulties being experienced by young people in securing employment to complete their apprenticeship through ApprenticeshipsNI as a result of the economic downturn.

With the award of the Training for Success contracts in June 2013, the Programme-Led Apprenticeships programme was closed to new entrants.

In cases where all components of the Level 2 framework were achieved, and where the participant was still under the guaranteed training entitlement, the Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme facilitated the commencement of Level 3 qualifications.

The new Training for Success programme also allows for Level 3 provision.

A priority for my Department is to progress programme participants into

full-time employment and, where possible, the employer-led ApprenticeshipsNI provision. Progression may also be in the form of further or higher education.

Apprenticeships: Frameworks

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the trades in which apprentices can carry out a funded (i) Level 2; and (ii) Level 3 apprenticeship.

(AQW 29221/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department's ApprenticeshipsNI programme funds the "off-the-job" training element of an apprenticeship aligned to over 140 apprenticeship frameworks at Levels 2 and 3. Table 1 (overleaf) provides a full breakdown of funded frameworks.

As the member will be aware, in February I announced a major review of my Department's apprenticeship policy. This review, which is all encompassing in nature, is progressing as planned and I will be reporting its findings shortly.

Table 1 ApprenticeshipsNI Apprenticeship Frameworks Level 2 and level 3

Group One	Framework available	
	Level 2	Level 3
Accounting	Yes	Yes
Advice and Guidance Support	Yes	No
Aviation Operations on the Ground	Yes	No
Bookkeeping	Yes	Yes
Business and Administration	Yes	Yes
Cabin Crew	Yes	No
Cleaning Support Services	Yes	No
Contact Centre Operations	Yes	Yes
Customer Service	Yes	Yes
Driving Goods Vehicles	Yes	Yes
Facilities Management	No	Yes
Hospitality	Yes	Yes
Housing	Yes	Yes
Marketing	Yes	Yes
Payroll	Yes	Yes
PCV Driving Bus and Coach	Yes	No
Property Services	Yes	Yes
Providing Financial Services	Yes	Yes
Providing Mortgage Advice	No	Yes
Retail	Yes	Yes
Sales and Telesales	Yes	Yes
Supply Chain Management	Yes	Yes
Surveying	No	Yes
Traffic Office	Yes	Yes
Travel Services	Yes	Yes
Vehicle Sales	Yes	Yes
Youth Work	Yes	Yes

Group Two	Framework available	
	Level 2	Level 3
Active Leisure & Learning	Yes	Yes
Amenity Horticulture	Yes	Yes

Group Two	Framework available	
	Level 2	Level 3
Children's Care Learning and Development	Yes	Yes
Food and Drink	Yes	Yes
IT User	Yes	Yes
Logistics Operations	No	Yes
Team Leading / Management	Yes	Yes
Warehousing and Storage	Yes	No

Group Three	Framework available	
	Level 2	Level 3
Beauty Therapy	Yes	Yes
Creative and Digital Media	No	Yes
Dental Nursing	No	Yes
Fashion and Textiles	No	Yes
Floristry	Yes	Yes
Glass Industry / Glass Industry Occupations	Yes	Yes
Hairdressing	Yes	Yes
Health and Social Care	Yes	Yes
Nail Services	Yes	Yes
Pharmacy Services	Yes	Yes
Polymer Processing and Signmaking / Polymer Processing	Yes	Yes
Printing Industry / Print Production	Yes	Yes
Rail Services	Yes	No
Set Crafts	No	Yes
Sign making	No	Yes
Spa Therapy	No	Yes

Group Four	Framework available	
	Level 2	Level 3
Animal Care	Yes	Yes
Catering and Professional Chefs	Yes	Yes
Environmental Conservation	Yes	Yes
Equine Industry	Yes	Yes
Game and Wildlife Management	Yes	Yes
IT and Telecoms Professional	Yes	Yes
Laboratory and Science Technicians	Yes	Yes
Security Systems	Yes	Yes
Trees and Timber	Yes	Yes
Vehicle Parts	Yes	Yes
Veterinary Nursing	No	Yes

Group Five	Framework available	
	Level 2	Level 3
Agriculture	Yes	Yes
Bus and Coach Engineering and Maintenance	Yes	Yes
Construction	Yes	Yes
Electrical and Electronic Servicing	Yes	Yes
Fencing	Yes	No
Furniture Production	Yes	Yes
Landbased Service Engineering	Yes	Yes
Vehicle Body and Paint	Yes	Yes
Vehicle Fitting	Yes	Yes
Vehicle Maintenance and Repair	Yes	Yes

Group Six	Framework available	
	Level 2	Level 3
Building Management Systems	No	Yes
Gas Utilisation, Installation and Maintenance	No	Yes
Electrical Power Engineering	Yes	Yes
Electrotechnical	No	Yes
Engineering	Yes	Yes
Extractives and Mineral Processing	Yes	Yes
Ferriery	No	Yes
Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning & Refrigeration	Yes	Yes
MES Plumbing	Yes	Yes
Rail Transport Engineering	Yes	Yes
Water Utility Operations	Yes	Yes
Wind Turbine Operations and Maintenance	No	Yes

North Antrim: Youth Employment

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail how many people, aged between 18 and 24, have obtained permanent employment as a result of the Youth Employment Scheme in North Antrim.

(AQW 29242/11-15)

Dr Farry: A total of 118 young people have availed of a placement through the Youth Employment Scheme within the North Antrim constituency, the area served by Ballymena and Ballymoney Jobs & Benefits offices, and 46 of these young people have entered permanent employment.

North Antrim: Management and Leadership Interventions

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the Management and Leadership Development Programme Initiatives in the North Antrim constituency.

(AQW 29243/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department offers a suite of leadership and management interventions across Northern Ireland, which aim to improve the skills of both companies and individual managers. This suite comprises the Management Analysis and Planning (MAP) Programme, the Management and Leadership Development Programme (MLDP), and the INTRO Graduate management development programme – 30 different interventions in all. Since April 2013 these interventions have been fully funded for interested companies and participants.

During the last three years, in the North Antrim constituency area 15 companies have taken up the MAP programme; 89 individual managers have participated in MLDP; and 17 graduates have participated on the INTRO Graduate Management Development Programme. A total of £165,118 in funding has been provided to date. In addition, focused leadership and

management roadshow events were held in Ballymena and Bushmills, providing details of available leadership and management support as well as providing leadership themed talks by leading UK experts.

NEETs: Figures

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training broken down by constituency.

(AQW 29291/11-15)

Dr Farry: Northern Ireland does not have a comprehensive data source on those young people Not in Employment, Full time Education or Training (NEET). Estimates are derived from a sample survey for Northern Ireland as part of the overall Labour Force Survey (LFS), and it is not possible to disaggregate the figures further. Figures for Quarter 3 (July-September) 2013 estimate the number of young people aged 16-24 who are NEET to be 48,000 or 22.1% of the population in that age group.

Universities: STEM Enrolments

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths students, broken down by university.

(AQW 29323/11-15)

Dr Farry: The table below details (a) the number of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths PHD student enrolments and (b) the overall number of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths student enrolments, broken down by university.

	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Stranmillis University College	Total
Ph.D enrolments on Narrow STEM	654	329	0	983
Overall enrolments on Narrow STEM	5,290	5489	143	10,922

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

1. The latest available data on enrolments are for academic year 2011/12.
2. Narrow STEM subjects include Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences, Mathematical Sciences, Computer Science and Engineering & Technology.

Universities: STEM Enrolments

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths PHD students, broken down by university.

(AQW 29324/11-15)

Dr Farry: The table below details (a) the number of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths PHD student enrolments and (b) the overall number of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths student enrolments, broken down by university.

	Queen's University of Belfast	University of Ulster	Stranmillis University College	Total
Ph.D enrolments on Narrow STEM	654	329	0	983
Overall enrolments on Narrow STEM	5,290	5489	143	10,922

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

1. The latest available data on enrolments are for academic year 2011/12.
2. Narrow STEM subjects include Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences, Mathematical Sciences, Computer Science and Engineering & Technology.

Queen's University Belfast: Teacher Training/Religious Background

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for a religious breakdown of the students in teacher training at Queen's University, Belfast.

(AQW 29334/11-15)

Dr Farry: The table below details the number of Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled in teacher training at Queen's University, Belfast broken down by religion.

Religion	Enrolments on Teacher Training at Queen's University, Belfast
Protestant	70
Catholic	80
Other/Not Known	15
Total	165

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.
2. The latest available data are for 2011/12.
3. Information on religion is only collected for NI domiciled students studying at NI Higher Education Institutions and therefore the above tables do not include students from outside NI.
4. Religious affiliation is not a mandatory question and therefore can have a high non-response rate.

Apprenticeships: Armed Forces Veterans

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of Armed Forces Veterans who have progressed into employment through the Apprenticeships Northern Ireland programme, broken down by gender.
(AQW 29354/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is the responsibility of employers to recruit apprentices in line with their business needs and so it is employers that hold information in relation to the previous employment of new recruits.

My Department funds the 'off-the-job' training element of an apprenticeship and so holds information on the apprentice's current employer. My Department does not hold information on the apprentice's employment history.

Girdwood Community Hub: Timescale

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the timescale for the completion and opening of the new Belfast Metropolitan College facility at Girdwood, North Belfast.
(AQW 29395/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Girdwood Community Hub in North Belfast is a Belfast City Council project which is being supported with European PEACE III funding. Belfast Metropolitan College is not involved in the construction stage of the project but, on its completion, plans to lease part of the facility for the delivery of further education. I understand that some preliminary design work has been completed but the detailed timetable for the delivery of the facility is the responsibility of the Belfast City Council.

University of Ulster: Senior Common Room

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the decision by the University of Ulster to close the senior common room to university students and staff; (ii) to provide details of all incoming and outgoing correspondence on this issue; and (iii) whether he will seek to reverse the decision by the University.
(AQW 29506/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department provides funding to the Higher Education Institutions for teaching and learning and research purposes. The University of Ulster is responsible for its own policies and procedures, including how it manages accommodation on its campuses. The closure of the area occupied by the Senior Common Room is a matter for the University and it is not within my remit to intervene.

My Department has received and responded to two pieces of correspondence in relation to this issue.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Warm Homes Discount Scheme

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the Warm Home Discount Scheme, available in England, for electricity is not available in Northern Ireland; and what action he will take to extend eligibility locally.
(AQW 28791/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The Warm Homes Discount Scheme is a four year scheme operating in Great Britain only and is covered by legislation which does not apply in Northern Ireland.

The introduction of such a scheme is akin to a social tariff as energy companies in Northern Ireland would almost certainly be entitled to pass the cost of such a scheme on to other customers (as they are in Great Britain). As such, the full implications of introducing such a scheme in Northern Ireland would need to be endorsed by the Northern Ireland Executive.

Aside from requiring legislation, careful consideration would also have to be given to the proportion of customers to benefit from such a scheme and which customers would pay more as a result. There may also be issues around administration costs and data protection that would need to be explored.

Renewable Generation: All-island Grid Study

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 28220/11-15, since it appears the 2008 All Island Grid Study underestimated the level of small scale renewable generation, which resulted in the 11kV distribution network being unable to cope, (i) whether she will continue to base policy on the 2008 study; (ii) what fresh investigative work has been carried out; and (iii) whether continuing to base connection upgrade costs on the small generator is a viable option. **(AQW 28897/11-15)**

Mrs Foster:

- (i) The All Island Grid Study envisaged that the majority of renewable generation to meet the 40% target would come from large scale onshore wind. This still remains the case despite the increase in small scale renewables. However, since the publication of the Strategic Energy Framework (SEF) in 2010, there has been considerable progress in renewable electricity deployment and a number of developments have taken place which impact on the original assumptions. I have therefore recently approved a review of the costs to consumers and benefits arising from the SEF target of 40% electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2020. This work will feed into the planned mid term review of the SEF due to start in 2014-15.
- (ii) The Utility Regulator-led Renewables Grid Liaison Group (RGLG), which includes representation from the Department, NIE and the renewables industry, has requested that NIE explores possible technology options for increasing the grid's ability to accommodate small scale renewable generators without substantial grid investment. NIE has set up a group including representatives from relevant stakeholders to consider and report to the RGLG.
- (iii) The current connection policy is semi-shallow. That is to say generators pay for any work required on the voltage at which they are connecting, plus, if necessary, one voltage above. Any change to this policy would necessitate all customers paying higher bills and so subsidising small scale renewable generators. I understand that the Regulator has no plans to revise its policy.

Trading Standards Service: Illegally Imported Cigarettes

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the role that Trading Standards' officials have in visiting and inspecting tobacconists for illegally imported cigarettes.

(AQW 28898/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Trading Standards Service has no statutory responsibility, nor any specified enforcement role in visiting and inspecting tobacconists for illegally imported cigarettes.

Trading Standards Service: Illegally Imported Cigarettes

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 27105/11-15, to detail the location and date of all inspections by Trading Standards' officials looking for illegally imported cigarettes in the last twelve months.

(AQW 28899/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Trading Standards Service has carried out no inspections looking for illegally imported cigarettes in the past twelve months.

Renewable Energy: Strategic Energy Framework

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of any changes that need to be made to the Strategic Energy Framework in order to achieve the 40 per cent renewable energy target.

(AQW 29043/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Strategic Energy Framework (SEF) was published in 2010 and its implementation is monitored on an ongoing basis. It is important that regular reviews are undertaken of key policies and I have therefore recently approved work which will provide an updated analysis of the costs to the consumer and benefits arising from the 40% target. This work will feed into the planned mid-term review of the SEF due to start in 2014-2015.

Invest NI: Rockabill Shellfish Limited

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether Invest NI has provided Rockabill Shellfish Ltd advice or financial support; and if so provide details of this advice or support.

(AQW 29109/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has not provided any financial support or advice to Rockabill Shellfish Limited, which is a Republic of Ireland based fish processing company operating out of Balbriggan in County Dublin and Skibbereen in County Cork.

Gifts and Hospitality: DETI Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many entries her Special Adviser has made in the Department's Register of Gifts and Hospitality since they were appointed; and what is the total value of such entries.

(AQW 29160/11-15)

Mrs Foster: None and nil.

Councils: Causeway Coast and Glens

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she can take to prevent the brand name of "Glens" being removed from the domain name of the Causeway Coast and Glens council grouping.

(AQW 29313/11-15)

Mrs Foster: NITB continues to promote, market and develop the tourism product within each of the nine tourism destinations across Northern Ireland including the Causeway Coast and Glens destination.

The Department of the Environment has responsibility for introducing the Local Government Bill into the Assembly.

Superfast Broadband: Funding

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to (i) outline what steps her Department has taken towards securing funding from the UK Government following its recent announcement in the Autumn Statement of the launch of a £10 million fund to assist in the delivery of superfast broadband to 'the most difficult to reach areas of the UK', and (ii) provide an update on the £250 million allocated at the Spending Round 2013 to extend superfast broadband to 95% of all UK premises by 2017.

(AQW 29462/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The £10 million fund from the UK Government is directed at suppliers and will be used to market-test solutions to providing superfast broadband services to those areas where the delivery of such services are most commercially challenging. The processes and criteria for the Fund are currently being developed by Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) but it is understood that funding will be made available to successful projects following a competitive process under which all suppliers with an innovative solution, across the UK, will be eligible to apply.

Details around the £250 million fund announced in June 2013 are currently being finalised and DCMS is expected to make a further announcement in the near future. In the meantime, my officials are formulating a project aimed at accessing a share of this funding in order to further extend the reach of superfast broadband services into the most challenging areas of Northern Ireland. In doing so, they are working closely with DCMS colleagues to ensure that essential issues such as State Aid will be met.

Department of the Environment

Taxis: DVA Enforcement Officers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 27215/11-15, whether any Driver and Vehicle Agency enforcement officers, who were gathering video evidence on private hire taxis to date, have been subject to any physical or verbal abuse, threats or assaults.

(AQW 28151/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): To date there has been no instance where an enforcement officer gathering video evidence on private hire taxis has been subject to any physical or verbal abuse, threats or assaults.

However, in the course of normal duties enforcement officers are often subject to verbal abuse and unfortunately there have been a few occasions where officers have been physically abused, threatened or assaulted. Thankfully, these incidents are relatively rare and where officers feel threatened they will complete a 'near miss' form in accordance with Health and Safety procedures. In respect of physical abuse and assaults these incidents will be reported to the PSNI with a view to prosecution. In all cases operational risk assessments will be reviewed and amended as required.

South Antrim: Wind Turbines

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the current planning applications for (i) single; and (ii) multiple wind turbines on agricultural land in South Antrim.

(AQW 28488/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The table attached at Annex 1 details 26 current planning applications for single wind turbines and 1 current planning application for a wind farm on agricultural land within the South Antrim Parliamentary Constituency. I have also placed a copy of this table in the Assembly Library

The information was taken from the latest available renewable energy information, fully validated by the Department's statisticians, as of 30th September 2013.

Housing: Single Dwellings

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether construction of single dwellings is counted and included in housebuilding statistics; and to detail the number of single dwelling buildings which have been built in each of the last five years.

(AQW 28926/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Each year the Department publishes Housing Land Availability Summary Reports which indicate the number of housing completions in settlements (as defined in Area Plans) over a specified period, and housing land availability at a given point in time. Dwellings in rural areas are not included in the reports.

Table 1 below details the total number of house completions in Northern Ireland settlements in each year from 2007-08 to 2011-12.

Table 1 Total dwelling completions in settlements in Northern Ireland.

Year ¹	Total Completions ²
2007-08	8708
2008-09	4682
2009-10	5095
2010-11	2374
2011-12	2372

1. 2011-12 is the latest Housing Land Availability Summary report available
2. Does not include dwellings built in open countryside.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment how many Areas of Special Scientific Interest have been designated since January 2013.

(AQW 28935/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Since January 2013 the Northern Ireland Environment Agency has designated 11 Areas of Special Scientific Interest.

Taxis: Belfast City Airport

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the current position at Belfast City Airport in relation to taxi services; and whether procurement protocol has been followed and best practice applied.

(AQW 28956/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I understand that Belfast City Airport has recently changed its contracted taxi company from one which used public hire vehicles to one which uses mainly private hire vehicles. Therefore under the current legislation, passengers have to make provision for the taxi booking at an operating centre prior to engaging a taxi from outside the airport.

The Department has no involvement regarding the procurement of contracted taxi services and therefore it is not in a position to comment on whether proper protocols and best practice has been applied in respect of Belfast City Airport.

Gifts and Hospitality: DOE Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment how many entries his Special Adviser has made in the Department's Register of Gifts and Hospitality since they were appointed; and what is the total value of such entries.

(AQW 28962/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Special Adviser has not received any gifts or hospitality since her appointment.

Endangered Wildlife Species: Studies

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has undertaken, or plans to undertake, any studies into endangered wildlife species.

(AQW 28972/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department has a long track record of undertaking studies or evidence gathering on endangered wildlife species.

Officials routinely gather data on a broad range of wildlife species. Such evidence can form part of one off studies; be part of longer term, ongoing, monitoring activities e.g. wildfowl or seal surveillance; be information gained from other science experts outside the Department or form part of specially commissioned research projects. The Department also has strategic partnerships which facilitate the involvement of the citizen with recording of species.

Since the mid-80s, the focus has been wildlife species that are considered a conservation priority. Such species include those protected under domestic legislation e.g. Wildlife Order, or for which we have an international responsibility e.g. species in the Annexes of the Habitats Directive. The recent Article 17 report is a particular focus for future evidence gathering that is needed, as well of information on species to inform selection and designation of Marine Conservation Zones. New studies are proposed on an ongoing basis and commissioned subject to priority and resource availability.

Domestic legislation, Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order, and the European Habitats Directive, provide a statutory authority for the Department to be involved in such activities, including the funding of projects. Notably with the Habitats Directive, there is an expectation that the member state “encourages” relevant research.

South Antrim: Listed Buildings

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the listed buildings in South Antrim.

(AQW 28977/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Based upon the 1974 ward boundaries, which is how the Department holds such records, the total number of listed buildings in the South Antrim constituency is 317. This constituency includes all of the electoral wards within the Antrim District Council area; 2 in the Lisburn City Council area; 9 in the Newtownabbey Borough Council area, and; 1 in the Belfast City Council area.

It should be noted that South Antrim is being reviewed under the Second Survey process, and these figures may change again, when all records have been finalised.

To provide the detail of all of these listed buildings by hard copy would be unwieldy; however, the information that you have sought may be accessed electronically at the following link

www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/other-index/content-databases/content-databases-build.htm.

Once you have accepted the terms and conditions of the site, a search may be carried out by the various Council areas – in this case Antrim, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and Belfast.

You will be aware, however, that there have been boundary changes since 1974; as a result the figures should not be taken as definitive, in relation to the current boundaries. For that reason I have appended, for your information, a table which provides a breakdown of the number of the listed buildings within each ward of the Council Areas.

You may also wish to note that all of these Councils are statutory consultees in the listing process. As a result, and since the introduction of the legislation in the early 1970's, they will have been provided with a copy of each listing in their area.

Numbers of listed buildings in each ward of the Council Areas

Hb20 - Antrim	
Toome	25
Drumanaway	1
Cranfield	2
Randalstown	76
Tardree	0
Parkgate	16
Balloo	1
Massereene	28
Parkhall	6
Stiles	3

Ballycraigy	0
Templepatrick	47
Ballyrobin	21
Aldergrove	13
Crumlin	12
HB21 - Newtownabbey	
Mallusk	3
Doagh	9
Ballynure	3
Ballyeaston	7
Ballyclare	3
Jordanstown	3
Mossley	0
Carnmoney	0
Ballyhenry	0
HB19 - Lisburn	
Glenavy	30
Tullyrusk	5
HB26 - Belfast	
Ligoneil	3

Tamboran Resources

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether an application to bore a test hole has been received, via the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, for Tamboran Resources.

(AQW 28985/11-15)

Mr Durkan: No such notification has been received to date.

Carrier Bag Levy: Ministerial Meetings/Correspondence

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 28015/11-15, to list the bodies from whom he received correspondence; and with whom and when he had the meetings.

(AQW 28990/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The table attached at Annex A lists the bodies I have received correspondence from or met with in respect of the carrier bag levy since taking up office on 16 July 2013. The table also indicates the date of each of the three meetings.

Annex A

Ministerial Meetings and Correspondence since 16 July 2013

	Body / Organisation		
Correspondence	PAFA (Packaging & Films Association) North Coast Energy Saving Co-operative (trading as "FutureProof") The Lough Neagh Partnership		
Meetings	Environment Committee (Chair)	Northern Ireland Retail Consortium	ASDA
	28 August 2013	29 August 2013	15 October 2013

National Parks

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has identified any areas which could be potential National Parks.

(AQW 29013/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My predecessor, Alex Attwood, convened a panel of experts to give an opinion on which areas of Northern Ireland would be most suitable for designation as national parks. The three areas that the panel identified were the Mourne, the Antrim Causeway Coast and Glens and the Fermanagh Lakes and Mountains.

While I am aware of the benefits to be derived from National Parks, I am also aware of opposition and the concerns of landowners over what designation will mean for them. Given the level of this opposition, I therefore am of the view that now is not the correct time to proceed with national parks.

Taxis: Disability Compliance

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of the Environment what number and percentage of Public Hire Taxis in Belfast have been found to be inadequately fitted-out to carry passengers with a disability; and what feedback he has received on the treatment of, or refusal to carry, such passengers.

(AQW 29058/11-15)

Mr Durkan: During the last 12 months, roadside inspections by Driver and Vehicle Agency enforcement officers have found no incidents of non compliance with the regulations. However, there is currently an investigation underway arising from a recent complaint of some taxi drivers failing to properly secure wheelchairs when picking up passengers at Belfast City Hospital.

Taxis: Ravenhill Rugby Ground

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment on how many occasions the CEO of the Driver and Vehicle Agency and senior officials have met with each of the two largest private taxi providers and company owners or staff since 23 August 2013 in relation to Ravenhill Rugby Grounds; and to provide dates, attendees, agenda, times and venues of these meetings.

(AQW 29062/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Chief Executive of the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) has not met with the taxi operators in relation to Ravenhill.

I can confirm that the Agency's Director of Licensing, Director of Enforcement and Head of Enforcement met with fonaCAB representatives on 27 September 2013 in DVA's Corporation Street offices. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss matters relating to fonaCAB's provision of taxis at Ravenhill Rugby Ground. This followed complaints received by Belfast Public Hire representatives.

In addition, a further meeting with fonaCAB representatives was held on 21 October 2013 in DVA's Corporation Street offices with the DVA's Director of Enforcement and Taxi Operator Compliance Manager. The sole purpose of this meeting was to communicate the Department's final determination of the legal position as regards the provision of private hire taxis at Ravenhill. No agenda was prepared in advance. The document discussed at the meeting has previously been provided in response to AQW27856/11-15.

East Antrim: Planning Permission for Wind Farms

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment how many wind farms have been granted planning permission in East Antrim, in each of the last four years.

(AQW 29076/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As of 28th November 2013, my Department has approved one application for the installation of 2 wind turbines at Whitehead Golf Club on 19th March 2009.

East Antrim: Planning Applications for Wind Farms

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment how many wind farm applications in East Antrim are currently being considered by the Planning Service.

(AQW 29077/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As of 28th November 2013, my Department is currently considering 3 applications for wind farms in East Antrim as detailed in the table below.

Planning Reference	Proposal	Location
F/2013/0085/F	Construction of wind farm comprising 5 wind turbines (126m in height) and ancillary development	lands approx. 700m south of no. 35 Mullaghsandall Road, between Mullaghsandall Road and Starbog Road, Kilwaughter, Larne

Planning Reference	Proposal	Location
F/2013/0101/F	Construction of wind farm comprising 9 wind turbines (120.5m in height) and ancillary development	Lands east of Feystown Road, Glenarm
V/2013/0051/F	Erection of 2 No wind turbines (45m in height)	390m East of 61 Seskin Road Ballyclare

East Antrim: Planning Permission/Applications for Wind Turbines

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment how many individual turbines are located in wind farms in East Antrim that have (i) been granted planning permission; and (ii) applied for planning permission.

(AQW 29078/11-15)

Mr Durkan: An application for 2 wind turbines (15m high) has been approved at Whitehead Golf Club.

Three wind farm applications are also currently under consideration by the Department which propose 16 turbines in total in East Antrim. These are detailed below.

Planning Reference	No. of turbines	Location
F/2013/0085/F	5 wind turbines (126m in height)	lands between Mullaghsandall Road and Starbog Road, Kilwaughter, Larne
F/2013/0101/F	9 wind turbines (120.5m in height)	Lands east of Feystown Road, Glenarm
V/2013/0051/F	2 No wind turbines (45m in height)	390m East of 61 Seskin Road Ballyclare

East Antrim: Planning Permission for Wind Turbines

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment how many individual wind turbines have been granted planning permission in East Antrim, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 29079/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The table attached at Annex 1 details 42 planning applications for single wind turbines that have been granted planning permission in the last 5 years.

The information was taken from the latest available renewable energy information, fully validated by the Department's statisticians, as of 28th November 2013.

ID	Districts	Constituency	Date Recvd	renewable_pub	Location	Decision Date	decision_pending
F/2008/0229/F	Larne	East Antrim	03-Jul-2008	Single wind turbine	27 Starbog Road, Larne (45m South of Starbog Road).	21-Jan-2009	Permission Granted
F/2009/0010/F	Larne	East Antrim	16-Jan-2009	Single wind turbine	28m East of 275 Middle Road, Islandmagee, Larne.	22-Feb-2010	Permission Granted
F/2009/0117/F	Larne	East Antrim	29-Apr-2009	Single wind turbine	209m West of 219 Middle Road, Islandmagee, Larne	12-Feb-2010	Permission Granted
F/2009/0379/F	Larne	East Antrim	22-Dec-2009	Single wind turbine	60m east of 209 Middle Road, Islandmagee, Larne	16-Apr-2010	Permission Granted
F/2010/0190/F	Larne	East Antrim	04-Jun-2010	Single wind turbine	Site 253m North West of 55 Carnalbanagh Road, Glenarm, Ballymena	04-Aug-2011	Permission Granted
F/2010/0208/F	Larne	East Antrim	16-Jun-2010	Single wind turbine	Site 187m south east of 30 Loughdoo Road Glenarm Larne	06-Jul-2012	Permission Granted

ID	Districts	Constituency	Date Recvd	renewable_pub	Location	Decision Date	decision_pending
F/2010/0228/F	Larne	East Antrim	30-Jun-2010	Single wind turbine	9 Starbog Road, Kilwaughter, Larne	14-Aug-2013	Permission Granted
F/2010/0231/F	Larne	East Antrim	01-Jul-2010	Single wind turbine	310m (approx) South East of 49 Deepark Road, Glenarm	17-Nov-2011	Permission Granted
F/2010/0340/F	Larne	East Antrim	18-Oct-2010	Single wind turbine	400M SE of 49 Deepark Road Glenarm Ballymena BT44 0DW	07-Dec-2011	Permission Granted
F/2011/0015/F	Larne	East Antrim	12-Jan-2011	Single wind turbine	233 Metres North of 47 Manse Road Ballycarry	17-Feb-2012	Permission Granted
F/2011/0024/F	Larne	East Antrim	21-Jan-2011	Single wind turbine	390 Metres West of 91 Shanes Hill Road Larne BT40 2TQ	15-Jul-2011	Permission Granted
F/2011/0028/F	Larne	East Antrim	27-Jan-2011	Single wind turbine	Approx_x000D_200 Metres south East of 62 Mullaghsandal Road Larne BT40 2ly	22-May-2012	Permission Granted
F/2011/0044/F	Larne	East Antrim	15-Feb-2011	Single wind turbine	100m SW of 8 Sallagh Road Larne BT40 2NE	24-Apr-2012	Permission Granted
F/2011/0073/F	Larne	East Antrim	14-Mar-2011	Single wind turbine	563m South of 68 Ballyvaddy Road Carnlough	17-Aug-2012	Permission Granted
F/2011/0099/F	Larne	East Antrim	08-Apr-2011	Single wind turbine	250m north west of 160 Ballyboley Road Larne	01-Nov-2011	Permission Granted
F/2011/0103/F	Larne	East Antrim	11-Apr-2011	Single wind turbine	370m North East of 32 Carneal Road Glenoe BT40 3LR	23-Feb-2012	Permission Granted
F/2011/0107/F	Larne	East Antrim	21-Apr-2011	Single wind turbine	Loughside Quarry 146 Belfast Road Larne BT40 2PN	16-Mar-2012	Permission Granted
F/2011/0126/F	Larne	East Antrim	19-May-2011	Single wind turbine	274m South West of 3 Stewartstown Drive Larne	25-May-2012	Permission Granted
F/2011/0167/F	Larne	East Antrim	20-Jul-2011	Single wind turbine	325m South of 109 Carrickfergus Road Larne BT40 3JX	26-Mar-2012	Permission Granted
F/2011/0203/F	Larne	East Antrim	29-Sep-2011	Single wind turbine	Approx 190m North East of 22 Drumnadonaghy Road,Larne	20-Apr-2012	Permission Granted
F/2011/0211/F	Larne	East Antrim	11-Oct-2011	Single wind turbine	Site approximately 160m North West of 147 Carrickfergus Road Larne	15-Aug-2012	Permission Granted
F/2011/0224/F	Larne	East Antrim	04-Nov-2011	Single wind turbine	495m South of 34 Ballvallah Road Raloo Larne BT40 3NA	16-Jan-2013	Permission Granted
F/2011/0232/F	Larne	East Antrim	16-Nov-2011	Single wind turbine	Approx 680m North East of 85 Ballyrickard Road Larne	21-May-2012	Permission Granted

ID	Districts	Constituency	Date Recvd	renewable_pub	Location	Decision Date	decision_pending
F/2011/0261/F	Larne	East Antrim	13-Dec-2011	Single wind turbine	110 Larne Road Ballycarry BT38 9JN	11-Oct-2012	Permission Granted
F/2012/0010/F	Larne	East Antrim	12-Jan-2012	Single wind turbine	320m WSW of 401 Middle Road Islandmagee Larne BT40 3TG	17-Sep-2012	Permission Granted
F/2012/0052/F	Larne	East Antrim	13-Mar-2012	Single wind turbine	Site located approximately 246m south east of 49 Deepark Road Glenarm	11-Oct-2012	Permission Granted
F/2012/0056/F	Larne	East Antrim	21-Mar-2012	Single wind turbine	200m SE of 23 Browndod Road Larne BT40 3JS	28-Sep-2012	Permission Granted
F/2012/0080/F	Larne	East Antrim	30-Apr-2012	Single wind turbine	526m North West of 91 Shanes Hill Road Larne	11-Oct-2012	Permission Granted
F/2012/0097/F	Larne	East Antrim	28-May-2012	Single wind turbine	Approx 420m NW of 8 Sallagh Road Larne	17-Jan-2013	Permission Granted
F/2012/0098/F	Larne	East Antrim	31-May-2012	Single wind turbine	514m NW of 20 Drumnadonaghy Road Larne	11-Oct-2012	Permission Granted
F/2012/0107/F	Larne	East Antrim	01-Jun-2012	Single wind turbine	Approximately 197m North East of number 87 Ballyvallah Road Ballyclare	17-Sep-2012	Permission Granted
F/2012/0172/F	Larne	East Antrim	15-Aug-2012	Single wind turbine	150m North West of 33 Craiganee Road Larne	10-Dec-2012	Permission Granted
F/2012/0184/F	Larne	East Antrim	05-Sep-2012	Single wind turbine	95 North West of 84 Ballyvaddy Road Carnlough	21-Feb-2013	Permission Granted
F/2012/0259/F	Larne	East Antrim	09-Nov-2012	Single wind turbine	Approx 180m SW of 64 Castletown Road Ballynure Co.Antrim	17-Apr-2013	Permission Granted
V/2008/0287/F	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	18-Nov-2008	Single wind turbine	Ulidia Intergrated College, 112 Victoria Road, Carrickfergus.	22-Jan-2009	Permission Granted
V/2009/0079/F	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	15-Apr-2009	Single wind turbine	Tesco Carrickfergus Castle, Minorca Place, Carrickfergus	05-Aug-2009	Permission Granted
V/2009/0084/F	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	29-Apr-2009	Single wind turbine	109m South of 57 Knockagh Road, Carrickfergus	09-Apr-2010	Permission Granted
V/2009/0238/F	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	18-Nov-2009	Single wind turbine	Carrickfergus Grammar School, 120 North Road, Carrickfergus	08-Jan-2010	Permission Granted
V/2011/0080/F	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	02-Jun-2011	Single wind turbine	429m North West of 43 Loughmourne Road Loughmourne Carrickfergus BT38 9AW	10-Aug-2012	Permission Granted
V/2011/0092/F	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	01-Jul-2011	Single wind turbine	438m North North East of 78A Paisley Road Carrickfergus	06-Jul-2012	Permission Granted

ID	Districts	Constituency	Date Recvd	renewable_pub	Location	Decision Date	decision_pending
V/2011/0105/F	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	01-Aug-2011	Single wind turbine	211m North of 39 Cairn Road Carrickfergus BT38 9AP	04-Apr-2012	Permission Granted
V/2011/0169/F	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	23-Dec-2011	Single wind turbine	230m's North of 30 Paisleys Road Carrickfergus Co Antrim	11-Sep-2012	Permission Granted

East Antrim: Planning Applications for Wind Turbines

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment how many individual wind turbine applications in East Antrim are currently being considered by Planning Service.

(AQW 29080/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The table attached at Annex 1 details 30 current planning applications for single wind turbines within the East Antrim Parliamentary Constituency.

The information was taken from the latest available renewable energy information, fully validated by the Department's statisticians, as of 31st October 2013.

AQW 29080/11-15 Annex 1

Pending Single Wind Turbines in East Antrim						
ID	PlanningArea	Districts	Constituency	Date_Rec'd	Location	
F/2011/0042/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	14-Feb-2011	675 Metres South South West of Junction of Gobbins Brae and Gobbins Road Islandmagee Larne	
F/2011/0175/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	11-Aug-2011	280m North East of 275 Middle Road Islandmagee Larne BT40 3TG	
F/2012/0133/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	02-Jul-2012	130m South West of 30 Cairncastle Road Ballygally Larne BT40 2RB	
F/2012/0159/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	06-Aug-2012	290m South East of 34 Crosshill Road Larne BT45 4EB	
F/2012/0234/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	15-Oct-2012	331m SW of No.29 Mounthill Road Larne	
F/2013/0010/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	17-Jan-2013	240m South East of 166 Ballysnod Road Larne	
F/2013/0087/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	19-Apr-2013	Approx 267m NW of 22 Drumnadonaghy Road Larne	
F/2013/0088/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	19-Apr-2013	Approx 281m SW of 3 Mullaghsandall Road Larne	
F/2013/0095/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	25-Apr-2013	250m East of 48 Craiganee Road Magheramore Larne BT40 3JE	

Pending Single Wind Turbines in East Antrim					
ID	PlanningArea	Districts	Constituency	Date_Rec'd	Location
F/2013/0111/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	15-May-2013	240m South West of 5 Aughaboy Road Glenarm
F/2013/0118/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	22-May-2013	Approx 283m NW of 81 Ballyhampton Road Larne
F/2013/0120/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	22-May-2013	Approx. 253m SW of 18 Mullaghsandall Larne
F/2013/0145/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	17-Jun-2013	Immediately south of unit 9 (Freight Direct) Port of Larne Business Park.
F/2013/0153/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	01-Jul-2013	Approx. 300m NE of 275 Middle Road Islandmagee Larne BT40 3TG
F/2013/0163/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	30-Jul-2013	Lands 380m North West of 30 Hannas Road Larne
F/2013/0164/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	31-Jul-2013	Approx 553m South of 68 Ballyvaddy Road Carnlough
F/2013/0187/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	16-Sep-2013	100m North West of 27 Newlands Road Larne BT403LN
F/2013/0193/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	23-Sep-2013	305m north east of 137 Low Road Island Magee
F/2013/0202/F	South Antrim	Larne	East Antrim	11-Oct-2013	Site 253m North West of 55 Carnalbanagh Road Glenarm
V/2009/0258/F	South Antrim	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	10-Dec-2009	260m North West of 32 Trooperslane, Carrickfergus
V/2010/0184/F	South Antrim	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	06-Sep-2010	83m North West of 36 Marshallstown Road, Carrickfergus, Co Antrim, BT38 9DE
V/2010/0201/F	South Antrim	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	22-Sep-2010	85m North of 55 Belfast Road, Whitehead
V/2011/0148/F	South Antrim	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	15-Nov-2011	Lands 225m South West of 55 Knockagh Road Newtownabbey Co Antrim BT36 5BP
V/2011/0157/F	South Antrim	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	08-Dec-2011	289m North of 1 New Line Carrickfergus BT38 9DL
V/2012/0139/F	South Antrim	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	29-Aug-2012	Approx 400m South West of 29 Loughmourne Road Carrickfergus
V/2012/0161/F	South Antrim	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	15-Oct-2012	200m North West of 12 Watchill Road Ballyclare

Pending Single Wind Turbines in East Antrim					
ID	PlanningArea	Districts	Constituency	Date_Rec'd	Location
V/2013/0004/F	South Antrim	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	10-Jan-2013	Lands approx. 550m South East of Kilroot Business Park Carrickfergus
V/2013/0006/F	South Antrim	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	03-Jan-2013	Lands 332 metres South of 60 Belfast Road, Whitehead
V/2013/0125/F	South Antrim	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	27-Aug-2013	420m North East of 155 Beltoy Road Ballycarry
V/2013/0136/F	South Antrim	Carrickfergus	East Antrim	07-Oct-2013	270m SW of 79 Manse Road, Ballycarry

Environmental Crime: Mills Report

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the remit given to the former Director of the Welsh Environment Agency in preparation of his Expert Review Report on environmental crime.

(AQW 29113/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The remit of Mr Mills Report is the Terms of Reference announced by my predecessor on 16 July 2013, as shown below:

This review will support the DoE's on-going work to create a waste sector in Northern Ireland that complies with the law, protects the environment and underpins resource efficiency by conducting a review into:

- what transpired in relation to the waste facility at the Campsie site and to identify any failures that might have occurred in the regulation of this site, in respect of any sectors of central Government;
- the external factors leading to the extensive illegal waste dumping at the Campsie site;
- the lessons this incident provides for the future development and administration of waste management, resource efficiency and enforcement programmes.

Tree/Hedge Planting: Public Domain

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what is the policy in maintaining green sites in the Public Domain; (ii) what is the policy for further tree and hedge planting in Public Domain green sites; and (iii) what is the policy for planting deciduous and coniferous trees.

(AQW 29114/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Planning has no direct powers over the maintenance of green sites in the public domain; however, the planning system has powers to protect trees and open spaces and also considers tree and hedge planting, including the appropriate species, as part of the assessment of individual planning applications.

The requirement for the protection of open space is set out in Planning Policy Statement 8 – Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation (PPS 8). Policy OS1 of PPS 8 protects open spaces, regardless of their condition, and only permits their development if it results in substantial community benefits that significantly outweigh the loss of the public space. Furthermore, Policy OS 2 – 'Public Open Space in New Residential Developments' necessitates that public open spaces are provided as an integral part of housing developments of over 25 units or over 1 hectare in size and these are subject to management agreements in perpetuity (this provision requirement does not extend to apartments or developments that are designed to integrate with existing public open spaces).

In relation to further tree and hedge planting these are matters which are considered as part of the individual planning applications which are submitted. Many applications may need to be accompanied by a landscaping plan and conditions will be attached to decision notices as appropriate. To assist in the management of planning applications at treed sites, the Department has produced supplementary guidance entitled, 'Trees and Development – A Guide to Best Practice'. It promotes the benefits of trees within public spaces and offers guidance for case officers assessing planning proposals on 'caring for trees at development sites'. In addition 'Creating Places: Achieving quality in Residential Environments' also provides advice for developers and development management officers on the selection of tree species, the incorporation of new planting in developments, aftercare and providing sufficient space for trees during their life cycle.

Planning is also responsible for the protection of individual trees and groups of trees that are of special value in terms of amenity, history or rarity, which may or may not be under threat through the designation of Tree Preservation Orders. Applications for consent to do works to, or cut down, protected trees are subject to scrutiny by the Department before being granted or refused.

East Antrim: Location of Wind Turbines

Mr Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment to publish a map showing the location of (i) individual wind turbines; and (ii) wind farms that have been granted planning permission, or are currently being considered by Planning Service, in East Antrim. (AQW 29117/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I attach, for information, map extracts showing the location of (i) wind turbines; and (ii) wind farms that have been granted planning permission, or are currently being considered, in East Antrim. I have also placed a copy of this map in the Assembly Library.

You may wish to note that a map detailing this information for the whole of Northern Ireland is available to view on the Planning Portal at www.planningni.gov.uk, along with other useful information and statistics on renewable energy planning applications.

Wind Farms

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of the Environment whether he is aware of proposals to construct a large scale wind farm in the Doravil area of County Tyrone; and whether his Department has taken cognisance of (i) the environmentally sensitive nature of this part of the Sperrins region; (ii) the potential negative impact such a proposal could have on tourism in this area; (iii) the negative impact that this proposal could have on sites of archaeological significance; and (iv) local opposition to this proposal. (AQW 29121/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I am aware of proposals for a company to construct a large wind farm in the Doraville area of County Tyrone but my Department has not yet received a formal planning application for such development. I am also aware the site is located within the Sperrins Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Should the application subsequently be received, it will be subject to the full assessment under relevant planning policies and guidance, including the impacts on the landscape character and visual amenity of the area, and the potential impacts on tourism and archaeology. I am aware that there is considerable opposition locally to such a potential development. An application of this nature will be required to be accompanied by an Environmental Statement.

Foyle: Taxi Operator's Licence

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of Taxi Operator licences in use in the Foyle constituency; (ii) the number of taxi drivers registered with each operator; and (iii) the length of the term of each license. (AQW 29122/11-15)

Mr Durkan: It is not possible to provide information from the Taxi licensing IT system by constituency; however, information has been provided for operator licences issued with the BT47 and BT48 postcode.

As at 9 December 2013, the Department has 941 licensed taxi operators within the postcode areas of BT47 and BT48.

Of the 94 operators, 19 hold 1 year licences (284 drivers), 36 hold 3 year licences (332 drivers) and 39 hold 5 year licences (540 drivers).

A detailed breakdown of the number of drivers affiliated to operator's licences is attached at Annex A.

Please note these figures are not part of official statistics and have not been subject to data validation.

Annex A - Breakdown of Drivers per Operator 1 Year Licences

Number of drivers on Operator's Licence	Number of Operators	Total drivers
1	9	9
11	1	11
16	1	16
19	2	38
24	1	24
25	1	25
31	1	31
32	1	32
41	1	41
57	1	57
Total	19	284

3 Year Licences

Number of drivers on Operator's Licence	Number of Operators	Total drivers
1	29	29
3	1	3
4	1	4
11	1	11
16	1	16
53	1	53
73	1	73
143	1	143
Total	36	332

5 Year Licences

Number of drivers on Operator's Licence	Number of Operators	Total drivers
1	35	35
3	1	3
4	1	4
217	1	217
281	1	281
Total	39	540

Planning Applications: Statutory Agency Responses

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Planning Service has set any time limits or targets for obtaining responses to planning applications from statutory agencies.

(AQW 29129/11-15)

Mr Durkan: DOE, as the Planning Authority, will consult with a number of agencies and organisations to obtain comments on a development proposal in relation to the consultee's area of expertise.

At this time only the relevant District Council and the Health and Safety Executive are Statutory Consultees. The need to consult other consultees is at the discretion of the planning authority, depending on the nature and scale of the application. Nevertheless, there are a number of standard organisations who are consulted on a regular basis such as Roads Service and Environmental Health.

To manage the consultation process the Department has Service Level Agreements or Memorandums of Understanding with the agencies most frequently consulted. These agreements set out the basis on which DOE Planning and the consultee will deliver services to each other and defines performance targets. Although the agreements are not legally binding, both parties agree to act in accordance with the agreement.

Their overall aim is to improve the efficiency of the planning process and provide greater certainty about timescale, particularly for applicants for planning permission in the context of achieving the Programme of Government Public Service Agreement targets.

With regard to responding to planning applications, the agreed performance target with most, is that they will return 70% of all planning application consultations within 15 working days.

In the future as part of the implementation of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 identified, in addition to transferring the bulk of planning powers to councils in 2015, I will provide greater clarity and certainty for the consultation process. For the first time, identified consultees will be statutorily required to provide a substantive response to a consultation request from a planning authority within a specified timeframe and to report on their performance in meeting their duty to respond.

All future consultation responses will have to be "substantive" providing sufficient information to allow the requesting planning authority to determine the application. A holding response would not be regarded as meeting the requirements of the duty to respond.

Details of proposed timeframes, criteria as to what would constitute a substantive response and reporting requirements will be set out in subordinate legislation which will be the subject of public consultation commencing in Spring 2014.

Planning Applications: Consultation Response Times

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment whether he plans to introduce a 28 day consultation response deadline for planning applications.

(AQW 29131/11-15)

Mr Durkan: To manage the consultation process the Department has agreed targets for consultation response times with those bodies most frequently consulted. These performance targets provide the basis on which DOE Planning and the consultee will deliver services. Although the targets are not legally binding, both parties agree to act in accordance with them.

The overall aim is to improve the efficiency of the planning process and provide greater certainty about timescales.

With regard to planning application consultations, the agreed performance target with most consultees, is that they will return 70% of all application consultations within 15 working days.

In the future as part of the implementation of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, in addition to transferring the bulk of planning powers to councils in 2015, I will provide greater clarity and certainty for the consultation process. For the first time, identified consultees will be statutorily required to provide a substantive response to a consultation request from a planning authority within a specified timeframe and to report on their performance in meeting their duty to respond.

All future consultation responses will have to be "substantive" providing sufficient information to allow the requesting planning authority to determine the application. A holding response would not be regarded as meeting the requirements of the duty to respond.

Details of proposed timeframes are currently being developed as are criteria for a substantive response and reporting requirements on consultees. These will be set out in subordinate legislation which will be the subject of public consultation commencing in Spring 2014. Consequently, it would not be appropriate at this stage to commit to any particular deadline.

Waste Prevention/Arising: Targets

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any targets his Department has in place for the total amount of waste generated each year.

(AQW 29162/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There are currently no EU targets for waste prevention or waste arisings and the Department similarly has no targets for these areas. However the amount of municipal waste arising has fallen steadily since 2006/07 with an average annual decrease of 2.5%. In 2012/13 the level was 14.1% below the 2006/07 level. The recently published Waste Management Strategy sets out challenging targets relating to recycling and landfill diversion as required by the EU Waste Framework Directive and Landfill Directive respectively.

For me, waste prevention is a critical objective in terms of protecting the environment, strengthening our economy and in tackling waste crime. The Department has recently completed a consultation exercise on the development of a Waste Prevention Programme. The aim of the Waste Prevention Programme will be to maintain the downward trend in waste arisings. Specific objectives proposed include:

- Decoupling economic growth from the environmental impacts associated with waste generation.
- Encouraging people to use resources efficiently and generate less waste.
- Establishing improved resource efficiency and waste prevention as an integral part of business management and project planning.

Household waste arisings will continue to be monitored to ensure that activities within the Waste Prevention Programme are on course to comply with its aims and objectives. The European Commission intends to publish a report on waste prevention towards the end of 2014 that may introduce measures and objectives for waste prevention and decoupling. In the interim, and informed by this process, I intend to bring forward a waste prevention strategy and am currently considering options.

Waste: Measurement

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how his Department measures the total amount of waste generated ; and (ii) whether his Department measures the total amount of waste that was (a) landfilled; (b) recycled; and (c) incinerated each year; and (iii) to detail the total amount of disposed waste by each method in the last twelve months.

(AQW 29163/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The Department primarily uses legislation to require certain operators handling waste to measure or calculate the waste they manage and report this to the Department. At the moment, this does not cover all wastes generated as certain waste activities are exempt from supplying this information.

There is a requirement for all operators in Northern Ireland actively landfilling waste to submit a summary report to the Department concerning the amount of waste landfilled but there is no such requirement for all those who recycle and / or

incinerate waste. The most recently available tonnage for all landfilled waste in NI is for the period 2012/13 which is 1,111,833 tonnes. Following consideration of the Mills Report, I will ask DOE to look at options to improve information collection processes.

Incineration: Stockholm Convention

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department is adhering to the Stockholm Convention in the Executive's policy on incineration.

(AQW 29165/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Section 4, "Other Recovery", of the new Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy states that 'The Department supports efficient energy recovery from residual waste in accordance with the waste hierarchy which can deliver environmental benefits, reduce carbon impacts and provide economic opportunities.'

Further, 'In supporting efficient energy recovery the Department acknowledges that technology solutions include mechanical biological treatment {MBT} of waste which can produce a fuel (sometimes referred to as refuse derived fuel {RDF} which may provide energy from waste through subsequent thermal treatment, for example, in a cement kiln, incinerator or gasifier'.

As a party to the Stockholm Convention, the UK developed a National Implementation Plan in 2007. This has now been revised to include an account of how the Convention is being implemented across all the UK jurisdictions, including Northern Ireland, and outlines next steps for managing the Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) specified in the Stockholm Convention.

The requirements of the Convention are implemented by EC Regulation 850/2004 on Persistent Organic Pollutants (as amended), which in turn is implemented in UK law by the Persistent Organic Pollutants Regulations (2007).

The UK POPs Regulations were amended in 2010 to include further substances of concern. The Regulations have the following functions:

- To ban or restrict the production, use and sale of listed POPs (such as those which were previously used as fire suppressants, biocides or product additives);
- To require efforts to minimise the unintentional formation of POPs (for example, dioxins which might arise as by-products of combustion processes);
- To describe how stockpiles of POPs (or waste contaminated with POPs) must be dealt with.

The Department of the Environment is the competent authority for EC POPs regulation in Northern Ireland, and NIEA compiles emissions' data for Northern Ireland and submits it to the UK Pollutant Release and Transfer Register.

The key mechanisms through which the Department ensures that energy from waste plants in Northern Ireland, whether they are incinerators or other forms of thermal treatment, adhere fully to the Stockholm Convention are its planning, permitting and monitoring regimes. In common with all other UK jurisdictions, the Northern Ireland regulatory regimes take full account of the requirements of the Stockholm Convention in their implementation of the relevant EU Directives.

Councils: Statutory Transition Committees

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to his statement on the 28 August 2013, in which he raised concerns regarding the nomination process for membership of Statutory Transition Committees, whether (i) he asked his officials to draft amended regulations; (ii) whether amended regulations were drawn up; and (iii) whether the membership of any Statutory Transition Committee changed following his intervention.

(AQW 29182/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Pursuant to my statement on 28th August 2013, I had a number of discussions with my officials who investigated amending the Local Government (Statutory Transition Committees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013. I had intended that, as some councils had failed to use a fair and equitable nomination process, the Regulations should be amended to specify the nomination process that should be used. However, the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010, which provided for the establishment of the Statutory Transition Committees, did not provide the vires to allow me to amend the Regulations in the way I wished. Consequently, amended Regulations were not drafted.

Whilst I intervened with a number of councils about non-compliance with the Department's guidance on the establishment and operation of their Statutory Transition Committees, regrettably the Councils mentioned in my statement did not revisit elected member nominations to their Statutory Transition Committees. I am therefore disappointed by the inactions of Ballymoney, Belfast, Castlereagh, Lisburn and Strabane councils. I believe these councils acted unfairly and have not complied with the original intentions of the Assembly.

I am committed to ensuring that equality of opportunity will be a key feature in the new councils and the sharing of positions of responsibility across the political parties represented on councils will be a cornerstone of the new arrangements. The Local Government Bill that I introduced into the Assembly on 23rd September 2013, and which is currently at Committee Stage, provides that councils will be able to select from either the d'Hondt or Sainte-Laguë divisor methods or Single Transferrable Voting to achieve this aim. The Bill also specifies the precise application of each of the alternative methods.

Vehicle Licensing: Tax Discs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of any implications for local jobs in relation to the announcement of the phasing out of vehicle exercise duty discs.

(AQW 29189/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Vehicle licensing is an excepted matter which is carried out in Northern Ireland by the Driver and Vehicle Agency within my Department, under the terms of an agreement with the Department for Transport, represented by its Agency, DVLA in Swansea. The decision to abolish tax discs is a matter for the Department for Transport and this change will apply across the UK.

The production of a tax disc is a minor and largely automated part of the process of licensing a vehicle. It is highly unlikely, therefore, that the abolition of the tax disc on its own will have any impact on staffing levels in DVA.

Planning Applications: Processing Times

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail how many planning applications took (i) more than 6 months; (ii) more than 12 months; or (iii) more than 2 years to process, in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 29196/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The information requested is set out in the table below.

The number of decided¹ planning applications between 2008/09 and 30th June 2013², that took (i) 6-12 months, (ii) 1-2 years and (iii) 2+ years³ to process the decision⁴

	2008-09			2009-10			2010-11			2011-12			2012-13			Q1 2013-14 ²		
	6-12 mths	1-2 yrs	2+ yrs	6-12 mths	1-2 yrs	2+ yrs	6-12 mths	1-2 yrs	2+ yrs	6-12 mths	1-2 yrs	2+ yrs	6-12 mths	1-2 yrs	2+ yrs	6-12 mths	1-2 yrs	2+ yrs
Antrim	120	56	14	53	45	17	35	44	33	64	24	17	41	18	9	10	10	1
Ards	218	139	38	166	100	62	172	64	56	220	73	30	159	83	39	25	14	10
Armagh	151	122	117	109	74	68	203	69	89	266	160	91	137	96	72	43	17	15
Ballymena	169	83	22	107	82	33	98	52	45	116	56	26	71	40	20	19	11	3
Ballymoney	94	49	21	42	31	24	60	19	27	54	26	10	53	25	10	10	12	3
Banbridge	199	215	54	76	53	60	108	67	50	165	41	9	98	27	6	11	2	3
Belfast	498	278	73	256	195	68	208	100	60	370	137	31	286	136	57	42	22	10
Carrick-fergus	57	32	16	24	24	10	22	8	3	37	9	7	16	9	2	9	0	2
Castle-reagh	95	39	22	40	46	22	84	28	15	80	21	15	58	29	14	14	8	5
Coleraine	250	156	37	96	63	35	98	49	37	79	35	14	70	57	13	11	9	13
Cookstown	214	67	25	102	69	42	86	49	64	99	43	20	81	43	15	16	10	3
Craigavon	186	142	40	113	80	48	102	47	59	191	74	55	71	58	24	14	6	4
Derry	141	94	54	131	73	46	109	70	34	149	70	41	89	87	33	18	6	5
Down	244	175	34	186	120	71	138	62	60	420	107	76	221	128	29	46	22	13
Dungannon	212	104	24	100	69	32	126	46	37	111	31	61	76	40	11	20	14	1
Fermanagh	283	131	52	194	106	86	85	60	191	85	34	50	86	47	24	7	3	3
Larne	97	56	16	39	40	25	45	23	28	76	28	5	47	19	8	10	3	2
Limavady	102	47	16	38	30	26	54	44	31	83	60	23	51	23	22	2	0	1
Lisburn	457	238	64	231	138	106	179	93	62	342	116	54	235	204	64	50	23	13
Maghera-felt	232	133	82	99	97	59	71	58	84	96	18	15	86	37	5	8	10	1
Moyle	82	63	42	63	41	33	71	43	24	50	34	12	47	25	20	7	8	4

	2008-09			2009-10			2010-11			2011-12			2012-13			Q1 2013-14		
	6-12 mths	1-2 yrs	2+ yrs	6-12 mths	1-2 yrs	2+ yrs	6-12 mths	1-2 yrs	2+ yrs	6-12 mths	1-2 yrs	2+ yrs	6-12 mths	1-2 yrs	2+ yrs	6-12 mths	1-2 yrs	2+ yrs
Newry and Mourne	421	367	170	291	141	273	267	162	198	347	276	204	251	198	144	42	24	15
Newtown-abbey	122	69	14	95	88	41	88	34	32	113	23	13	93	30	15	12	6	7
North Down	279	111	25	83	72	30	67	28	20	82	19	7	71	26	14	25	3	3
Omagh	262	134	51	156	95	67	122	51	101	147	51	94	108	68	24	22	10	7
Strabane	97	36	15	63	32	22	44	39	49	60	37	24	52	41	9	6	7	1
Total	5,282	3,136	1,138	2,953	2,004	1,406	2,742	1,409	1,489	3,902	1,603	1,004	2,654	1,594	703	499	260	148

Notes:

- 1 Decided applications do not include withdrawn applications.
- 2 Q1 of 2013/14 is currently our most recently published information.
- 3 The processing time categories were calculated using the processing time information, in days, as follows:
6-12 mths: Processing time > 120 & <= 240
1-2 yrs: Processing time > 240 & <= 480
2 yrs+: Processing time > 480
- 4 A small number of applications have been excluded from the analysis as processing time information was not available.

Buses: Operator Licensing

Mr Givan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the extent of the consultation with community transport providers and user groups on the bus operator licensing proposals.

(AQW 29227/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Since my Department began a review of bus operator licensing in 2009 officials have undertaken extensive engagement with the community transport sector. This has included collective and individual meetings with the eleven Rural Community Transport Partnerships (RCTP) and also with the Community Transport Association (CTANI). A full public consultation exercise was carried out in late 2010 and this included public meetings throughout Northern Ireland.

The consultation process resulted in no clear consensus on the way forward and at the Environment Committee's request the Department began a series of focused stakeholder engagements.

In 2011 Minister Attwood set up a Bus Forum where all stakeholders including the RCTP's, CTA, the Consumer Council, Youthnet, the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC), commercial bus operators, Education & Library Boards and Health Trusts have representation.

In 2012, in an effort to move the process forward, my officials produced a discussion document (colloquially known as 'the strawman') which was presented to the Bus Forum. The members of the Forum engaged with their own organisations and reported back their findings both to the Bus Forum and to separate meetings which were held with officials. This has resulted in a number of changes to the initial document in response to this engagement, including with the community transport providers and with other organisations such as NICVA. At this stage, these are still draft proposals and no final decision has been taken.

I am aware that some community transport providers have concerns surrounding the proposals for a new licensing scheme; my officials will continue to engage with the community transport providers and users to develop a licensing scheme which will allow for a vibrant and innovative community transport sector to flourish. Most recently, my officials met with representatives of most of the RCTPs on 9 December and a number of actions were agreed as needing follow up before further engagement. Officials have requested further meetings with CTANI also.

Taxis: Single-tier Licensing

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment (i) under what title or statement was the petition from Belfast Taxi (CIC) Association submitted to the consultation on the Arrangements for Single Tier Licensing; (ii) whether the petition pertained to the consultation as a whole or just the question referring to taxibuses; (iii) whether the same weight was given to each signature on that petition as to each individual full consultation response; and (iv) whether he will publish the consultation project plan, stakeholder list and scoring and coding system adopted to weigh the responses.

(AQW 29274/11-15)

Mr Durkan:

- (i) The title of the statement was "single tier licensing reply".
- (ii) The statement said that "we the undersigned believe that in order to protect our Taxi Bus service, that the implementation of the proposed single tier licensing should be deferred until such times as the Act is ready to be implemented in full". Since the consultation stated clearly that "it is not to consider the broader policy of single tier licensing, on which decisions have been made following the 2011 consultation" and the petition did not relate to any of the questions on the single tier letter, it was not included in the summary of responses. Instead Minister Attwood was informed of the petition and the number of names included. He subsequently met with Belfast CIC to discuss their concerns. Their views, shared by the Environment Committee and other stakeholders, led to Minister Attwood postponing single tier licensing until it could be implemented in full under the Taxis Act in September 2014.
- (iii) Each response received to the letter was given the same weight when compiling the synopsis. As explained in part (ii) above, the Department did not include the petition in the responses.
- (iv) The single tier letter was issued to all taxi driver licence holders, all taxi vehicle owners and all taxi operators. Since the responses were not weighted, no coding system was used. There was no formal project plan for the consultation exercise, and it would not be common practice of the Department to have a formal project plan for such exercises; but key dates for issue and closing of the consultation, the compilation of the responses and their submission to the Minister and the Environment Committee were agreed and monitored.

Taxis

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what is the average age of (a) Belfast Public Hire; and (b) private hire taxi vehicles; (ii) what plans he has for improving the (a) quality and safety of taxis; and (b) customer service standards to be adopted by drivers; and (iii) how he will deliver on these standards.

(AQW 29275/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The average age of Belfast Public Hire taxi vehicles is 11.91 years* and the average age of Private Hire taxi vehicles is 5.13 years*.

Full implementation of the taxi reform programme will improve standards within the industry and reduce the use of illegal taxis. The introduction of taxi operator licensing in September 2012 already requires all taxis to be listed on a valid and current taxi operator's licence. This reform made a vital link of responsibility, for the first time, between customers, drivers/vehicles and operators. It is the Department's intention to introduce the remaining strands of the programme by September 2014.

Single tier taxi licensing will remove the distinction between Public Hire and Private Hire taxis, permitting both to pick-up passengers without a pre-booking. Consumer and disability groups and the majority of those already consulted are in favour of this system which will give consumers greater choice as to which taxi they use.

The introduction of taximeters and printers to all taxis as well as the introduction of a regulated maximum fare is supported by the Consumer Council, the PSNI and the taxi industry generally. It will reduce instances of over-charging and thereby promote and enhance consumer safety and confidence.

A proposed new higher standard wheelchair accessible vehicle specification will be subject to consultation early in 2014. I believe this impact on the industry is necessary to ensure wheelchair users have confidence in both the safety and comfort of vehicles licensed to carry them, and to remove the situation where users are travelling in vehicles whose safety equipment has not been tested by DVA. The proposed regulations will also prevent taxis not tested as wheelchair accessible from advertising themselves as such, providing further reassurance to wheelchair users.

The introduction of a taxi driver test for new drivers and periodic training for all taxi drivers is widely welcomed by consumer and disability groups and will improve standards in the industry, increasing road safety, providing additional assurance to passengers and raising the reputation of the industry as a provider of a quality service.

The role of my Department is to set the minimum standards and requirements which the industry must adhere to and it is the responsibility of operators and the wider industry to deliver on these standards. Once implemented, all of the reforms under the Taxis Act (NI) 2008 will be kept under review.

*These figures are not validated DOE Official Statistics. The average age of vehicle has been calculated using the date the vehicle was first registered wherever that registration may have occurred.

North Down: Listed Buildings

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the listed buildings in North Down.
(AQW 29284/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Based upon the 1974 ward boundaries - which is how the department holds such records - the total number of listed buildings in the North Down Borough Council (NDBC) area is 287. The North Down constituency also includes two electoral wards of Ards Borough Council in Donaghadee, which contain a further 58 listed buildings (highlighted in bold in the attached table). This gives a total of 345 listed buildings in your constituency. It should be noted that North Down is being reviewed currently under the second survey process, and this figure may change again, when all records have been reviewed.

Taxis: Fixed Penalty Notices

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department hold records on (i) taxi drivers who are given fixed penalty notices for breaching regulations; and (ii) convictions relevant to drivers' trade, including motoring offences, drugs offences, and any violence-related crime.

(AQW 29293/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I can confirm that the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) holds records on taxi drivers who are given fixed penalties by DVA Enforcement Officers.

Details of all other convictions are obtained through an "enhanced disclosure certificate" provided by Access NI, which includes information on spent and current convictions.

Councils: Judicial Reviews

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 28380/11-15, whether he will undertake to obtain the requested information from the three councils who failed to respond.

(AQW 29294/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The following information has been obtained from those three councils.

During 2011/12 and 2012/13 neither Newry & Mourne District Council nor North Down Borough Council applied for any judicial reviews.

Armagh City & District Council reported no cases in 2011/12. However, during 2012/13 it applied for one case, which the judge decided to split into two issues. Costs to date have been c£10,000.

Taxis: Ravenhill Rugby Ground

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment how much it cost, including overtime, to have six Driver and Vehicle Agency enforcement officers on duty to monitor the services of private hire taxis at Ravenhill Rugby Grounds on 23 August 2013.

(AQW 29295/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The total cost of six enforcement officers in carrying out a compliance operation at Ravenhill Rugby Grounds on 23 August 2013 was £694.

Local Government Reform: Expenditure

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department will maintain control of local government spending during the transition period of the Review of Public Administration.

(AQW 29316/11-15)

Mr Durkan: There are controls in place to ensure that local government does not over-stretch in terms of borrowings. In line with Section 13 (1) of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, "a council shall determine and keep under review how much money it can afford to borrow." A council may not borrow money if doing so would result in a breach of the limit determined by it under Section 13. This is examined each year by the Local Government Auditor as part of the audit process.

In terms of the expenditure of current councils in the run up to April 2015, I have issued a direction and guidance on expenditure controls for Statutory Transition Committees. This gives Statutory Transition Committees the power to examine and approve three year capital plans and revenue expenditure forecasts in their constituent councils.

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010, taken together with the Departmental direction, provides that councils must seek the consent of the relevant Statutory Transition Committee before:

- making a disposal of land where consideration exceeds £100,000;
- entering into a capital contract where consideration exceeds £250,000; or
- entering into a non capital contract where consideration exceeds £100,000.

This is to ensure that the current 26 councils cannot enter into new contracts that will have an impact on the finances of the newly created councils without first seeking permission from the Statutory Transition Committee. This power will also be applied to the new councils during the period when they will be operating in shadow mode from end May 2014 – March 2015.

Councils: Rates Convergence

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of the Environment what measures are in place to ensure that commercial and domestic rate-payers are not adversely affected by the transition period of the Review of Public Administration; and that projected savings are used to reduce the rates burden.

(AQW 29317/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Earlier this year the Executive agreed to provide councils with a reform funding package of £17.8 million over the 2013 to 2015 period, with a commitment of up to £30 million for rates convergence beyond 2015.

The £30 million will be made available for managing rate convergence as a consequence of councils merging and other boundary changes arising from implementation of the local government reform.

DFP and DOE continue to work on the design of a transitional rate relief scheme within the agreed cost envelope of £30m. The relief scheme will help manage rates convergence by protecting those ratepayers otherwise facing sudden and excessive increases as a direct consequence of councils merging or due to other boundary changes.

Local Government Reform: Cost

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of the Environment what the cost will be of implementing the Review of Public Administration; and from where will this funding originate.

(AQW 29318/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The PricewaterhouseCoopers economic appraisal of local government service delivery, carried out on behalf of and published by the Department in October 2009, indicated that under the preferred option (i.e. Transformation with Regional Collaboration), implementation of the local government reform programme could involve expenditure of up to £118 million over five years.

The Regional Transition Committee commissioned the Finance Working Group in 2012 to develop an up-to-date and accurate analysis of the full costs (transition and transformation) and benefits (including savings) of the reform implementation programme. Since then, local government has worked on this issue, and a Transition Costs Paper is currently being finalised.

Earlier this year the Executive agreed to provide councils with a reform funding package of £17.8 million over the 2013 to 2015 period, with a further commitment of up to £30 million for rates convergence beyond 2015.

My Department has no further monies available from within its own budget. Any additional costs will have to be met by local government, offset against the longer term savings that will result from reform.

Clough Castle: Union Flag

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 28210/11-15, whether the regulations are applicable at Clough Castle; and are being fully adhered to on an all year round basis in relation to the usage of the flagpole that is provided by his Department within the grounds of the castle.

(AQW 29359/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Clough Castle is not among the Government Buildings specified for the flying of the Union Flag on set days within the Regulations brought in under the Flags (Northern Ireland) Order 2000. Though the Regulations permit the Union flag to be flown 'in the same manner on the same day at any other government building', the Departmental Solicitor has advised that Clough Castle, being unoccupied, does not constitute a 'Government Building' under the terms of the Order, so the Regulations do not apply to it.

Clough Castle was gifted to the National Trust which then leased it to the Ministry of Finance in 1969 and agreed to the erection of a flagpole in 1971 to prevent the long-standing, dangerous and damaging practice of erecting a flag atop the stone tower of the Castle itself. Responsibility for Historic Monuments in State Care subsequently transferred to the Department of the Environment.

The flag at Clough Castle is not flown by the Department; nor did the Department provide the current flagpole in the Castle grounds. This was erected without permission in July of this year by persons unknown, replacing a shorter pole erected by the Department in 2008 when a pole erected in 1987 snapped off after it was vandalised.

The Department has tried unsuccessfully to limit the period of flag-flying at Clough Castle to two weeks in July. The local Loyal Orange Lodge has agreed to seek to limit the flag-flying period to July and August, however elements in the local community have proved very difficult to regulate, have broken in to the site and have threatened contractors engaged to carry out works at the Castle by the Department.

Planning Permission: Extant

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 28465/11-15, whether his definition of an extant planning permission includes minerals planning applications which have been approved and where extraction or processing are currently taking place.

(AQW 29402/11-15)

Mr Durkan: An extant planning permission is any planning permission which is still in existence. That is, any approved development commenced on or before the expiration of the time frame given in Article 34 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 and is within its conditioned time limits.

Tarry Waste: Mobuoy Road, Derry

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 28465/11-15, (i) whether the location of the known tarry waste site at a sand pit on Mabuoy Road forms part of the illegal landfilling site; and (ii) whether the known tarry waste site at the closed landfill forms part of the illegal landfill site.

(AQW 29403/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Two of the tarry waste deposits identified in the past were marked as being located within the overall area which is the subject of the Operation Sycamore investigation at Mobuoy - one on the east side of Mobuoy Road and the other on the west. During the extensive survey work that was carried out during the investigation no areas of tarry waste were encountered.

Taxis: Belfast Prescribed Limits

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the area covered by the Belfast taxi licence plate.

(AQW 29435/11-15)

Mr Durkan: The By Laws relating to Motor Hackney Carriages standing or plying for hire within the County Borough of Belfast were made by Belfast City Council on 4 June 1951. The By Laws set down the "prescribed limits" for standing or plying for hire as an area within the boundaries of a circle the radius of which shall be five miles from Castle Junction in the City of Belfast.

Habitats Directive: Compliance

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 28983/11-15, whether his answer confirms his Department's full compliance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive.

(AQW 29456/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As detailed in my answer to your previous question (AQW 28983/11-15) a full review of all extant planning permissions was not carried out at the time of designation. The Habitats Regulations require competent authorities to review all permissions 'as soon as reasonably practicable'. This is an ongoing process. Where there are amendments or modifications to planning applications approved before designation of the River Faughan and tributaries SAC the project in its entirety is reassessed. In order to maintain and enhance Northern Ireland's natural heritage my Department's priority at this time is to complete the designation of sites which are nationally or internationally important for their bio or geo diversity. The Department has complied with all aspects of the Habitats Directive.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Service: DFP Posts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why AQW 27954/11-15 remains unanswered.

(AQW 28834/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): AQW 27954/11-15 was answered 29 November 2013.

Levy: Bottled Mineral Water

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any consideration he has given to the introduction of a levy on the production or sale of bottled mineral water.

(AQW 28866/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I have not given any consideration to the introduction of a levy on the production or sale of bottled mineral water.

Pay: Mean Gross Annual

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the average salary in Northern Ireland compared to the (i) Republic of Ireland; and (ii) UK.

(AQW 28919/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The average (mean) gross annual pay for all employee jobs in Northern Ireland compared to (i) the Republic of Ireland and (ii) the UK is provided in Table 1 overleaf.

The NI and UK figures are from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), conducted by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Data for the Republic of Ireland is sourced to the Earnings, Hours and Employment Costs Survey (EHECS), carried out by the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

Both ASHE and EHECS are based on a sample of employee jobs and the reported estimates therefore have an associated degree of sampling error.

Table 1: Mean Gross Annual Pay¹ for all employee jobs², 2012

	Mean
Northern Ireland	£21,836
United Kingdom	£26,664
Republic of Ireland	€36,079

Sources:

Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (NI & UK)
Earnings, Hours and Employment Costs Survey (CSO)

Notes:

- 1 Gross annual pay covers remuneration in cash paid directly by the employer, before tax deductions and social security contributions payable by wage earners and retained by the employer. All bonuses (such as overtime, holiday pay, profit sharing, commission, etc) regardless of whether they are regularly paid are included.
- 2 Employees (full time and part time) on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay-period was not affected by absence.

Rate Debt

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the shortfall resulting from the write off of rates debt is made up; and whether, in setting the regional rate, there is a margin for bad debt.

(AQW 28958/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Rate debt occurs when ratepayers, for whatever reason, fail to pay their rates bills. With regard to write-off, this is taken into account in setting the Regional Rate and in the Penny Product calculations for District Councils.

Civil Service: Job Advertisements

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the criteria used by the Equality and Diversity Branch Corporate Human Resources when considering which job advertisements require welcome statements.

(AQW 29029/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Equality and Diversity Branch add welcoming statements to job advertisements where reviews into the community background and gender profiles of the Civil Service reveal one or more groups are under-represented compared to the NI workforce. The processes used to assess fair participation and to determine when to use welcoming statements are complicated. However, in general, action is taken where the difference between the profile of the Civil Service and the NI workforce is more than 5%. In relation to gender, action is also taken where no persons of one gender are currently employed. The reports of the last reviews into the composition of the Civil Service (the 2010 Article 55 and Gender Reviews) include detailed explanations of the processes used and copies of both have been placed in the Assembly library.

Further reviews are being carried out and the results will be published next year.

Legal Profession: Solicitors Leaving

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many solicitors have left the profession in each of the last five years.

(AQW 29067/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department of Finance and Personnel understands that the Law Society does not specifically keep statistics on the numbers of solicitors leaving the profession in any given year. The table below, based on figures obtained from the Society, outlines the number of practising certificates in force compared to the number of solicitors admitted to the roll in any given year. It can act as a guide, but cannot be considered as a completely accurate reflection as there may be other reasons for practising certificates not being issued in a given year (for example, maternity leave).

Year	Practising Certificates Issued	Solicitors admitted to the Roll
2008	2,487	170
2009	2,500	171
2010	2,559	254
2011	2,626	220
2012	2,688	198

Law: Practising Certificates

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of solicitors registered to practice in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 29068/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department of Finance and Personnel has obtained the figures below from the Law Society of Northern Ireland. In each of the last 10 years, the number of solicitors holding practising certificates is as follows:

■ 2003 – 2,001	■ 2008 – 2,487
■ 2004 – 2,110	■ 2009 – 2,500
■ 2005 – 2,160	■ 2010 – 2,559
■ 2006 – 2,298	■ 2011 – 2,626
■ 2007 – 2,358	■ 2012 – 2,688

Economic Inactivity

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people in each constituency are economically inactive.

(AQW 29103/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Estimates of the numbers of economically inactive persons in each Northern Ireland (NI) Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) are sourced from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) Local Area Database, with the most recent data available for January – December 2012. These estimates are based on the residency of an individual.

Please note that LFS estimates at PCA level are based on relatively small sample sizes and are subject to a higher degree of sampling variability than for NI level results.

The requested breakdown of economic inactivity by PCA is shown in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1: Number of Economically Inactive Persons (aged 16-64) by Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA), January - December 2012

Parliamentary Constituency Area	Economic Inactivity	
	Number	% of 16-64 Population in each PCA
Belfast East	14,000	26.3%
Belfast North	16,000	30.0%
Belfast South	24,000	30.9%
Belfast West	16,000	37.3%
East Antrim	12,000	21.2%
East Londonderry	20,000	33.0%
Fermanagh South Tyrone	20,000	27.6%
Foyle	20,000	28.9%
Lagan Valley	17,000	23.2%
Mid Ulster	17,000	28.2%
Newry & Armagh	18,000	27.7%
North Antrim	19,000	26.5%
North Down	12,000	21.6%
South Antrim	14,000	19.3%
South Down	21,000	29.3%
Strangford	18,000	30.1%
Upper Bann	23,000	29.5%
West Tyrone	16,000	28.4%
Total	319,000	27.6%

Source: Labour Force Survey, Local Area Database 2012

Stormont Estate: Car Parking

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why parking is prohibited on both sides of the access road from the Massey Avenue entrance into the Stormont Estate; and on whose direction this has arisen.

(AQW 29104/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I refer the Member to AQW 25669/11-15 which was answered on 24 September 2013.

Equal Pay Settlement: PSNI/NIO

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when staff from the PSNI and NIO, who were not part of the equal pay settlement, will be informed of the action he intends to take to resolve the issue.

(AQW 29111/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I am currently carefully considering the matter and I will update staff in due course.

Equal Pay Settlement: PSNI/DOJ/NIO

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the equal pay settlement for PSNI, Department of Justice and Northern Ireland Office staff; and for a timescale to fully implement this settlement.

(AQW 29119/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I am currently carefully considering the matter and I will update staff in due course when I have made my decision.

North Down: Unemployment

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people are currently unemployed in the North Down area.

(AQW 29132/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The official measure of unemployment is sourced to the Northern Ireland (NI) Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, the LFS is a sample survey and estimates of unemployment, at sub-NI geographies, are not sourced to the LFS because of the relatively large confidence intervals around such estimates. This is due to sample size constraints in the LFS.

The table attached is sourced instead to the claimant count measure of unemployment. This shows the number of persons claiming unemployment related benefits at October 2013 in the North Down Parliamentary Constituency Area and this figure as a percentage of the resident working age population.

Table 1 – Claimant Count at October 2013

Parliamentary Constituency Area	Claimants	
	Number	% of working age population
North Down	2,027	3.6

Barnett Consequentials

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the Barnett Formula Consequentials which result from the Chancellor's autumn statement.

(AQW 29158/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: As a result of the UK Chancellor's Autumn Statement Northern Ireland received an additional £0.3 million / £45.0 million / £51.9 million Resource DEL in 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16 respectively. In addition, Northern Ireland received £10.4 million / £28.5 million Capital DEL in 2014-15 and 2015-16. Of these Capital allocations, £3.3 million and £22.3 million are ring-fenced for Financial Transactions Capital.

Barnett Consequentials: Free School Meals

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much of the £136 million Barnett Consequentials is linked directly to the UK Government's Free School Meals policy.

(AQW 29183/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: As a result of the Free School Meals policy announcement in Whitehall Northern Ireland received a Barnett share of £38.4 million. Importantly, this allocation is unhyphenated, which means it is for the Executive to decide how this funding should be spent in line with local needs and priorities.

Barnett Consequentials

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide a breakdown of the £136 million Barnett Consequentials, resulting from the Autumn Statement.

(AQW 29184/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The £136 million Barnett Consequentials comprised net additions in Resource DEL, Capital DEL and Financial Transactions Capital DEL. In terms of Resource DEL there were net additions of £0.3 million in 2013-14; 45.0 million in 2014-15; and £51.9 million in 2015-16. For Capital DEL the increases were £7.1 million in 2014-15 and £6.1 million in 2015-16, whilst for Financial Transaction Capital the additions were £3.3 million and £22.3 million over the next two years.

Crucially, these consequentials are unhypothecated, which means it is for the Executive to decide how this funding should be spent in line with local needs and priorities.

Budget: Autumn Statement 2013

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the implications of the Autumn Statement.

(AQW 29201/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Autumn Statement has many positives for Northern Ireland, not least the £136 million increase in the Northern Ireland Executive's Budget over the next two years. This increase, of course, reflects the out-workings of the Barnett Formula and again demonstrates how this can work for Northern Ireland when Health and Education is protected from spending reductions in England.

There were also a number of specific decisions taken by the Chancellor, which will have a positive impact for many people in Northern Ireland. These included an increase of £2.95 per week in the state pension from April 2014; cancellation of next year's planned fuel duty rise; a new married couples tax allowance, which will benefit some 130,000 couples in Northern Ireland; and abolition of National Insurance contributions for those aged under 21, which could save local businesses some £10 million.

Gross Domestic Product: Gross Debt

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide the proportion of Gross Value Added which is accounted for by British Government Borrowing for the most recent five years that data is available

(AQW 29225/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: UK General Government gross debt as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) - the standard measure of economic output at a national level - is provided in the table below:

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
UK General Government Gross Debt as % of UK GDP	51.1%	67.1%	78.4%	84.3%	88.7%

Source: Eurostat

North Antrim: DFP Offices

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many offices are available in the North Antrim constituency; and to detail the square footage of 'Grade A' office space.

(AQW 29240/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: DFP has seven offices in the North Antrim constituency totalling 171,157 square feet. DFP does not categorise its office accommodation by means of Grade A, B or C.

DFP Properties: Vacant/Underutilised

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of departmentally owned properties which are either vacant or under utilised; and (ii) to outline any plans to dispose of them.

(AQW 29262/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: There are currently eight properties vacant and one underutilised within DFP Properties Division Estate.

- Two are for sale on the open market;
- Three are in the process of being disposed of;
- One is being refurbished to accommodate staff which will allow us to surrender leased buildings;
- One is currently under review as the Department may seek planning permission for change of use to increase potential yield; and
- One will be demolished.

Welfare Reform Bill: Financial Penalties

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the outworking of the penalty imposed by Her Majesty's Government, given the failure to implement welfare reforms by the 1 January 2014.

(AQW 29479/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Without any progress on the Welfare Reform Bill in this financial year, the Executive will be faced with penalties of £15 million. The Executive will need to consider, as part of its January monitoring round, the impact of these penalties on the 2013-14 financial position.

Should the delay in implementing welfare reforms stretch beyond this financial year, then the Executive will need to consider the implications of this in future years.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Prisoners: Complex Needs

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department works with other jurisdictions to find suitable facilities for offenders with complex needs such as alcoholism, substance abuse and learning difficulties once they leave prison.

(AQW 28056/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Arrangements are not in place for my Department to work with other jurisdictions to find suitable facilities for offenders with complex needs such as alcoholism, substance abuse and learning difficulties once they leave prison. Rather arrangements are in place between the South East Health and Social Care Trust and the other HSC Trusts to ensure that all relevant information is shared when a prisoner is discharged into the community.

The Department of Justice works closely with a range of agencies, in a number of other jurisdictions, in designing and developing interventions to ensure a co-ordinated approach to dealing with offenders with complex needs and inform the implementation of best practice programmes.

Ophthalmology Service

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the Regional Eye Clinic communicates (i) appointment details; and (ii) outcomes of appointments, with patients who have a visual impairment.

(AQW 28951/11-15)

Mr Poots: The in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust provides a number of services to patients with a visual impairment within the Belfast Trust area and Northern Ireland.

The majority of appointments for Ophthalmology within the Belfast Trust area are communicated to patients via appointment letters. The Trust acknowledges that these may be difficult to read for those with visual impairment as the font size and layout is limited on its Patient Administration System (PAS). The Trust is currently looking at ways to address this problem through the work of its Disability sub group on Accessible Information & Communications. Appointments are also communicated via SMS and voicemail.

The outcomes of any outpatient appointment are discussed with the patient in detail at the time of their appointment and then communicated via letter to their GP shortly after.

Any outreach Ophthalmology clinics which are held in other areas of Northern Ireland are managed locally by the relevant Health and Social Care Trust.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Voluntary and Community Organisations

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list all the community organisations in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area that received funding from his Department in the last twelve months.

(AQW 28969/11-15)

Mr Poots: The voluntary and community organisations in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area that received funding in the last twelve months are listed below. Funding was provided by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and the Public Health Agency.

Funding provided by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| ■ Aaron House Day Care | ■ Action Mental Health |
| ■ Accept Care | ■ Action on Hearing Loss |
| ■ Action Cancer | ■ Age NI |
| ■ Action for Children | ■ Alzheimer Society |

- ARC (TILLI) Project
- Ardglass Community Playgroup
- Ards Gateway Club
- Ards Arthritis Care
- Ascort
- Autism Initiatives
- Aware Defeat Depression (ADD)
- Bangor Senior Gateway Club
- Barnardos
- Beacon
- Belfast Central Mission
- British Red Cross
- Cause (NI) Ltd
- Cedar Foundation
- Christine Mc Sherry, Art Therapist
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Colin Community Counselling
- Core Respite Services
- Croft Community
- Cruse Bereavement Care
- Disabilities Trust
- Donaghadee Arthritis Care
- Lisburn Carers Forum
- Lisburn City Council Police & Community Safety Partnership
- Lisburn Disabled Christian Fellowship
- Lisburn Downtown Centre
- Lisburn Senior Gateway Club
- Lisburn YMCA
- Mainstay DRP
- Marie Curie
- MENCAP
- Mend
- Mindwise
- Mytime Active
- National Autistic Society Northern Ireland
- Newtownards Contact Centre
- Newtownards Stroke Club
- Nexus
- NI Chest Heart & Stroke
- NI Institute for the Disabled
- NIACRO
- NIAMH
- NI Community Addiction Services Ltd
- Oaklee
- Orchard Grove
- Outreach-3way
- Pathfinders
- Patrician Youth Centre
- Positive Futures
- Praxis Care Group
- Priory (Watton) Limited Prospects
- RNIB
- Saturday Fellowship
- St Luke's Family Centre
- St Luke's Parish Playgroup
- St Patrick's Senior Citizens Fellowship
- Stepping Stones
- Stroke Association NI Supporting People
- Sure Start with Action for Children
- Teenage Kicks
- The Beeches Resource Centre
- The Link Family & Community Centre
- The P.A.C.T Service
- Thorndale Family Centre (Salvation Army)
- Volunteer Now
- Voypic
- Wider Vision Women's Aid

Funding provided by Public Health Agency

- Ards Development Bureau and Network
- County Down Rural Community Network
- Flying Horse Ward Community Forum
- Kilcooley Forum
- Kiro's Centre, Newcastle
- North Down Community Network
- Resurgam Community Trust

Dementia: Diagnosis

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to improve the rates of dementia diagnosis.

(AQW 28988/11-15)

Mr Poots: The regional dementia strategy, which I published in November 2011, addresses the importance of early diagnosis, and includes an action for the HSC Board in collaboration with the Public Health Agency and HSC Trusts to draw up criteria and clear protocols for referral from GP practices to memory services. This will assist in the assessment and diagnosis of dementia. Work is underway to complete this action, as part of the wider implementation of the strategy.

The Alzheimer's Society study entitled 'Mapping the Dementia Gap' shows that Northern Ireland has a diagnosis rate of 63% (11'800 people) which is just marginally below Scotland (64.4%) and well above the UK average of 46%. This is based on the number of people on GP dementia registers.

Broken down by area, the Belfast HSC Trust rates are highest in UK.

The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that it is aware of the gap in diagnosis rates across Northern Ireland and has been taking steps to address this. Services are being developed to include pre-diagnostic counselling, comprehensive assessment, post diagnostic counselling, support and education in the area of dementia. Increasing the timely diagnosis of dementia requires multi-agency partnership working and the Trust is making significant progress in this area. As a result of these measures, the Trust has indicated that it has the largest increase in diagnosis rate across Northern Ireland and it remains committed to further improvement.

Dementia: Belfast and Northern Health and Social Care Trusts

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the differential between the rate of dementia diagnosis in the Belfast and Northern Health and Social Care Trusts in 2012-13.

(AQW 28989/11-15)

Mr Poots: The regional dementia strategy, which I published in November 2011, addresses the importance of early diagnosis, and includes an action for the HSC Board in collaboration with the Public Health Agency and HSC Trusts to draw up criteria and clear protocols for referral from GP practices to memory services. This will assist in the assessment and diagnosis of dementia. Work is underway to complete this action, as part of the wider implementation of the strategy.

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Human Trafficking: Health Service

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken in the Health Service to train staff to spot signs of human trafficking.

(AQW 28997/11-15)

Mr Poots: A range of measures are in place to train and support staff working in the Health Service to recognise the signs of Human Trafficking.

In February 2011 the DHSSPS, with the Police Service of Northern Ireland issued Guidance on "Working arrangements for the Welfare and Safeguarding of Child Victims/Suspected victims of Human Trafficking."

In October 2012 the DHSSPS and the Department of Justice jointly issued Guidance on "Working arrangements for the Welfare and Protection of Adult Victims of Human Trafficking".

Further Guidance "Pathway for Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of separated children" was launched in November 2013. Following the launch the Health and Social Care Board is leading on a training needs analysis. This will form the basis for specific training to be provided by HSCTs to staff in relation to this area of practice for 2014/15.

In addition, awareness training and/or specialist training is provided for social workers as appropriate in relation to their duties.

Learning Disability: Transition

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department is working with the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education to identify and respond to specific barriers faced by young people with a learning disability at key life transitions during school, training and employment and day centre opportunities.

(AQW 29018/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department and the HSC continues to work closely with the Department for Employment and Learning, the Department of Education, and their agencies, to assist young people with a learning disability during transition from children's to adult services and, on leaving school, to have access to the fullest possible range of day opportunities and support in appropriate settings.

To assist young people with a learning disability in overcoming barriers encountered during such transitions, each Health and Social Care Trust has designated individuals/teams who collaborate with other Departments/Agencies, allied health professionals and the voluntary and community sector, to assist the young person and their family in planning ahead. These plans should take into account the aspirations and aptitudes of the young person and seek to assist their progression into meaningful day opportunities - involving further education, training, supported employment, social and leisure activities, along with appropriate care and support.

The need for inter-departmental and inter-agency working was highlighted in the Bamford Equal Lives Report and many actions and strategies stemming from that, including the Regional Day Opportunities Model, recently consulted on by the HSC Board. It is also represented in the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership in which key agencies work together to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children. One of their sub-groups focuses on Transitions of children and young people with disabilities into adulthood.

Ambulances: Spend/Mileage

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the cost of new ambulances in the last five years; and (ii) the mileage on each vehicle, broken down by units of 10,000 miles.

(AQW 29023/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The capital spend on new A&E Ambulances in the last 5 years was £11.745m.
- (ii) The mileage for the A&E Ambulance Vehicles broken down by units of 10,000 miles are set out below:

Miles	A&E Ambulance
0-9,999	7
10,000-19,999	12
20,000-29,999	9
30,000-39,999	4
40,000-49,999	8
50,000-59,999	7
60,000-69,999	6
70,000-79,999	7
80,000-89,999	9
90,000-99,999	5
100,000-109,999	3
110,000-119,999	6
120,000-129,999	3
130,000-139,999	2
140,000-149,999	0
150,000-159,999	7
160,000-169,999	3
170,000-179,999	3
180,000-189,999	7
190,000-199,999	5
200,000-209,999	3
Grand Total	116

IVF: Number of Treatments

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 27786/11- 15, whether he intends to increase the number of treatments for IVF patients.

(AQW 29030/11-15)

Mr Poots: In February 2013, NICE published Clinical Guideline CG156 on Fertility, which updates and replaces CG11. The applicability of this Guideline to Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland has recently been considered and endorsed by my Department, and it is now the responsibility of the HSC Board to implement the guidance.

The HSC Board will now take the necessary steps to prepare a Draft Service Notification (formerly known as "commissioning plan or Board response"), which will set out its approach to implementing the guidance in the context of currently available resources and other HSC priorities.

Protect Life: Suicide Rates

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact that the Protect Life Strategy has had on suicide rates and on the care for a person at risk of suicide.

(AQW 29048/11-15)

Mr Poots: International evidence indicates that efforts to reduce national suicide trends need to be sustained and long term. Over the seven year period leading up to the publication of the Protect Life Strategy in late 2006, the Northern Ireland suicide rate almost doubled. Since then the rate has remained high with an average of 277 recorded deaths each year since 2007. Undoubtedly, lives have been saved through Protect Life services, but it is not possible to estimate how many. The Northern Ireland Audit Office has acknowledged that the relative impact of the Protect Life strategy on suicide is difficult to estimate. This difficulty is due to the fact that suicide is primarily a societal issue and is, therefore, influenced by a very wide range of interacting factors. This fact is recognised in other jurisdictions, some of which do not set reduction targets as part of their suicide prevention strategies.

A wide range of measures have been implemented through Protect Life to care for a person at risk of suicide. These include: training courses on suicide prevention and mental health awareness for health and social care staff; the emergency department Card Before You Leave scheme; the Shine project in the Western HSC Trust area which takes self-harm referrals from emergency departments and provides counselling services; community-led suicide prevention and bereavement support services; and the Lifeline 24/7 crisis response helpline.

GP Appointments

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the estimated annual cost to the public purse of missed GP appointments.

(AQW 29050/11-15)

Mr Poots: General Practitioners (GPs) are independent contractors who contract with the Health and Social Care Board to provide Primary Medical Services to their patients. As independent contractors, GPs are responsible for the day to day management of their practice, including patient appointment arrangements, therefore information on missed appointments is not collated centrally and therefore could only be available at disproportionate cost.

Health Service: Advocacy

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the funding made available to voluntary sector organisations, specifically for the delivery of advocacy services, since June 2012.

(AQW 29054/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information is not held in the format requested.

Active Tremor: Public Awareness Campaign

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 28326/11-15, why the Public Health Agency feel that active tremor would not benefit from a public awareness campaign.

(AQW 29071/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been advised by the Public Health Agency that there is no published evidence that a public awareness campaign assists in the management of this condition.

Health Service: Latex Gloves

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that UK independent advisory bodies have recommended that health care settings replace latex gloves with synthetic alternatives, whether he has any plans to follow these recommendations.

(AQW 29072/11-15)

Mr Poots: I understand the Royal College of Physicians and NHS Plus published guidelines on managing latex allergies in the workplace in 2008. The report made a number of recommendations including the use of powder free low protein latex gloves as an alternative to powdered latex gloves.

HSC Trusts have informed my Department that they have, in the main, replaced latex gloves with alternative synthetic gloves. Some HSC Trusts indicated that high quality latex gloves are used in a small number of specialist areas for reasons of dexterity, but this is risk managed.

Latex Allergy: Settlements

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he is aware of latex allergy settlements in England; and what funds are available for such settlements locally.

(AQW 29073/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am aware that there have been latex allergy settlements in England although I am not aware of the individual cases. There are currently no funds set aside for such settlements locally. In the event of a liability arising the cost would be met from within the overall funding available to my Department.

Latex Allergy: Health Service Staff

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he is aware of type one latex allergy and its affects on Health Service employees.
(AQW 29074/11-15)

Mr Poots: HSC Trusts have confirmed that they are very aware of Type 1 Latex Allergy and any potential risk to employees associated with this is proactively assessed and managed.

Latex Allergy: Management

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many of the recommendations from the evidence based guidelines for the occupational aspects of latex allergy management, produced by NHS Plus Occupational Health Clinical Effectiveness Unit and the Royal College of Physicians in 2008, have been implemented locally.
(AQW 29075/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care Trusts have informed my Department that they have implemented the recommendations in the guidelines on the management of latex allergies published by the Royal College of Physicians and NHS Plus in 2008.

South West Acute Hospital: Car Parking

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the full cost of purchasing and installing the systems for car park charging at the South West Acute Hospital; (ii) the projected running and maintenance costs of the system for each of the next five years; and (iii) the projected income that will be generated from the system in each of the next five years.
(AQW 29081/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The South West Acute Hospital (SWAH) is a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) project. The costs of purchasing and installing the systems were part of the overall cost to the contractor of providing the hospital.
- (ii) The running and maintenance costs for the car park charging systems form part of a total overall unitary PFI charge to the Trust and are not accounted for separately.
- (iii) The projected income from 1 April 2014 and over each of the next five years is £320k per annum.

Bangor: Firefighters

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many fire fighters are based at Bangor Fire Station.
(AQW 29086/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of firefighters based at Bangor Fire Station at 5 December 2013 is as follows:

Wholetime (Fulltime)	Number
Watch Commander	4
Crew Commander	4
Firefighter	20
Total	28

Retained (Part time)	Number
Watch Commander	1
Crew Commander	2
Firefighter	9
Total	12

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Agency Staff

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost to the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust of using agency staff in 2012/13.

(AQW 29088/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department monitors all of the Health and Social Care Trusts' expenditure on agency staff on a bi-annual basis and the reports are published on the Departmental internet site at:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hrd/workforce_planning/wpu-monitoring.htm

Gifts and Hospitality: DHSSPS Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many entries his Special Adviser has made in the Department's Register of Gifts and Hospitality since they were appointed; and what is the total value of such entries.

(AQW 29107/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Special Adviser has not made any entries in the Department's Register of Gifts and Hospitality.

GP Practices: 0844 Telephone Numbers

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the number of GP practices still using 0844, or other high cost, telephone numbers; and what actions he has taken following the debate on this matter in the Assembly on the 29 May 2012.

(AQW 29110/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are currently only 20 GP practices across Northern Ireland using 0844 numbers, which is less than 6% of all practices; by end of 2014 this will reduce to 10 GP practices, less than 3%. The 20 practices are tied into contracts with the Service Provider and there is no legal power to instruct practices to stop using 0844 numbers.

In June 2013 my Department arranged with the Service Provider to offer those practices a separate geographical number which would run alongside their 0844 number which patients could use. To date 10 practices have installed a separate geographical line; 2 have indicated that they are willing to install a separate geographical line; and a further 4 practices are currently exploring the possibility of substituting their 0844 number with a geographical number, using the same service provider.

Of the 20 that currently have a 0844 number, 10 contracts will expire in 2014, 6 in 2015 and 4 in 2016.

My Department will continue to monitor the use of 0844 numbers to ensure that practices do not renew or extend their 0844 contracts.

Health Service: Staff Numbers

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (i) hospital registrars; (ii) GP registrars; (iii) hospital consultants; and (iv) GPs currently employed through public funding; and the number employed during each of the last two years.

(AQW 29134/11-15)

Mr Poots: The numbers requested (headcount and whole-time equivalent [WTE] where possible) are shown in the table below.

	HSC Trust only -Specialty Registrars		GP Trainees	HSC Trust only - Consultants		GPs (principal and salaried)
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	Headcount	WTE	Headcount
2012	1240	1218.0	231	1439	1368.9	1170
2013	1207	1183.6	231	1484	1411.1	1171

Sources: Human Resource Management System, Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA) and Business Services Organisation (BSO).

Notes

1. Figures for HSC Trust Consultants and Registrars are as at 31st March in the years referred to. NIMDTA have provided GP Trainee numbers as at 1st September each year and include staff on maternity leave. BSO figures on GPs are as at November.
2. GP Trainees receive training posts first within HSC Trusts in a hospital environment, and then within GP practices. Their training in registrar posts takes three years.
3. The request for 'hospital registrars' and 'hospital consultants' has been interpreted as those working within HSC Trusts only. Note, however, that some of these staff may be providing services within the community.

4. Figures for Specialty Registrars include Locum Appointments for Training and Locum Appointments for Service working at registrar level.

GP Practices: Patient Numbers

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average number of patients seen by a GP on a daily basis in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 29136/11-15)

Mr Poots: The data requested is not available. General Practitioners (GPs) are independent contractors who contract with the Health and Social Care Board to provide Primary Medical Services to their patients. As independent contractors, GPs are responsible for the day to day management of their practice, including patient appointment arrangements; therefore information on the number of patients seen each day is not collated centrally and could only be made available at disproportionate cost.

Health Service: Primary Care Funding

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the proportion of Primary Care funding as a share of Health Service expenditure compared with the other regions of the UK.

(AQW 29137/11-15)

Mr Poots: Expenditure by the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency on the four strands of primary care (comprising General Medical Services, General Dental Services, General Ophthalmic Services and Pharmaceutical Services) amounted to £805m in 2012/13.

This represented 22.5% of health-related expenditure in 2012/13 (ie excluding capital expenditure, expenditure by the NI Fire and Rescue Service and spending on personal social services).

Expenditure data for primary care services in the other UK regions is not available on a consistent basis. Therefore a comparable figure is not available.

Nurses: Specialist Training

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of specialist nurses undergoing training in the current financial year and each of the last three years; and the funding committed to support that specialist training.

(AQW 29138/11-15)

Mr Poots: Detailed Information on the number of specialist nurses undergoing training could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Since 2009/10 to date over 840 places have been provided on specialist nursing and midwifery post-registration education specialist practice programmes and post graduate qualifications, covering a wide range of areas including, but not limited to, asthma, allergy, addiction, Parkinson's disease care, Paediatric Thoracic Practice and cardiology.

The Department spends in the region of £7.6m annually on postgraduate nurse training. This figure includes specialist nursing and midwifery training.

Whistle-blowing: Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the statutory function of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority as a prescribed body under whistleblowing legislation.

(AQW 29141/11-15)

Mr Poots: Prescribed persons are responsible for investigating allegations that fall under their jurisdiction, and for protecting the whistleblower and their interests while conducting an investigation. The RQIA is prescribed as having a role in relation to matters relating to the quality, safety, and availability of health and social care services provided by statutory, independent, community and voluntary providers in Northern Ireland.

Dementia: Strategy and Action Plan

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Dementia Strategy Implementation Group and the progress of the current action plan.

(AQW 29143/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board and Public Health Agency jointly lead a regional group, which includes people with dementia and their carers, to oversee the implementation of the Dementia Strategy and its recommendations across Northern Ireland. The group has drawn up an Action Plan which is used to report progress in the implementation of the strategy to the Department.

The Action Plan contains 44 initiatives which are being progressed under various headings such as Reducing the Risk or Delaying the Onset of Dementia, Raising Awareness, Promoting Early Assessment and Diagnosis, Supporting People with Dementia and Supporting Carers.

My Department received an update report in June 2013 which detailed significant progress on a majority of the actions. A further update on progress is expected this month.

South West Acute Hospital: Emergency Department

Mr McKinney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are any plans to downgrade the Accident and Emergency department at the South West Acute Hospital.

(AQW 29144/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are no plans to downgrade the South West Acute Hospital's emergency department.

Children: Internet Safety

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department and its arm's-length bodies are taking to protect children from abuse through the internet.

(AQW 29146/11-15)

Mr Poots: At Departmental level, a senior official sits on the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) Executive Board. The overall mission of the UKCCIS is to coordinate the efforts of Government, industry and others to keep children safe online. My Department also sponsors the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI). As a strategic priority, the SBNI has agreed to develop a co-ordinated strategy and working model to help children at risk of: becoming criminalised through online activity; bullying through cyber activity; and sexual abuse through sexting and online exploitation. To date the SBNI has undertaken a number of initiatives in this area including: a presentation to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure (CAL) in relation to the Investigation into Gaps in Child Protection and Safeguarding across the CAL remit; the funding of training for all SBNI member agencies in the use of the UK Safer Internet Centre risk assessment; and the commissioning of the National Children's Bureau to research e-safety messages available in Northern Ireland to young people, parents and practitioners with which to inform delivery of the SBNI's Strategic Priority, this will be launched in January 2014.

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) continues to prioritise the protection of children through the commissioning of services to protect children from all forms of abuse. The HSCB is supported by all five HSC Trusts which have developed a number of initiatives to protect children from abuse through the Internet. Those initiatives include specific training for Trust staff, including Looked After Children Teams, Residential Staff, and Foster Carers; the agreement of an individual safe caring plan for each Looked After Child at the beginning of their placement which includes safe practices for computer usage; the placing of restrictions on IT equipment provided to Looked After Children to prevent the access of inappropriate material; and the development of leaflets advising children on how to keep safe online.

Human Papilloma Virus: Detection

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of detections of the Human Papilloma Virus over each of the last ten years; and whether his Department is aware of any subsequent deaths as a consequence of the disease.

(AQW 29170/11-15)

Mr Poots: The purpose of the human papillomavirus (HPV) immunisation programme is to prevent cases of and deaths from cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women worldwide. HPV causes 99% per cent of invasive cervical cancer. HPV is a virus that is spread through sexual activity.

This programme, which offers vaccination to all girls when they are 12-13 years old, was introduced in Northern Ireland in 2008 by the then Health Minister, Michael McGimpsey, following a recommendation from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). JCVI is an independent expert advisory committee that advises the four UK Health Ministers. JCVI consider all the available medical and scientific evidence before recommending which vaccines should be offered. It is expected that the HPV immunisation programme will significantly reduce the incidence of cervical cancer in Northern Ireland in future years.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is the government agency responsible for ensuring that medicines and medical devices work and that they are acceptably safe. All vaccination programmes in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the UK are subject to ongoing safety monitoring through the Yellow Card system. This ensures that even if there is merely a suspicion that a vaccine or a combination of vaccines has caused an adverse reaction, patients and health professionals are asked to send a Yellow Card to the MHRA. Yellow Card reports received by MHRA on suspected adverse reactions are evaluated, together with additional sources of information such as clinical trial data, medical literature or data from international medicines regulators, in order to identify previously unidentified safety issues or side effects. The MHRA takes action whenever necessary to ensure that vaccines are used in a way that minimises risk while maximising patient benefit. I am not aware of any concerns regarding the HPV vaccines.

HPV vaccines are not used to treat the human papillomavirus; they are a preventative measure. HPV vaccines are highly effective at preventing the infection of the HPV types covered by the vaccines but to be fully effective a girl needs to receive three separate injections over a 6-month period as recommended by JCVI and the vaccine manufacturers.

I am not in a position to provide a detailed breakdown of the cost of the HPV vaccination programme since it was introduced, due to a commercial confidentiality clause in the contract for the supply of the vaccine Cervarix which was used across

the UK when the HPV vaccination programme was introduced, however I can advise that the programme currently costs approximately £900k per annum. The broad breakdown of this figure is approximately £590k for the vaccine and £340k for administration of the vaccine by school health teams.

Human papillomavirus is not routinely tested for in Northern Ireland. There are approximately 100 types of human papillomavirus, of which about 40 infect the genital tract. Although most infections are asymptomatic and self-limiting, genital infection by HPV is associated with genital warts and anogenital cancers in both men and women. HPV types are classified as either high-risk or low-risk, depending on their association with the development of cancer. Most HPV infections in young women are temporary and have little long-term significance. Seventy percent of infections are gone in one year and ninety percent in two years. However, when the infection persists in 5% to 10% of infected women there is high risk of developing precancerous lesions of the cervix, which can progress to invasive cervical cancer. This process usually takes 10 to 15 years, providing many opportunities for detection and treatment of the pre-cancerous lesion. In January 2013 HPV Testing was incorporated within the NI Cervical Screening Programme. Cervical smears which contain borderline or low-grade abnormalities are tested for high-risk HPV strains and, if a test is positive, the woman is referred to colposcopy. Women with borderline or mildly abnormal smears that are HPV-negative are able to return to routine recall for cervical screening straight away instead of having a number of follow-up smears.

Human papillomavirus is not a disease; it is a micro-organism which causes a range of diseases. The HPV vaccine that is currently used in the UK – Gardasil – was designed by the manufacturer to prevent not only cervical cancer but also genital warts.

Because HPV is transmitted through sexual contact, girls are offered vaccination at age 12/13, before the vast majority of them become sexually active. Cervical cancer is most commonly diagnosed between the ages of 25 and 50. As the immunisation programme was introduced in 2008 it will be several decades yet before the full impact of the programme can be known, however it is expected that in due course HPV vaccination will prevent up to 70% of invasive cervical cancers.

Table A, below, shows the number of cases of cervical cancer in the period 2007 to 2011 in Northern Ireland.

Table A

Year	Cervix (C53) Cancer	
	Cases Diagnosed	Deaths*
2007	89	16
2008	127	28
2009	119	21
2010	89	25
2011	105	23

Sources: Northern Ireland Cancer Registry (NICR) and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

*Based on year death was registered.

Table B, below, shows the number of anogenital warts cases recorded in Northern Ireland in the three years from 2010/11 to 2012/13. All cases of anogenital warts are caused by HPV.

Table B

Description	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Anogenital warts - first attack	2,210	2,271	2,124

Human Papilloma Virus: Costs

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of the Human Papilloma Virus Vaccine since its adoption, including purchasing and administration costs.

(AQW 29171/11-15)

Mr Poots: The purpose of the human papillomavirus (HPV) immunisation programme is to prevent cases of and deaths from cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women worldwide. HPV causes 99% per cent of invasive cervical cancer. HPV is a virus that is spread through sexual activity.

This programme, which offers vaccination to all girls when they are 12-13 years old, was introduced in Northern Ireland in 2008 by the then Health Minister, Michael McGimpsey, following a recommendation from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). JCVI is an independent expert advisory committee that advises the four UK Health Ministers. JCVI consider all the available medical and scientific evidence before recommending which vaccines should be offered. It is expected that the HPV immunisation programme will significantly reduce the incidence of cervical cancer in Northern Ireland in future years.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is the government agency responsible for ensuring that medicines and medical devices work and that they are acceptably safe. All vaccination programmes in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the UK are subject to ongoing safety monitoring through the Yellow Card system. This ensures that even if there is merely a suspicion that a vaccine or a combination of vaccines has caused an adverse reaction, patients and health professionals are asked to send a Yellow Card to the MHRA. Yellow Card reports received by MHRA on suspected adverse reactions are evaluated, together with additional sources of information such as clinical trial data, medical literature or data from international medicines regulators, in order to identify previously unidentified safety issues or side effects. The MHRA takes action whenever necessary to ensure that vaccines are used in a way that minimises risk while maximising patient benefit. I am not aware of any concerns regarding the HPV vaccines.

HPV vaccines are not used to treat the human papillomavirus; they are a preventative measure. HPV vaccines are highly effective at preventing the infection of the HPV types covered by the vaccines but to be fully effective a girl needs to receive three separate injections over a 6-month period as recommended by JCVI and the vaccine manufacturers.

I am not in a position to provide a detailed breakdown of the cost of the HPV vaccination programme since it was introduced, due to a commercial confidentiality clause in the contract for the supply of the vaccine Cervarix which was used across the UK when the HPV vaccination programme was introduced, however I can advise that the programme currently costs approximately £900k per annum. The broad breakdown of this figure is approximately £590k for the vaccine and £340k for administration of the vaccine by school health teams.

Human papillomavirus is not routinely tested for in Northern Ireland. There are approximately 100 types of human papillomavirus, of which about 40 infect the genital tract. Although most infections are asymptomatic and self-limiting, genital infection by HPV is associated with genital warts and anogenital cancers in both men and women. HPV types are classified as either high-risk or low-risk, depending on their association with the development of cancer. Most HPV infections in young women are temporary and have little long-term significance. Seventy percent of infections are gone in one year and ninety percent in two years. However, when the infection persists in 5% to 10% of infected women there is high risk of developing precancerous lesions of the cervix, which can progress to invasive cervical cancer. This process usually takes 10 to 15 years, providing many opportunities for detection and treatment of the pre-cancerous lesion. In January 2013 HPV Testing was incorporated within the NI Cervical Screening Programme. Cervical smears which contain borderline or low-grade abnormalities are tested for high-risk HPV strains and, if a test is positive, the woman is referred to colposcopy. Women with borderline or mildly abnormal smears that are HPV-negative are able to return to routine recall for cervical screening straight away instead of having a number of follow-up smears.

Human papillomavirus is not a disease; it is a micro-organism which causes a range of diseases. The HPV vaccine that is currently used in the UK – Gardasil – was designed by the manufacturer to prevent not only cervical cancer but also genital warts.

Because HPV is transmitted through sexual contact, girls are offered vaccination at age 12/13, before the vast majority of them become sexually active. Cervical cancer is most commonly diagnosed between the ages of 25 and 50. As the immunisation programme was introduced in 2008 it will be several decades yet before the full impact of the programme can be known, however it is expected that in due course HPV vaccination will prevent up to 70% of invasive cervical cancers.

Table A, below, shows the number of cases of cervical cancer in the period 2007 to 2011 in Northern Ireland.

Table A

Year	Cervix (C53) Cancer	
	Cases Diagnosed	Deaths*
2007	89	16
2008	127	28
2009	119	21
2010	89	25
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Sources: Northern Ireland Cancer Registry (NICR) and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

*Based on year death was registered.

Table B, below, shows the number of anogenital warts cases recorded in Northern Ireland in the three years from 2010/11 to 2012/13. All cases of anogenital warts are caused by HPV.

Table B

Description	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Anogenital warts - first attack	2,210	2,271	2,124

Human Papilloma Virus: Treatment

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why people requiring treatment for the Human Papilloma Virus are recommended to receive 3 separate doses of the Human Papilloma Virus Vaccine.

(AQW 29172/11-15)

Mr Poots: The purpose of the human papillomavirus (HPV) immunisation programme is to prevent cases of and deaths from cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women worldwide. HPV causes 99% per cent of invasive cervical cancer. HPV is a virus that is spread through sexual activity.

This programme, which offers vaccination to all girls when they are 12-13 years old, was introduced in Northern Ireland in 2008 by the then Health Minister, Michael McGimpsey, following a recommendation from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). JCVI is an independent expert advisory committee that advises the four UK Health Ministers. JCVI consider all the available medical and scientific evidence before recommending which vaccines should be offered. It is expected that the HPV immunisation programme will significantly reduce the incidence of cervical cancer in Northern Ireland in future years.

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I am not in a position to provide a detailed breakdown of the cost of the HPV vaccination programme since it was introduced, due to a commercial confidentiality clause in the contract for the supply of the vaccine Cervarix which was used across the UK when the HPV vaccination programme was introduced, however I can advise that the programme currently costs approximately £900k per annum. The broad breakdown of this figure is approximately £590k for the vaccine and £340k for administration of the vaccine by school health teams.

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Human Papilloma Virus: Vaccine

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on what evidence, research and tests the Human Papilloma Virus Vaccine was adopted for use; and whether his Department is aware of any side effects associated with the vaccine.

(AQW 29173/11-15)

Mr Poots: The purpose of the human papillomavirus (HPV) immunisation programme is to prevent cases of and deaths from cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women worldwide. HPV causes 99% per cent of invasive cervical cancer. HPV is a virus that is spread through sexual activity.

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Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Appointment of Chairperson

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the process for the appointment of a Chair of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) when an appointment will be made; (iii) the total number of applicants for the post; (iv) how many individuals were interviewed; and (v) who made up the interview panel.

(AQW 29186/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department's established Public Appointments process which complies with the Code of Practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland was the methodology applied to this competition. The appointment opportunity was advertised in the three regional newspapers, and in addition advertised on the Department's and OFMDFM websites and circulated to those individuals and organisations registered on the Departmental Mailing List as interested in all DHSSPS public appointments. A re-advertisement was also placed due to the low number of initial applications received

Appointment will be made once the appointment process has been completed. Ten applications were received. Four applicants having met the criteria were invited for interview. The interview panel comprised of Dr Andrew McCormick (DHSSPS Permanent Secretary, Panel Chair), Mrs Kathryn Riddle (Panel Member) and Mrs Anne Rowe (Independent Assessor, allocated by CPA NI).

Hospitals: Social Workers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of social workers employed by, or based in, each acute hospital.

(AQW 29197/11-15)

Mr Poots: The numbers (headcount and whole-time equivalent [WTE]) of hospital social workers based in each acute hospital are shown in the table below.

Hospital	Headcount	WTE
Altnagelvin	16	13.65
Antrim	15	12.75

Hospital	Headcount	WTE
Belfast City Hospital	2	2.00
Causeway	8	7.06
Craigavon Area	16	14.16
Daisy Hill	12	10.08
Downe	3	2.00
Lagan Valley	4	3.00
Mater	30	28.76
Musgrave Park	10	7.71
Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children	10	8.93
Royal Jubilee Maternity	1	1.00
Royal Victoria	32	28.75
South West Acute	3	2.60
Ulster	23	18.00

Source: HSC Trusts

Learning Disability: Regional Day Opportunities Model

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he would finance the day care model referred to in the Regional Day Opportunities Model for Adults with a Learning Disability consultation.
(AQW 29208/11-15)

Mr Poots: Once the Regional Day Opportunities Model is agreed and any recommended amendments are made, each of the five Health and Social Care Trusts will benchmark their current services against this regional model.

It is fully recognised that, given demographic pressures on learning disability services and the improvements to services which the Model will require, there will be an additional need for both revenue and capital.

The vision set out in the Bamford Review and confirmed in Transforming Your Care is to enable people with Learning Disabilities to lead full and meaningful lives in their own communities.

The Model recommends that future services should be delivered on a joint cross-departmental and inter-agency basis, recognising that day opportunities are not solely a responsibility of Health and Social Care. Consequently, as with the general response to Bamford, some of the costs in making a reality of the Model will be shared with other Government Departments who may also bid for further resources.

Learning Disability: Regional Day Opportunities Model

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he has taken to ensure that the Regional Day Opportunities Model for Adults with a Learning Disability consultation consults with service users and carers.
(AQW 29209/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board utilised a best practice approach to ensure that service users and carers are fully consulted on the Regional Day Opportunities Model for Adults with a Learning Disability. A number of processes were undertaken. As the first stage in the consultation, and to ensure a truly independent response, an event was arranged and led by Compass Advocacy Network (CAN) on behalf of the HSC Board. This took place in September 2013 and involved over 100 people, including many with learning disabilities, from across Northern Ireland. CAN is a user-led charity managed by and for people with learning disabilities and has significant experience in facilitating user participation events.

The HSC Board wrote to every known relevant organisation on its database advising of the consultation and inviting responses. They also wrote to all user/carer groups within the five HSC Trusts inviting them to take part in the consultation and providing a range of options on how to do so. A range of documents including an 'Easy Read' version of the consultation were developed and designed by people with Learning Disabilities. Advertisements were placed in regional newspapers to publicise the consultation process and further notices were placed in regional and local newspapers to invite people to the local public meetings held in each Trust area. A variety of social media were also used to promote awareness of the consultation and invite responses.

By 12 December, thirteen local public meetings were held which have been well attended by people with a learning disability and their carers. The original final date for submission of responses has been extended by 4 weeks until the 10 January 2014.

Learning Disability: Regional Day Opportunities Model

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what arrangements the Health and Social Care Board made to ensure that all service users and carers were aware of the recommendations outlined in the Regional Learning Disability Day Opportunities Model in advance of the public consultation meetings.

(AQW 29210/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board utilised a best practice approach to ensure that service users and carers are fully consulted on the Regional Day Opportunities Model for Adults with a Learning Disability. A number of processes were undertaken. As the first stage in the consultation, and to ensure a truly independent response, an event was arranged and led by Compass Advocacy Network (CAN) on behalf of the HSC Board. This took place in September 2013 and involved over 100 people, including many with learning disabilities, from across Northern Ireland. CAN is a user-led charity managed by and for people with learning disabilities and has significant experience in facilitating user participation events.

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Female Genital Mutilation

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department is aware of any cases of female genital mutilation; and whether victims have been treated in hospital.

(AQW 29213/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on cases of Female Genital Mutilation is not currently collected by my Department or the Health and Social Care Board. The Northern Ireland Maternity System is currently undergoing an update and information on women presenting to maternity services who have undergone Female Genital Mutilation will be collected in future.

Ambulances: Response Times

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the average ambulance response times for the (i) Creggan; (ii) Creggan South; and (iii) City Walls electoral wards.

(AQW 29238/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department's current performance indicator for ambulance response times is that 72.5% of all Category A (life-threatening) calls are responded to within eight minutes, with no less than 67.5% in any Local Commissioning Group (LCG). Performance against this indicator is detailed in the table below for each month since April 2013.

Percentage of Category A (Life threatening) Calls Responded to Within Eight Minutes (April – October 2013).

LCG	Apr 2013	May 2013	Jun 2013	July 2013	Aug 2013	Sept 2013	Oct 2013
Belfast LCG	75.7%	83.0%	85.0%	83.9%	83.4%	85.9%	84.9%
Northern LCG	58.0%	58.8%	61.5%	56.6%	62.1%	62.6%	65.0%
South Eastern LCG	57.2%	66.3%	68.4%	64.1%	65.1%	61.4%	68.2%
Southern LCG	60.3%	62.6%	63.3%	65.7%	64.4%	63.9%	65.7%
Western LCG	64.0%	66.8%	66.4%	65.9%	66.1%	72.1%	71.5%
Northern Ireland	63.8%	68.7%	69.8%	68.4%	69.3%	70.8%	72.1%

North Antrim: Registered Carers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of registered carers who are over the age of 60, in the North Antrim constituency.

(AQW 29252/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available.

North Antrim: Autism

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what resources have been invested to support people diagnosed with autism and their families in the North Antrim constituency, in each of the last three years; and to outline his Department's policies for assisting these families and the charities that support them.

(AQW 29253/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information is not available for the North Antrim constituency; however investment in autism specific services in the NHSC is outlined in the table below:

Year	Children's services (£)	Adult services (£)
2011	294,866	
2012	340,977	139,857
2013	340,977	170,357

Given that autism is a spectrum disorder, support services for individuals and their families are based on assessed need. In addition to the health and social care services available to the local population, the Northern HSC Trust provide both Children's and Adult's ASD services which operates across the entire Trust area.

These are multidisciplinary autism teams which are made up from a number of different professions. Additional support is available to the teams through education and voluntary sector providers in accordance with an individual's needs.

Health Service: Retirement of Consultants

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many hospital consultants are due to retire over the next two years; and how many of these will be replaced.

(AQW 29270/11-15)

Mr Poots: There is no mandatory retirement age for consultants and they are only required to give three months notice of their intention to retire. It is not possible therefore to estimate how many hospital consultants are due to retire over the next two years. Any posts vacated by consultants who retire are normally replaced.

Health Service: Vacant Consultant Posts

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many vacant consultant posts there are in the Health Service; and why these posts are vacant.

(AQW 29271/11-15)

Mr Poots: Vacancies in HSC organisations are collected biannually and detailed in the Department's HSC Vacancy Survey Reports for March and September each year. The most recent report covers vacancies as at 31st March 2013 and is available at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/vacancy_survey_march_2013_web-2.pdf. The full position of vacancies as at 30th September 2013 is not yet available. This report will be published in early 2014. Vacancies are defined as posts that HSC organisations are actively recruiting to. A post does not have to be unoccupied in order to be counted as a vacancy.

As at 31st March 2013, there were 72 (69.7 whole-time equivalent) permanent consultant vacancies being recruited to and 27 (27.0 WTE) temporary consultant vacancies. These vacancies occur as part of normal turnover of staff due to retirement, transfers, resignation or can be newly created posts. Trust will usually take steps to fill vacancies substantively in the first instance. Where a post remains unfilled for a period of time, doctors may be employed on a locum basis to cover the requirements of the post in order to meet service needs.

Health Service: Vacant Consultant Posts

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any consultant posts remain vacant because of cost saving in Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 29273/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care Trusts have informed my Department that no consultant posts remain vacant because of cost savings.

Mental Health: Stigma

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures he has taken to address the stigma surrounding mental health issues.

(AQW 29308/11-15)

Mr Poots: In October 2011, I launched the Public Health Agency's "Under the Surface" public information campaign which aimed to de-stigmatise mental illness and raise awareness of the early warning signs and symptoms. The Agency has just launched a new campaign which continues the emphasis on encouraging people to discuss their feelings, builds on the previous approach to stigma reduction, and focuses on recovery.

Other action taken forward by the Public Health Agency to improve awareness of mental health issues, reduce stigma associated with mental illness, and encourage help-seeking behaviour includes: local seminars and educational workshops; mental health awareness training; the hosting of websites providing advice and information; and work with the media to encourage more positive reporting on the issue. The reduction of stigma associated with mental illness will be a priority in the new Suicide Prevention and Positive Mental Health Strategy currently being developed.

My Department is also continuing work on the draft Mental Capacity Bill. The approach of the Bill means that mental capacity and mental health legislation will, for the first time in any jurisdiction, be encompassed into a single piece of legislation. This will reduce the stigma associated with separate mental health legislation which was a key recommendation of the Bamford Review. It remains my intention that the Bill will be enacted within the current mandate of the Assembly.

South Down: Mental Health Services for Young People

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what mental health services exist for young people; and specifically in the South Down area.

(AQW 29309/11-15)

Mr Poots: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in Northern Ireland are provided through a stepped care model, based on the clinical needs of the individual.

CAMHS for the northern part of the South Down constituency area are provided by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, on behalf of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust from a local community based team in the Lagan Valley Hospital site. This team also provides outreach to Downpatrick. CAMHS for the southern part of the South Down constituency area are provided by the Southern Trust in local community based teams in Newry and Portadown. CAMHS consist of multidisciplinary teams that specialise in the assessment and intervention for under 18s with mental health needs and their families/carers.

Services for children and young people presenting in crisis, and requiring urgent assessment and intervention, are provided by Crisis Assessment Teams which are available 7 days per week.

Inpatient care for young people, when required, is provided in Beechcroft, the Regional Child and Adolescent Inpatient Mental Health Unit in Belfast.

Air Ambulance

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the provision of an air ambulance. **(AQW 29315/11-15)**

Mr Poots: I am currently considering the recommendations and implications of a report undertaken by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) about the feasibility for a helicopter emergency medical service (HEMS)/air ambulance in Northern Ireland.

In addition, I am liaising with the Irish Health Minister, Dr James Reilly TD, regarding the potential for a cross-border HEMS/air ambulance service.

The HSCB has in place an air ambulance contract for the transfer of adult and paediatric patients to and from Northern Ireland. This service is used primarily to transport seriously ill patients from a referring NI hospital to Belfast International Airport for onward transfer by dedicated aircraft to GB NHS services. It is also used to repatriate patients back to NI hospitals following treatment if they are deemed too unwell to travel by other means.

Foyle: Mental Health Services

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many people have been referred to the mental health team in the Foyle constituency in the last two years; (ii) how many staff, and at what level, are available in this team; (iii) to detail the projected funding for mental health services up to 2015; (iv) how many people have presented in the Foyle constituency with (a) depression; and (b) anxiety problems, in the last two years.

(AQW 29322/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) From April 2011 to April 2013, 3,247 people have been referred to the mental health team in the Foyle constituency.
- (ii) All new referrals are in the first instance referred to the Primary Care Mental Health team, which is made up of:
 - 1 Team Manager
 - 5 Social Workers (Band 6 and above)
 - 9 Community Psychiatric Nurses (between Bands 6 and above)
 - 1 Consultant Psychiatrist
 - 1 Staff Grade Doctor
 - 1 Junior Doctor
 - 6 Administration staff

- (iii) Currently the Western HSC Trust's total recurrent expenditure on mental health services across the whole Trust is £27.6M. It is not possible at this stage to detail the projected funding for mental health services up to 2015.
- (iv) Information on the numbers of people who have presented in the Foyle constituency with depression and anxiety problems, in the last two years is not available.

GPs: Numbers Practising

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of GPs practising in each year since 2008; and whether there is any predicted rise in the numbers over the next few years.

(AQW 29335/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures provided by the Family Practitioner Services Information and Registration Unit in the HSC Business Services Organisation are as shown in the following Table:

Year	Number of GPs
2008#	1,148
2009#	1,156
2010#	1,160
2011#	1,163
2012\$	1,170
2013\$	1,171

Figures as at October each year.

\$ Figures as at November each year. The figures include principal and salaried GPs only, locums are not included.

No rise is predicted in the number of practicing GPs over the next few years.

Medical/Dental Consultants: Numbers Practising

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of consultants working in each year since 2008; and whether there is any predicted rise in the numbers over the next few years.

(AQW 29336/11-15)

Mr Poots: The headcount and whole-time equivalent (WTE) of medical and dental consultants working in HSC organisations in each year since 2008 are shown in the table below.

Year	Headcount	WTE
2008	1305	1227.1
2009	1346	1271.9
2010	1377	1302.1
2011	1406	1328.0
2012	1494	1411.4
2013	1542	1455.0

Source: NI HSC Human Resources Management System/ Human Resources, Payroll, Travel and Subsistence System. Figures are as at 31st March in each year, and exclude staff with a whole-time equivalent less than or equal to 0.03 and staff on career breaks.

This shows a 19% increase in the HSC whole-time equivalent consultant workforce since 2008.

With regard to predicted increases, local staffing arrangements are the responsibility of HSC employers based on service need and available resources. The Department has a role in ensuring there are sufficient, suitably qualified staff to meet the needs of the service overall.

GPs: Number of Consultations

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average number of consultations which GPs have had per patient in each year since 2008.

(AQW 29337/11-15)

Mr Poots: The data requested is not available. General Practitioners (GPs) are independent contractors who contract with the Health and Social Care Board to provide Primary Medical Services to their patients. As independent contractors, GPs

are responsible for the day to day management of their practice, including patient appointment arrangements; therefore information on the annual average number of consultations per patient is not collated centrally and could only be made available at disproportionate cost.

Medical General Practice: Investment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has for investment in general practice from 2013-2016 as part of Transforming Your Care.

(AQW 29338/11-15)

Mr Poots: The role of general practice is recognised as a critical element of the new models of care set out in Transforming Your Care (TYC) and investment in General Practice is planned across the following areas:

- The 'shift left' of services set out in TYC, is supported by a planned shift of 5% of current resources from secondary care to primary and community care, including general practice, underpinning the overarching vision for TYC which is care closer to home and greater access to services in the right place at the right time;
- An estimated £16.4m of investment during the implementation of TYC in support of the establishment and development of ICPs in which GPs will play a key role;
- A continuation of the investment which has been made over a number of years via Enhanced Services aligned to the strategic direction of TYC to promote early intervention and prevention, and deliver more care closer to home rather than in hospital;
- Workforce and service planning to ensure there is sufficient numbers and capacity within general practice to meet the needs of our population and facilitate the shift left will be critical, and work has commenced to review this across a number of medical sub-specialties including general practice; and
- Alongside investment in general practice directly, a programme of infrastructure development and investment is taking place across Northern Ireland to provide upgraded accommodation for general practice, as well as a range of other health and social care services in one location which will reduce the need for patients to travel outside their locality to access services. This investment will be through a mixture of funding options which will be explored depending on the availability of funding and business case approval following the budget.

Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when staff in the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast will be trained in Extra Corporeal Membrane Oxygenation.

(AQW 29360/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Belfast Trust advises that in an emergency, staff can ensure those patients requiring emergency ECMO can be cared for safely. ECMO has been previously used successfully in the Cardiac Surgery Unit in Belfast, and staff training will ensure best practice guidelines are adhered to. The Trust further advises that there are several centres within the UK who provide training on ECMO and that they are making arrangements for staff to be facilitated within these courses.

North Down: Respite Care

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many respite care places are available in North Down on a weekly basis.

(AQW 29372/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not held centrally and was therefore requested from the South Eastern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. Their response is provided below.

Children's Disability

There are 6 beds available for overnight respite in the North Down geographic locality. These are allocated to a number of families throughout the year.

Older Peoples Services

There are 10 block beds for respite in the North Down & Ards sector in a range of Frail Elderly and Elderly Mentally Infirm nursing and residential homes which can be booked in advance for respite breaks.

In addition, the Trust also spot purchase beds in nursing and residential homes for respite to meet demand as required. In the week commencing 2nd December 2013, 9 additional beds were spot purchased for respite.

Tobacco: EU Directive

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the introduction of minimum pack size for tobacco products under the revised EU Tobacco Products Directive.

(AQW 29375/11-15)

Mr Poots: I support the UK position on the revised EU Tobacco Products Directive which is currently under consideration in the European Parliament. The revised Directive includes measures for banning certain flavourings from tobacco products, introducing larger warnings on packaging and phasing out smaller packs of ten cigarettes.

I support these measures that will help to reduce the appeal of smoking for children and young people, and will also limit their access to cigarettes.

I understand the revised Directive is expected to be adopted in 2014 and the agreed measures will come into effect in all EU Member States, including the UK, from 2015/16.

Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority: Nursing Home Inspectors

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many nursing home inspectors are employed by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA); (ii) how many nursing homes are on the RQIA's register; and (iii) how many people currently reside in those nursing homes.

(AQW 29377/11-15)

Mr Poots: RQIA employs a team of 9 nursing home inspectors. In addition RQIA employ a number of estates, pharmacy and financial inspectors who may also play a role in the inspection of nursing homes.

There are currently 269 nursing homes in Northern Ireland registered with the RQIA.

There are 10,965 nursing bed spaces within these nursing homes. Whilst RQIA records the number of patients accommodated within an individual home on the day of inspection, it does not maintain a day by day occupancy figure across the whole sector.

Children: Safeguarding Referrals

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 28643/11-15, how many children have been referred to the social services safeguarding team in each of the last three years.

(AQW 29396/11-15)

Mr Poots: All Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts have a Gateway Service that receive all new referrals regarding children and young people in need, including children where there are safeguarding concerns. In general, although there are some variations between the HSC Trusts, the HSC Trusts do not have dedicated social services children's safeguarding teams. Those children referred to social services who are deemed to require an ongoing service following initial assessment will be referred to appropriate Family Intervention/Support teams.

The table below contains the number of children referred to social services (Gateway Teams) in each of the last three years.

Table 1: The number of children referred to Social Services (2010/11 – 2012/13)

Year	Children Referred to Social Services ¹
2010/11	26,725
2011/12	28,496
2012/13	29,508

Source: 1. Children Order Return N1

This information is available in 'Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2012/13' which can be found on the Department's website at the following link: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib/statistics_and_research-cib-pub/children_statistics/stats-cib-children_order.htm

Health Service: Social Enterprise

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the funding his Department has set aside for projects that can be delivered through social enterprise.

(AQW 29419/11-15)

Mr Poots: Funding provided in health and social care can be accessed by organisations using a variety of business models. No funding is specifically set aside for social enterprise.

Royal Victoria Hospital: Critical Care Building

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether the planned opening of the critical care building at the Royal Victoria Hospital has been delayed because of issues arising from the construction contract; (ii) when the building will open; (iii) to detail the cost of any defects with the building or from the contract; and (iv) whether the Health Service will incur costs from the defects and the delayed opening of the business.

(AQW 29420/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The planned opening of the critical care building has been delayed by the discovery of pipe-work corrosion problems which necessitated the complete removal and replacement of all five sealed water systems in the building; these were installed under the construction contract and the issue must be resolved under the terms of contract;
- (ii) It is now planned to bring the building into operation on a phased basis in the latter half of 2014 and early 2015;
- (iii) The contractor is responsible for the cost of repair and the details of the costs incurred by the contractor are not therefore available; and,
- (iv) The Trust has had to incur expenditure (e.g. additional design team fees, expert opinion, etc.) which will now have to be recovered from the contractor in the settlement of the case.

Royal Victoria Hospital: Critical Care Building

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money has been invested in the critical care building at the Royal Victoria Hospital to date.

(AQW 29421/11-15)

Mr Poots: To date £139.5m has been invested in the critical care building project on the Royal Group of Hospitals. While a further investment of £8.8m is planned to complete this building, there has been no capital spent to date in this financial year, while the issues that have caused the project to be delayed are being resolved.

Royal Victoria Hospital: Critical Care Building

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what was the original planned opening date of the critical care building at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

(AQW 29422/11-15)

Mr Poots: Before discovery of the pipe-work corrosion problems, the building was to be handed over on 12 November 2012 and the Trust intended to bring the building into operation on a phased basis – theatres on 19 March 2013, critical care beds on 10 April 2013, and the emergency department on 18 May 2013. The upper three (maternity) floors were not to come operational until the new Maternity Building is completed in mid 2017.

Fire and Rescue Service: Recruitment

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the recruitment reserve list for the Fire and Rescue Service, to outline the position on allowing experienced local firefighters, who have been working in Britain, to return to work in the Service.

(AQW 29425/11-15)

Mr Poots: All Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) recruitment activity is subject to external advertisement and competition in order to comply with Employment Equality Legislation. Successful candidates are selected wholly on merit.

NIFRS' policy is that eligible Wholetime Firefighters from other Fire and Rescue Services must apply for posts in response to an external advertisement. However, in recognition of their expertise and experience, applicants from other Fire and Rescue Services are exempt from the normal initial physical and written tests. They are required to compete for entry alongside other candidates at the final interview stage.

Freedom of Information: Ambulance Waits

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why Northern Ireland did not provide any data in response to a Freedom of Information request asking for the longest ambulance waits outside hospital for the 12 weeks from August to October 2013.

(AQW 29442/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust agreed an extension to the deadline for responding to this Freedom of Information request until 13 December 2013.

The response was issued on 9 December 2013.

Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the points in legislation where young people are defined, for the purposes of the work of the Children's and Young People's strategic partnership, as outlined in The NI Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14, Appendix 2, Section 2.2.

(AQW 29502/11-15)

Mr Poots: The legislative mandate for the Children's and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) is the statutory duty placed on the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) under The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (the 1995 Order) as amended by The Children (1995 Order) (Amendment) (Children's Services Planning) Order (Northern Ireland) 1998 (the

1998 Order). Under the 1995 Order, the HSCB is required to: annually review services provided to children and families under Articles 18, 21, 23, 27, 35 and 36 of the 1995 Order; and, taking account of the annual review and any review conducted under Article 20 (which relates to childminding and day care services), prepare a Children's Services Plan. In constructing the Plan, the 1995 Order requires the HSCB to consult with a range of agencies, named in paragraph 3 of Schedule 2. Article 2 of the 1995 Order, defines a child as a person under the age of 18. The 1995 Order (by way of amendment by The Children (Leaving Care) Act (Northern Ireland) 2002) also makes provision for advice, assistance and support to be provided to former looked after children and young people up to the age of 21.

In addition, Articles 35, 35A, 35B, 35C and 35D of the 1995 Order also enables a young person to receive assistance in respect of employment, education or training until age 24 in specified circumstances.

Department of Justice

Staff Suspensions: DOJ

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of staff suspended in each year since 2010; (ii) the cost of these suspensions; and (iii) the number of suspended staff who were reinstated.

(AQW 29026/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice):

- (i) The number of staff suspended in each year since 12 April 2010 is provided in the table below. Please note that a suspension may carry over more than one calendar year. Therefore, for the purpose of these statistics, the number of ongoing cases per year has also been included for information.

Year	Number of staff suspended	Number of ongoing suspensions
2010 (from 12 April 2010)	22*	-
2011	12	21
2012	17	26
2013	9	17

*19 suspensions were ongoing prior to the DOJ being created.

- (ii) The total cost of suspensions in the Department of Justice since 12 April 2010 is £1,276,709.60. A breakdown of the costs of these suspensions by year is below:

Year	Gross Salary Cost (£)	National Insurance Costs (£)	Pension Costs (£)
2010	324,559.55	23,100.07	63,335.59
2011	306,328.94	24,674.63	66,083.56
2012	222,197.02	19,122.49	43,571.43
2013	145,252.53	11,274.84	27,209.38

- (iii) 47 staff suspended during this period returned from suspension.

Prostitution: Research

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 28048/11-15, when he intends to commission research into prostitution, including the estimated commencement and conclusion dates; and when he will publish the Terms of Reference. **(AQW 29033/11-15)**

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to the reply I gave him on 27 November 2013

(AQW/28153/11-15). The terms of reference will be shared with the Justice Committee in early January. It is anticipated that the contract for completion of the research will have concluded by autumn 2014.

Kenneth Douglas

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 28490/11-15, (i) given the sentence imposed was of some vintage due to the nature of the offences, but taking into account offences involving high violence were committed whilst on licence/parole in the year prior to ultimate release in 2012, why Public Protection Arrangements (PPANI) were not involved in this case; (ii) whether an oversight or issue in this case has been identified as a result of the sentence imposed which could have led to PPANI notification; and (iii) in relation to future similar cases, whether he will amend legislation or guidelines

to ensure the risk to the public is fully considered and extensive monitoring is in place to prevent potential re-offending, particularly in cases of high violence and previous re-offending.

(AQW 29057/11-15)

Mr Ford: My previous answer to AQW 28490/11-15 confirmed the offences which Mr Douglas committed during his time living in the community on licence in 2010 did not meet the criteria which would have allowed Public Protection Arrangements in Northern Ireland (PPANI) to be engaged. As a result I can confirm that I am satisfied no oversight occurred in this case nor was any issue identified which could have led to PPANI notification. Furthermore I can also confirm that I have no plans to amend legislation or guidelines as a result of this case.

Inquests: Historical

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to list the historic inquests which are outstanding; and to outline the timescale for holding each inquest.

(AQW 29105/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently 43 historical 'legacy' inquests relating to 70 deaths at various stages of completion. The attached table details these and includes available listing information.

The listing of inquests is a matter for the Coroner and is dependent on a range of factors including the availability and volume of relevant evidential material, the duration and complexity of preparatory work, and witness availability.

Legacy Inquests [as at 19 November 2013]

	Name	Date of Death	Current Position (inc Hearing Date)
1	Roseanne Mallon	08/05/94	Inquest in progress
2	John McKearney & Kevin McKearney	03/01/92 & 04/04/92	Provisionally listed for inquest on 6/10/14 for three weeks
3	Neil John McConville	29/04/03	Preliminary hearing scheduled for 16/12/13
4	Daniel Doherty & William Fleming	06/12/84	AGNI referral 9/7/10 Preliminary hearing scheduled for 12/12/13
5	Gareth Paul O'Connor	11/06/05	Preliminary hearing scheduled for 31/1/14
6	Daniel Stephen Osvaldo McColgan	12/01/02	Inquest provisionally listed for 24/3/14 for three weeks
7	Michael James Ryan, Anthony Patrick Doris & Laurence McNally	03/06/91	Inquest Listed provisionally for inquest 1/9/14 for four weeks
8	Gerard Martin Slane	23/09/88	AGNI referral 20/5/11 Preliminary Hearing to be listed following update on PII issues.
9	Samuel James Marshall	07/03/90	Preliminary Hearing listed 25/2/14
10	Sgt John Quinn, Con Allan McCloy & Con Paul Hamilton (Stalker/Sampson cases) Lead Case	27/10/82	Preliminary Hearing listed 19/12/13
11	James Gervaise McKerr, Eugene Toman & John Frederick Burns (Stalker/Sampson cases)	11/11/82	See Quinn, McCloy & Hamilton above
12	Michael Justin Tighe (Stalker/Sampson cases)	24/11/82	See Quinn, McCloy & Hamilton above
13	Roderick Carroll & Peter James Martin (Seamus) Grew (Stalker/Sampson cases)	12/12/82	See Quinn, McCloy & Hamilton above
14	Gerard Laurence Casey	04/04/89	AGNI referral 7/7/10 PH listed 17/12/13
15	Gerard Lawlor	22/07/02	Police Ombudsman investigation.

	Name	Date of Death	Current Position (inc Hearing Date)
16	Seamus Patrick Dillon	28/12/97	NOK funding still outstanding.
17	Liam Paul Thompson	27/04/94	Awaiting HET report. Update to be requested December 2013
18	Richard Jameson	10/01/00	Family confirmed they still wish to wait for OPONI report.
19	Patrick Daniel Vincent, Sean O'Farrell, Peter Paul Clancy & Kevin Barry O'Donnell	16/02/92	Funding issues to be resolved
20	Sean Patrick Brown	12/05/97	On-going live police investigation. HET report outstanding Preliminary Hearing listed 3/1/14
21	Raymond McCord	09/11/97	On-going live police investigation. OPONI report required
22	Francis Patrick Bradley	18/02/86	AGNI referral 26/5/10 Disclosure on-going
23	Father Hugh Mullan Francis Joseph Quinn AG referral 10/6/11	09/08/71	AGNI referral - for date see each case Disclosure on-going
24	Joan Connolly Daniel Teggart Noel Phillips Joseph Murphy	09/08/71 09/08/71 10/08/71 Died 22/8/71 (Shot 9/8/71)	AG referral 11/11/11 As Father Mullan
25	Edward Doherty	10/08/71	AG referral 25/5/11 As Father Mullan
26	John Laverty Joseph Corr	11/08/71 27/08/71 (Shot 11/8/71)	AG referral 19/9/11 As Father Mullan
27	John James McKerr	20/08/71	AG referral 8/9/11 As Father Mullan
28	Bernard Watt	06/02/71	AGNI Referral 9/5/12 Disclosure on-going
29	Francis Rowntree	22/04/71	AGNI referral 21/6/12 Disclosure on-going Preliminary hearing listed for 21/1/14
30	Manus Deery	19/05/72	AGNI referral 19/6/12 Disclosure on-going
31	Kevin Anthony McAlorum	03/06/04	OPONI investigation. Inquest adjourned sine die
32	John Coulter & Robert Mahood	21/08/00	Disclosure has been requested Ongoing PONI and PSNI investigations. Inquest adjourned sine die
33	Henry Thornton	7/8/1971	AG referral 25/2/13 Disclosure on-going

	Name	Date of Death	Current Position (inc Hearing Date)
34	John Bryans Robert Chambers Reginald Chapman Walter Chapman Robert Freeburn Joseph Lemon John McConville James McWhirter Robert Samuel Walker Kenneth Worton	5/1/76	AG referral 8/7/13 Disclosure requested
35	Marion Brown	10/6/72	AG referral 18/7/13 Disclosure requested
36	James (AKA Seamus) Bradley	31/7/72	AG referral 18/7/13 HET report received Disclosure requested
37	Mary Kathleen Thompson	6/11/71	AG referral 2/9/13 Original inquest file received from PRONI Disclosure Requested
38	Daniel Carson	1/11/73	AG referral 3/9/13 Original inquest file received from PRONI Disclosure Requested
39	Terence McDaid	10/5/1988	AG referral 3/9/13 Disclosure Requested HET report delayed during their internal review
40	Fergal McCusker	18/1/98	24/9/13 - case transferred to the legacy team list HET report delayed during their internal review
41	Craig McCausland	11/7/05	24/9/13 - case transferred to the legacy team list
42	Joseph Parker	11/12/1971	AG referral 26/9/13 Original inquest file received from PRONI Disclosure Requested
43	Elizabeth McDonald	16/8/76	AG referral 19/11/13 Disclosure Requested

Children: Internet Safety

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice what action his Department and the Criminal Justice Agencies are taking to protect children from abuse through the internet.

(AQW 29145/11-15)

Mr Ford: I would refer the Member to the replies I gave Mr McIlveen, under AQW/26116/11-15 and AQW/26117/11-15.

Female Genital Mutilation

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the scale of the problem of female genital mutilation.

(AQW 29215/11-15)

Mr Ford: There have been no convictions for offences under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 for the period for which data is available (from commencement to 2009). The Department of Justice does not hold any other data on which to base an assessment.

Legal Aid: Reform

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the responses, particularly from those in the legal profession who currently deal with legal aid cases, to his consultation document in connection with possible changes to the Legal Aid system, how many solicitors firms have indicated they will decline Legal Aid related work if his proposals are implemented.

(AQW 29259/11-15)

Mr Ford: To date, no solicitors have indicated they will decline legal aid related work arising from my proposals to reform both criminal and civil legal aid.

Legal Aid: Budget

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Justice what options his Department has considered with regard to the provision of Legal Aid within an acceptable budget.

(AQW 29301/11-15)

Mr Ford: The budget for NI Legal Services Commission for the years 2011-12 to 2014-15 was set as part of the Budget 2011-15 process.

The reform of legal aid is one of my priorities and bringing legal aid within budget is one of the strategic objectives of legal aid reform. Significant changes have been made to criminal legal aid which will save over £20m annually, and proposals have been published for further reform of both criminal and civil legal aid which are estimated to deliver further annual savings of some £24m.

The budget for 2015-16 will be set as part of the 2015-16 spending review process.

Legal Aid: Scope

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department has considered restricting Legal Aid to matters which pertain to crime, family law and child law.

(AQW 29302/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have asked my officials to begin work to examine the scope of civil legal aid, to allow me to consider whether there are areas where continued financial support from legal aid is inappropriate or unnecessary, or where there may be a better way of resolving the conflict or difficulty involved. That work is at an early stage. I am very aware of the need to ensure that any changes to legal aid will not leave vulnerable people without support, and identifying alternative sources of support will be a major part of this work.

Legal Aid: Reform

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the impact of the reduction in Legal Aid and Civil Aid on the service provided by solicitors to their clients.

(AQW 29303/11-15)

Mr Ford: Impact assessments are completed as part of the public consultation process conducted by my Department in delivering the programme of legal aid reforms. No specific evidence has been provided to the Department by the Law Society or solicitors' firms to quantify the impact on the service to their clients. This would vary from firm to firm depending on the type of work each firm undertakes and the level of legally aided work delivered within the firms.

Family Justice

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Justice what actions his Department has taken to establish a more efficient and financially viable system for child and family law proceedings.

(AQW 29304/11-15)

Mr Ford: Further to a recommendation by the Access to Justice Review for a fundamental review of family justice, my Department, together with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, undertook work scoping a review of the operation of the family justice system. That exercise has been completed and the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and I have agreed to begin to address the issues found to be impacting on the operation of the system by adopting a staged approach to reform. The initial stage will include:

- the development of proposals for a pilot to minimise unnecessary delay in care proceedings;
- the development of a cross-departmental strategic approach to alternative dispute resolution services for families; and
- consideration of options for dealing with breaches of contact orders.

This initial stage will inform consideration of the need to take forward legislative reform in the future.

Court Boundaries: Legislation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice at what stage is legislation in relation to the changes of the court boundaries system. (AQW 29325/11-15)

Mr Ford: Provisions for the creation of a single territorial jurisdiction for the county courts and magistrates' courts in Northern Ireland will be included in the Faster, Fairer Justice Bill. It is intended that the Bill will be introduced in Spring 2014.

Prison Service: Reform

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27080/11-15, whether previous recommendations were not implemented by the previous governor or deputy governor, or any staff who held their posts on an acting or temporary basis. (AQW 29326/11-15)

Mr Ford: The scale of required change, including addressing recommendations at all prison establishments, has been consistently acknowledged by NIPS and summarised by the Prison Review Team report. This is being delivered, not solely by the actions of individuals, but through the determined and concerted process of strategic change offered by the Reform Programme.

Prison Service: Code of Conduct

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27656/11-15, and given that he states in his answer to AQW 27299/11-15 that, the text of the new Code was agreed by all stakeholders, to outline the rationale behind the decision not to include this information from the Professional Code of Conduct 2013; and why Prison Service staff are being treated differently to Civil Service staff and other prison service counterparts. (AQW 29327/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Member is incorrect in his assertion that the Northern Ireland Prison Service does not sufficiently define or sufficiently inform prison staff of the types of offences that may lead to the invoking of disciplinary procedures in the new 2013 Code of Conduct. There is a whole section of the new Code of Conduct that deals specifically with that issue. Section 3.2 clearly sets out 17 possible examples of the types of offences that may lead to the invoking of disciplinary proceedings against staff.

Forensic Science Northern Ireland: Cooperation with Republic of Ireland

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what are the cost implications of any inter-governmental arrangement with the Republic of Ireland in the area of co-operation on forensic science services. (AQW 29339/11-15)

Mr Ford: Co-operation between Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI) and Eolaíocht Fhóirínseach Éireann (EFÉ) takes place under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Criminal Justice Cooperation. That includes sharing experiences and participating in shared training events and incurs normal travel and subsistence costs. All other costs are met on a "quid pro quo" basis. For example, no charges were raised for the analysis of 60 drugs samples recently carried out by EFÉ on behalf of FSNI which was an exercise to test potential contingency arrangements.

Prison Service: Code of Conduct

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27564/11-15, (i) to clarify the meaning of specialist staff, within 1.6 of the Code; (ii) on what date nursing staff ceased to be employed by the Prison Service; and (iii) whether alleged breaches of discipline will be investigated and adjudicated upon by the relevant Health and Social Care Trust in tandem with the Prison Service. (AQW 29363/11-15)

Mr Ford: I think that the previous question the Member should have referred to is AQW/27654/11-15 as opposed to AQW/27564/11-15. On that basis I would advise as follows:

- (i) The specialist staff referred to in paragraph 1.6 of the Northern Ireland Prison Service Professional Code of Conduct are those groups of officers employed in more specialised areas within prisons such as dog handlers, physical fitness instructors, joiners or caterers;
- (ii) The healthcare staff ceased to be employed by the Northern Ireland Prison Service on 31 March 2012; and
- (iii) I would confirm that discipline of healthcare staff is now a matter for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

Prison Service: Code of Conduct

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27301/11-15, (i) to specify the current legislation that authorised him to approve and implement a transitional Code of Ethics and Professional Code of Conduct for members of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS); (ii) why NIPS staff are not specifically informed of the transitional nature of the documentation;

and (iii) for his assessment of the appropriateness of such action in the light of the deficiencies which have been identified in the Code.

(AQW 29366/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) Subject to the approval of the Department of Finance and Personnel, the following legislation allows the Northern Ireland Prison Service to have its own disciplinary Code:

Rule 6 of the 1995 Prison Rules, which states that:
“The Department of Justice may approve a code, or codes, of conduct to have effect in relation to the conduct, duties and discipline of the staff of prisons”.
- (ii) The new Professional Code of Ethics and the new Professional Code of Conduct are internal Northern Ireland Prison Service policy documents. As such it is for the Northern Ireland Prison Service to decide when and how often they should be reviewed.
- (iii) Given this is a brand new disciplinary system for the Northern Ireland Prison Service in my view it is good practice for the Prison Service to review and, if necessary, amend the new Codes after they have been in operation for 12 months. The Department of Finance and Personnel endorses this view.

Prison Service: Code of Conduct

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 27564/11-15, in cases of gross misconduct that have the potential to remove employment and profession, whether it is accepted that any reasonable request for legal representation must be given fair consideration, given that failure to follow proper process may lead to an unfair dismissal claim to an Industrial Tribunal.
(AQW 29367/11-15)

Mr Ford: The previous question the Member should have referred to is AQW 27654/11-15 as opposed to AQW 27564/11-15, which was a question from another Member to a different Department.

The Department of Finance and Personnel has overall responsibility for disciplinary policy in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The central policy clearly states that a member of staff subject to disciplinary proceedings should not be accompanied by a person acting in a legal capacity.

Human Trafficking: National Referral Mechanism

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 29220/11-15, whether he will reconsider the decision to refuse to disclose the nationalities and average age, as the corresponding information for the 2012/13 year was made readily available to the All Party Group on Human Trafficking in September 2013.
(AQW 29452/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department has previously provided information on potential victims of human trafficking who have been referred to the National Referral Mechanism. This information relates to the potential victims' countries of origin, a breakdown between minors and adults and, where available, exploitation type.

Specific information about those who have been confirmed as victims of human trafficking, however, is not shared in order to protect their identities. This is in line with the Data Protection Act 1998, which precludes the disclosure of information that could lead to the identification of an individual. Having taken advice from the UKHTC, however, I can now advise that the average age of the confirmed victims since 1 April 2013, who are minors, is 16. I hold by my decision not to disclose information on nationality.

Maghaberry Prison

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to detail any occasion over the last four weeks, where prison officers were unable to retain control over sections of Maghaberry Prison.
(AQW 29468/11-15)

Mr Ford: There has been no occasion over the last four weeks where prison officers were unable to retain control over sections of Maghaberry Prison.

Prison Officers: Security Threat Level

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to outline any guidance, and from whom did he receive it, when he downgraded the security threat level for prison officers.
(AQW 29469/11-15)

Mr Ford: I did not downgrade the security threat level, which is a matter for the Secretary of State.

Legal Services: Not-for-profit Organisations

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to detail if the contracts that his Department has with not for profit organisations require those organisations to apply for funding for Legal Aid in addition to public funding.

(AQW 29497/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission, through funding provided by the Department of Justice, has grant funding agreements with two not-for-profit organisations: the Housing Rights Service, for the provision of advice and assistance in mortgage repossession, and ejection proceedings and the Law Centre (NI), for the provision of legal services for immigration, asylum and human trafficking.

These organisations may submit applications for legal aid on behalf of clients in respect of cases not covered by these grants.

Legal Services: Not-for-profit Organisations

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to detail how many contracts does his Department have with not for profit organisations for the provision of legal services.

(AQW 29498/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission, through funding provided by the Department of Justice, has grant funding agreements with two not-for-profit organisations: the Housing Rights Service, for the provision of advice and assistance in mortgage repossession and ejection proceedings and the Law Centre (NI), for the provision of legal services for immigration, asylum and human trafficking.

Department for Regional Development

Cycling: Massey Avenue/Belmont Road, Belfast

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will consider introducing changes to the Massey Avenue/Belmont Road junction to make it safer for cyclists travelling in the direction of Parliament Buildings who are often overtaken by motorists who are continuing on the Belmont Road.

(AQW 28163/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I intend to refer this matter to the Cycling Unit.

Roads: Noise Models

Mr Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) how many noise models have been used to assess the impact of road schemes; (ii) the number of cases that the revision of models has been necessary; and (iii) the number of cases that mitigation measures have been taken, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28510/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In developing a major road improvement scheme, a detailed assessment of the environmental implications of the proposals is carried out, which includes modelling to assess the associated noise implications.

The table below provides a breakdown of the noise models, as well as the number of revisions and cases where mitigation measures were required in each of the last three years:

Noise models used to assess road schemes in each of the last three years

Year	Number of Noise Models used to assess impact of road schemes	Number of Cases requiring revision of models	Number of Cases requiring mitigation measures
2010/11	5	1	3
2011/12	2	8	1
2012/13	1	1	1

After a scheme is constructed, legislation requires that the associated noise model is reassessed on the first, fifth, tenth and fifteenth year after road opening. The figures in the above table relating to 'Number of cases requiring revision of models' are all related to these reassessments, which by their nature redefine the model.

Kilrea: Penalty Charge Notices

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of Penalty Charge Notices issued in Kilrea over the last three years; and of these, how many were successfully appealed.

(AQW 28712/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued in Kilrea, over the last three financial years, are included in the table below:

Financial Year	PCN's Issued
2010/11	95
2011/12	83
2012/13	54

It is not possible to provide figures relating to successful appeals by town or council area, as this information is not maintained in the format requested. However, an overall summary for Northern Ireland is provided in the table below for the last three financial years.

Financial Year	PCNs issued across NI	Number of PCNs appealed	Number of successful appeals
2010/11	118463	281	74
2011/12	124995	289	70
2012/13	108502	284	62

Car Parking: Christmas Rate

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the car parks that have been designated as having a special Christmas parking rate; and the criteria used to select these from other urban car parks.

(AQW 28719/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the car parks, to which the special Christmas parking rate applies, are included in the table below:

Car Park	Location
Central (Castle Way)	Antrim
Dobbin Street Lane	Armagh
Friary Road (East Side)	Armagh
Linenhall Street	Armagh
Lonsdale Street	Armagh
Harrier Way	Ballyclare
Market Square	Ballyclare
Broughshane Street	Ballymena
Church Street 1	Ballymena
Church Street 2	Ballymena
Church Street 3	Ballymena
Town Centre Multi Storey	Ballymena
Church Street/Main Street	Ballymoney
Commercial Road	Banbridge
Downshire Place	Banbridge
Kenlis Street	Banbridge
Abbey Street East	Bangor
Abbey Street West	Bangor
Bingham Lane	Bangor
Castle Street	Bangor
Central Avenue	Bangor
Clifton Road	Bangor
Holborn Avenue	Bangor

Car Park	Location
Mills Road	Bangor
The Vennel	Bangor
High Street	Carrickfergus
Joymount	Carrickfergus
Lancasterian Street	Carrickfergus
Abbey Street	Coleraine
Long Commons	Coleraine
Mall	Coleraine
Irish Street	Downpatrick
Anne Street East	Dungannon
Castle Hill	Dungannon
Perry St East	Dungannon
Scotch Street North	Dungannon
Down/Market/Cross Street	Enniskillen
Eden Street	Enniskillen
Head Street	Enniskillen
Quay Lane North	Enniskillen
Quay Lane South	Enniskillen
Shore Road East	Enniskillen
Ballynahinch Street	Hillsborough
Church Road	Holywood
Hibernia Street North	Holywood
Hibernia Street South	Holywood
Agnew Street	Larne
Fairhill	Larne
Narrow Gauge Road	Larne
Central	Limavady
Connell Street	Limavady
Antrim Street	Lisburn
Barrack Street	Lisburn
Governors Road	Lisburn
Laganbank Road	Lisburn
Longstone Street Roundabout	Lisburn
Queens Road	Lisburn
Smithfield Square	Lisburn
Bishop Street	Londonderry
Carlisle Road	Londonderry
Foyle Street	Londonderry
Queen's Quay	Londonderry
Society/Palace Street	Londonderry
Spencer Road	Londonderry

Car Park	Location
Strand Road	Londonderry
Victoria Market	Londonderry
William Street	Londonderry
Castle Lane	Lurgan
Rainey Street	Magherafelt
Union Road	Magherafelt
Abbey Way Multistorey	Newry
Basin Walk	Newry
Canal Bank 2	Newry
Monaghan Street	Newry
New Street	Newry
Ann Street	Newtownards
Kennel Lane	Newtownards
Mill Street	Newtownards
Old Cross Street West	Newtownards
Old Cross Street East	Newtownards
South Street	Newtownards
South Street / Court Street	Newtownards
Upper Court Street	Newtownards
Drumragh Avenue (3 Mountjoy Road)	Omagh
Foundry Lane (30 Kevlin Avenue)	Omagh
Johnston Park	Omagh
Market Place	Omagh
Market Street (11 Dublin Road)	Omagh
Magowan Buildings	Portadown
Marley Street	Portadown
Meadow Lane West	Portadown
Butcher Street	Strabane
Lower Main Street North/South	Strabane
Railway Street	Strabane
Upper Main Street	Strabane
Total	95

With regard to the criteria used, the special Christmas tariff is being applied to all Roads Service car parks where drivers will benefit from it, (i.e. all car parks with a tariff of 30p per hour or more). It applies to areas outside of Belfast because they do not have the same level of accessibility to Park and Ride and Public Transport services. There would be no benefit to drivers if this rate had applied in lower tariff car parks, as the existing tariffs are already equal to, or lower than, the special rate.

Roads: Habitats Directive

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether any proposed road schemes came to the same conclusion for the need of an Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive's Habitats Regulations Assessment as the A5 scheme.

(AQW 28744/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Under current legislation, all roads projects entailing the construction of a new or alteration of an existing carriageway must be assessed to determine their impact on ecology and the environment. Under the Habitats Regulations 1994, special consideration must be given to sites of special European status. These sites, which include Special Areas of

Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA), and Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), are collectively referred to as Natura 2000 sites.

I carried out an Appropriate Assessment of the Main Valley Bogs SAC when making the decision to proceed with the A26 Frosses Road dual carriageway scheme.

During my time as Minister, a report to inform an Appropriate Assessment of the Natura 2000 sites has also been prepared for the A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dualling scheme, however, this scheme has not yet reached the stage where the Appropriate Assessment should be undertaken.

Prior to my tenure as Minister, a report to inform an Appropriate Assessment was prepared for the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson dualling scheme, which will be reviewed in due course.

In addition, the decision not to carry out an Appropriate Assessment for the A5 Western Transport Corridor Dualling was taken during the tenure of my predecessor.

Taxis: High Street/Bridge Street/Botanic Avenue, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the timeline of the actions since planning permission was sought in respect of additional Public Hire Taxi Ranks at High Street, Bridge Street and Botanic Avenue, Belfast
(AQW 28764/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is empowered to provide lengths of roads that may be used as stands for taxis under Article 27A of the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. As such, planning permission is not specifically required.

Officials have developed proposals for additional taxi ranks in Botanic Avenue and High Street, Belfast and, on 18 September 2013, forwarded details to Belfast City Council and the PSNI for their comment and approval.

PSNI agreement to the proposals was obtained on 25 November 2013. My officials are presently preparing to carry out an informal consultation with the property owners immediately adjacent to the proposed locations to seek an agreed way forward, following which the necessary legislative procedures will be initiated.

Officials are not processing an additional public hire taxi rank at Bridge Street at present.

Sydenham Bypass: Upgrade

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the planned upgrade of the Sydenham By-Pass to a 3 lane carriageway.
(AQW 28822/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is continuing to develop proposals for the A2 Sydenham Bypass Improvement Scheme. The proposed scheme will widen a 2.5km section, between Bridge End and Knocknagoney, from a dual 2-lane carriageway to a dual 3-lane carriageway.

The scheme is currently in the third stage of a three stage assessment process. Stage 1 focused on identifying the environmental, engineering, economic and traffic advantages and disadvantages, in addition to the constraints associated with broadly defined improvement strategies. This concluded in the selection of the Proposed Corridor in May 2008. In Stage 2, a detailed assessment of a range of options within the Proposed Corridor was considered. This concluded in the selection of the Preferred Option in February 2010. Stage 3 involves detailed assessment of the Preferred Option and ongoing consultation with key stakeholders. This will result in the completion of the Statutory Orders; the draft Direction Order, Environmental Statement and Notice of Intention to Make a Vesting Order.

Whilst the budget for the period to 2015 will allow development work on Stage 3 to continue, progression beyond this will be subject to a satisfactory outcome to the statutory processes and the availability of funding in future years' budgets.

Roads: Traffic Calming

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's policy on road calming measures for villages.
(AQW 28840/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The objective of traffic calming is to improve driver behaviour and control speed, thereby contributing to a reduction in the number, and severity of casualties resulting from road traffic collisions, especially amongst pedestrians and cyclists. Traffic calming also improves the urban street environment and reduces community severance.

My Department's traffic calming policy includes for the provision of gateway features at the entry points to villages and settlements. These features highlight the change in the road environment to drivers. In many cases, a speed limit change is associated with a gateway feature. Central islands and additional road markings are also provided for within the policy and have been used effectively to create a safer road environment.

Traffic calming is generally achieved through the provision of a range of engineering measures, which includes gateways, central islands, build-outs and road humps. However, it is not my Department's policy to provide road humps on through routes or trunk roads as a general rule, but only in exceptional circumstances.

Details on current traffic calming features can be accessed at

http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/traffic_calming_leaflet.pdf

Car Parking: Park and Ride/Share

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development, in each of the last ten years, (i) how many park and ride or park and share spaces have been in place; (ii) how many of those spaces were used; and (iii) what the equating number of vehicles was in terms of vehicles being taken out of the traffic flow.

(AQW 28851/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: AQW 28851/11-15

Details of the park and ride and park and share spaces operated by each Division of my Department's Roads Service, for the last ten years, are set out in the tables below:

Northern Division

Park & Ride/Share Site		D'derg Antrim	B'groobey, Antrim	Dunsilly, Antrim	T'patrick	Ballee, B'mena	Millbrook, Larne	Drumahoe, L'derry
No. of Spaces		100	35	258	68	87	84	271
Average Number of Cars Using Park and Ride Sites Daily	2013	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	150
	2012	79	20	131	82	87	52	97
	2011	59	23	64	64	72	Not opened	79
	2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Not opened	60
	2009	73	30	105	78	59	Not opened	Not opened
	2008	49	21	110	57	44	Not opened	Not opened
	2007	39	28	86	62	44	Not opened	Not opened
	2006	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Not opened	Not opened
	2005	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Not opened	Not opened
	2004	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Not opened	Not opened

Southern Division

Park & Ride/Share Site		Newry, Sheepbridge	Cloughogue, Forkhill Road Newry	Armagh, Portadown Road	Lurgan, Lough Road
No. of Spaces		25	25	17	105
Average Number of Cars Using Park and Ride Sites Daily	2013	25	8	12	105
	2012	25	8	12	105
	2011	25	8	12	105
	2010	25	8	Not opened	105
	2009	Not opened	Not opened	Not opened	105
	2008	Not opened	Not opened	Not opened	105
	2007	Not opened	Not opened	Not opened	105
	2006	Not opened	Not opened	Not opened	105
	2005	Not opened	Not opened	Not opened	105
	2004	Not opened	Not opened	Not opened	105

Western Division

Park & Ride/Share Site	Ballygawley	Maghera	Castledawson roundabout	Castledawson Hillhead	Crevenagh Omagh
No. of Spaces	72	123	78	24	85/231*

Park & Ride/Share Site		Ballygawley	Maghera	Castledawson roundabout	Castledawson Hillhead	Crevenagh Omagh
Average Number of Cars Using Park and Ride Sites Daily	2013	38	107	79	4	85
	2012	52	85	80	8	73
	2011	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2010	Not opened	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2009	Not opened	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2008	Not opened	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2007	Not opened	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2006	Not opened	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2005	Not opened	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2004	Not opened	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

* Capacity increased from 85 to 231 in April 2013

Eastern Division

Park & Ride/Share Site		Cairnshill	Sprucefield	Blacks Road	Eastside	Northside	Northside Overflow
No. of Spaces		720	320	220	220	231	154
Average Number of Cars Using Park and Ride Sites Daily	2013	388	226	202	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2012	219	224	192	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2011	152	211	177	213	232	47
	2010	99	220	151	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2009	Not opened	222	145	214	203	68
	2008	Not opened	241	150	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2007	Not opened	211	121	198	232	154
	2006	Not opened	146	99	120	225	145
	2005	Not opened	Not opened	Not opened	N/A	N/A	N/A
	2004	Not opened	Not opened	Not opened	N/A	N/A	N/A

Note

- Where available, details of average occupancy levels have been included. As they are resource intensive, surveys to inform occupancy analysis are not carried out every year by each Division. In such instances "N/A" is specified in the tables.
- In some car parks occupancy levels can exceed capacity due to improper parking practices.

My Department's Roads Service does not hold data to illustrate the impact of park and ride and park and share schemes on traffic flow.

Details of the utilisation levels in all of Translink's Park and Ride facilities, for the last ten years, are set out in the following table:

Translink Park and Ride Facilities

Year	Number of Sites	Total Number of Spaces	Overall Utilisation Rate
2004	36	2,323	77%
2005	N/A	2,345	N/A
2006	N/A	2,874	N/A
2007	38	3,302	87%
2008	39	3,609	96%

Year	Number of Sites	Total Number of Spaces	Overall Utilisation Rate
2009	40	3,621	83%
2010	40	4,835	N/A
2011	45	5,136	70%
2012	49	5,697	75%
2013	49	6,099	76%

Note

- Where available, details of average occupancy levels have been included. As they are resource intensive, surveys to inform occupancy analysis are not carried out every year by each Division. In such instances "N/A" is specified in the tables.
- Translink does not hold information in relation to Park and Share facilities.

With regard to the number of vehicles being taken out of the traffic flow, a calculation using the data in the table above would suggest that, on the basis of an average 76% utilisation rate, on a daily basis 9,270 car journeys are removed from the network as a result of the provision of park and ride and park and share facilities.

A5/A6: Investment

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he intends to prioritise the A6 or the A5 in future rounds of infrastructure building.
(AQW 28883/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI) 2011-21 envisages improvements to both the A5 and A6 over the course of the 10 year period to 2021.

Both the Executive and the Irish Government remain committed to the A5 dual carriageway project and contractors are already in place. Following the Court ruling, work is progressing on an Appropriate Assessment process. Upon completion, this will be the subject of a public consultation exercise, which is expected to take place in spring 2014. A review of other matters considered in the Environmental Statement (ES) is ongoing, which may lead to publication of an updated document. Clearly I cannot prejudge any public consultation exercise and I am unable to give a definitive timetable as to when it may be possible for construction to start.

It is my intention to initiate a procurement competition to put a contractor in place for the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson scheme, so my Department would be in a position to avail of funding should it become available.

The A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dualling scheme has been through Public Inquiry. My officials have considered the Inspector's recommendations and I expect to make a Departmental Statement on the way forward later this financial year.

However, progression of these schemes to construction will be dependent upon the successful completion of the statutory processes and the availability of funding.

Public Transport: Usage

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the 10 per cent of wards in which people are least likely to use public transport.
(AQW 28887/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: This information is not currently available as there is no measure of the availability of public transport at Local Government District or Ward level, and Translink do not record this information.

Public Transport: Dunloy–Ballymoney/Ballymena/Ballycastle

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to improve the public transport provision between Dunloy and (i) Ballymoney; (ii) Ballymena; and (iii) Ballycastle.
(AQW 28888/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have operational responsibility in regard to service provision. As Dunloy has a lower density of population, demand for conventional public transport is lower. It has also advised that all bus services throughout the network were examined under a Strategic Review in 2005.

Potential for increasing the service level in these areas has been discussed on a number of occasions since the review, but current usage would not justify additional journeys at present.

I have asked that Translink keep these corridors under review and look at any potential growth opportunities that may arise.

North Antrim: Public Transport

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the increase in public transport usage in North Antrim over the last five years.

(AQW 28889/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The popularity of rail travel in the North West* continues to grow. Since 2007/08 growth in excess of 35% has been recorded along the corridor from Londonderry, through Coleraine, Ballymena and Antrim to Belfast and beyond. The recent £30m Renewals Project on the line between Coleraine and Londonderry which re-opened to passenger traffic on 24 March 2013 is likely to be a positive contribution to increased patronage.

A further contributory factor has been the enhanced timetable which came into operation in January 2013 which has resulted in an increase in frequency of over 40%.

Recently I announced that Translink will enhance the rail service provision in the North West.

Starting on 6 January 2014 Translink will offer passengers even more flexibility between Coleraine and Londonderry with the introduction of two additional trains. The extra service will depart Londonderry at 16:13, arriving in Coleraine at 17:01, while the return service will leave Coleraine at 17:55, and arrive back into Londonderry at 18:42. As a result the number of trains operating on the Coleraine to Londonderry section will increase from 59 to 64 each way per week

Bus service patronage in the North Antrim area, for the period requested is set out in the table below.

Year	Passenger Journeys
2008/09	8.6m
2009/10	8.2m
2010/11	8.1m
2011/12	7.9m
2012/13	8.0m

* Translink would define North West as Londonderry and Coleraine line

** Based on passenger statistics from Coleraine, Ballymena, Coleraine and Antrim depots

Cycling: Cycle Filter Lights

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what cycle filter lights are installed on the roads network.

(AQW 28890/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are no cycle filter lights currently installed on my Department's road network.

Car Parking: Parkmobile

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of the times the ParkMobile App; and (ii) the phone system have been used to pay for parking (a) in off-street carparks; and (b) on-street, in each month since their introduction.

(AQW 28905/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The most common methods of using Parkmobile to pay for parking events in parking places managed by my Department are the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) Telephone System (also known as "automated voice recognition") and the Parkmobile App. However, other less commonly used methods include texting from a mobile phone, using a computer to access the Parkmobile Internet Site, or being put through by a direct phone in cases where IVR cannot decipher the caller's voice.

The following table details the number of occasions that Parkmobile has been used to purchase off-street and on-street parking events, in each month, since being introduced by my Department in December 2010:

Year	Methods Used to Pay for Parkmobile						
	Parkmobile App		IVR Telephone System		Other (computer/direct phone/text)		On-Street
	Month	Off-Street	On-Street	Off-Street	On-Street	Off-Street	
2010	Dec		3				6
2011	Jan	0	4	15	5	3	28
	Feb	0	1	15	402	38	548
	Mar	22	529	33	774	28	465

Year	Methods Used to Pay for Parkmobile						
	Parkmobile App		IVR Telephone System		Other (computer/direct phone/text)		On-Street
	Month	Off-Street	On-Street	Off-Street	On-Street	Off-Street	
2011	April	15	555	65	1026	23	386
	May	45	858	118	1377	46	467
	June	106	858	155	1777	38	430
	July	95	706	103	1227	21	292
	Aug	101	952	164	1814	30	447
	Sep	97	950	106	1746	45	1030
	Oct	85	1322	98	1821	84	1252
	Nov	100	1536	160	2340	40	748
	Dec	80	1538	165	2460	49	496
2012	Jan	147	1895	209	2797	68	471
	Feb	296	2330	410	3195	162	500
	Mar	327	2651	484	3553	132	544
	April	357	2271	549	3249	120	375
	May	416	2883	636	3999	125	542
	June	405	2673	666	3802	126	483
	July	226	1325	491	3161	304	1829
2012	Aug	333	1438	844	3533	507	2203
	Sep	638	2766	914	3520	286	887
	Oct	799	3706	1147	4068	285	653
	Nov	945	4216	1287	4251	384	578
	Dec	1713	3490	1951	3634	682	517
2013	Jan	2588	4513	2953	4210	461	463
	Feb	2792	5176	3031	4293	347	470
	Mar	3068	5979	3376	4442	225	360
	April	3681	6347	3665	4400	167	287
	May	4400	7275	4242	5061	201	317
	June	4778	6671	4655	4478	150	235
	July	5007	5849	4171	3779	130	247
	Aug	5887	7320	4542	4411	207	252
	Sep	6511	7678	5256	4886	213	272
	Oct	7960	9115	5951	5459	269	318
	Nov	8388	9386	5877	5182	292	249
	Total	62408	116765	58504	110132	6288	19647

Donaghadee Harbour: Upgrade

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to improve and upgrade the Donaghadee Harbour and its environs prior to the proposed transfer to the new North Down and Ards Council.

(AQW 28912/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In light of the proposed transfer of Donaghadee harbour to local authority control, considerable capital expenditure has been invested to ensure that the harbour's structures will transfer in good condition. Most recently, my

Department funded dredging of the full harbour basin in 2011. The biennial harbour condition survey was carried out in 2013. My officials will consider the report of the survey when it is received and draw up an action plan for any capital works that are identified.

Gifts and Hospitality: DRD Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether, since May 2007, in relation to civil servants in his Department or its arm's-length bodies receiving gifts or hospitality, there have been any requests for approval of matters that fall outside the boundaries of what is normally allowable; and if so, to detail such requests.

(AQW 28959/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Within my Department and its arm's length bodies Northern Ireland Water and Translink, registers are maintained, updated and monitored in respect of all offers of gifts and hospitality made to staff by third parties. These registers record details of each offer received and indicate, in each case, whether the offer was accepted (with management approval) or declined.

The entries in the registers show that, during the period from May 2007 to date, no requests were made for approval of matters which fall outside the boundaries of what is normally acceptable in this area.

Comber Road, Dundonald: Footpaths

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the width of the footpath planned, as part of the Comber Road safety improvements, in ensuring adequate safety for pedestrians and people with a disability.

(AQW 28973/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has inherited many footpaths in towns and villages throughout Northern Ireland which do not meet modern day standards. The Public Realm Scheme planned for Comber is an Ards Borough Council-led project, funded mainly by the Department of Social Development (DSD), but with a contribution from the Council.

In general, Environmental Improvement Schemes are intended to enhance and revitalise towns, providing finishes which will help encourage new development, increase business potential and make them more commercially viable and attractive to visitors. My Department's Roads Service is one of a number of consultees to the planning process in this regard.

As you will appreciate, site constraints in some narrow streets, together with other contributory factors, can present considerable practical difficulties when seeking to achieve desired aims. Roads Service will, however, in conjunction with Public Representatives, Ards Borough Council, DSD, Comber Regeneration Community Partnership, PSNI, Appointed Consultants and other interested parties, continue to provide advice and guidance in relation to potential road safety improvements in the town where practicable, subject to the availability of resources.

Comber Road, Dundonald: Improvement Scheme

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the process whereby the road traffic flow and pedestrian safety were evaluated in relation to the Comber Road safety improvements; and to outline the cost-benefit analysis undertaken prior to the decision being taken.

(AQW 28974/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: AQW 28974/11-15

My Department's Roads Service has been one of a number of consultees involved in the Planning process relating to a Public Realm Improvement Scheme for Comber. The scheme is led by Ards Borough Council and mainly funded by the Department for Social Development (DSD), with a contribution by Council.

I understand URS Consultants, who have been appointed to deliver the Public Realm Scheme, made a number of recommendations regarding traffic management in Comber. The recommendations were as a result of local consultations and took account of the physical need within Comber, set against the constraints of the target budget of £2 million. One suggestion was the possibility of introducing a one-way system in Comber town centre.

Departmental officials commissioned a Feasibility Study in 2009 to look at the possibility of introducing a one-way system in Comber town centre, including Castle Street. The basis of this study was considered by URS Consultants and proposals were included in discussions, in relation to the Public Realm Scheme, with local traders and stakeholders. No agreement or consensus could be reached, and the one-way proposal was withdrawn as it could have jeopardised the delivery of the Public Realm Scheme.

Consideration has also been given to a further suggestion by Comber Regeneration Community Partnership, to set the traffic signals further back in Castle Street to allow the footways to be widened on either side. The personal injury collision history records provided by PSNI, site constraints, parking/servicing, potential traffic delays and reduced efficiency of the junction, together with road safety concerns, were taken into consideration during the primary assessment of this suggestion. The major concern with this proposal is the potential safety issue caused by traffic emerging from Castle Street after passing the set-back traffic signals on Castle Street. For example, any delay after passing the set-back green light may mean that traffic will reach the junction when other legs of the junction are on green – thus causing a serious road safety issue.

My officials are continuing to investigate and provide advice and guidance in consultation with Ards Borough Council and the various stakeholders involved in the Public Realm Scheme, to seek improvements to the infrastructure, where it is practicable to do so.

Comber Road, Dundonald: Pedestrian Safety

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development what proposals the Roads Service has to improve pedestrian safety on the Comber Road foot path.

(AQW 28975/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has inherited many footpaths in towns and villages throughout Northern Ireland, which do not meet modern day standards. Roads Service officials will continue to investigate and assess potential improvements to the road network infrastructure and develop work programmes to be implemented, on a prioritised basis, in accordance with current guidelines, subject to available finance and resources. Castle Street, Comber will be given due consideration during this process.

Railways: Redundant Equipment

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, when the only manually operated signalling equipment in N. I. Railways from the 19th century that is currently functioning at Castlerock becomes unnecessary in 2015, will he ensure that the items are retained and kept for future generations.

(AQW 29001/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink officials have advised me that it has already had discussions with relevant heritage groups, i.e. Downpatrick and County Down Railway and Railway Preservation Society of Ireland, about the recovery and future use of any such redundant equipment and through these discussions will try to ensure that the items are retained and kept for future generations.

Gifts and Hospitality: DRD Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development how many entries his Special Adviser has made in the Department's Register of Gifts and Hospitality since they were appointed; and what is the total value of such entries.

(AQW 29006/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Special Adviser has made no entries in the Department's Register of Gifts and Hospitality.

A26 Frosses Road: Environmental Impact Assessment

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the scope of the Environmental Impact Assessment carried out on the A26 Frosses Road; and (ii) the findings of the assessment.

(AQW 29016/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The scope and findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment carried out on the A26 Glarryford to A44 Drones Road Dualling scheme are reported in the scheme's Environmental Statement, which was published on 20 March 2012.

The Environmental Statement for this scheme can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address: www.drdni.gov.uk/a26frosses.

Translink: Redundant Buses

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of buses disposed of or sold by Translink in the last five years; (ii) the value of the sales; and (iii) the method of disposal.

(AQW 29024/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink, when disposing of redundant buses, aims to maximise their value using the most appropriate outlet. The vast majority of buses are life-expired and the highest scrap value is obtained from a scrap vehicle handler.

Selected vehicles which are considered to have further operational life are advertised on the Translink website and, where appropriate, in industry publications or by use of approved dealerships.

Offers for non-life expired vehicles are considered for approval by the Translink Executive Committee.

The tables below detail the information which you have requested.

Ulsterbus

Year	No. of Vehicles	Profit/(Loss) on Disposal (Assets) £	Comments
2009/10	125	374,764	57 sold as scrap 68 to other operators
2010/11	110	177,083	29 sold as scrap 81 to other operators
2011/12	75	72,778	23 sold as scrap 52 to other operators
2012/13	58	100,407	27 sold as scrap 31 to other operators
2013/14	53	150,481	13 sold as scrap 40 to other operators
Total	421	875,513	149 sold as scrap 272 to other operators

Metro

Year	No. of Vehicles	Profit/(Loss) on Disposal (Assets) £	Comments
2009/10	11	14,955	1 sold as scrap 10 to other operators
2010/11	7	14,705	3 sold as scrap 4 to other operators
2011/12	12	(25,797)	8 sold as scrap 4 to other operators
2012/13	23	47,041	15 sold as scrap 8 to other operators
2013/14	16	33,332	7 sold as scrap 9 to other operators
Total	69	84,236	34 sold as scrap 35 to other operators

Tinker Hill, Newry: Park and Ride

Mr Rogers asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the section of the A1 Road at Tinker Hill, Newry could accommodate additional Park and Ride facilities.

(AQW 29040/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: AQW 29040/11-15

I am pleased to inform you I officially opened a new expanded Park and Share facility at the Sheepbridge/Tinkers Hill Area of Newry on Monday 9 December 2013. The capacity of this well-used parking area has more than doubled with 62 spaces now available compared to the previous 25. This scheme has been constructed on lands owned by the Department following the construction of the Newry Bypass scheme.

At the present time there are no other viable sites located closer to Newry along the old A28 Belfast Road (previously known as A1 Tinker Hill). My officials will monitor usage in this area following the opening of the new facility and, should demand increase, will also further investigate the possibility of providing additional sites, subject to land acquisition and budgetary constraints.

Street Lights: Numbers

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many street lights there are in each council area; (ii) how many tonnes of CO2 emissions they produce annually; and (iii) whether he has considered replacing them with LED technology lighting.

(AQW 29041/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of street lights my Department has, in each council area, are provided in the table below:

Council Area	Street Lights
Antrim	8,813
Ards	11,876
Armagh	8,115
Ballymena	10,093
Ballymoney	4,410
Banbridge	6,885
Belfast	35,780
Carrickfergus	6,642
Castlereagh	10,585
Coleraine	12,146
Cookstown	4,754
Craigavon	16,677
Derry	21,023
Down	10,321
Dungannon & South Tyrone	6,931
Fermanagh	10,408
Larne	5,326
Limavady	5,669
Lisburn	18,098
Magherafelt	5,142
Moyle	2,957
Newry and Mourne	12,895
Newtownabbey	14,442
North Down	12,887
Omagh	7,399
Strabane	6,991

The electricity procured for street lighting is currently from 100% renewable sources. However, at a typical conversion rate for grid electricity, the amount of electricity consumed by the street lights would equate to some 53,613 tonnes of CO² annually.

Roads Service has an ongoing programme of replacing street lighting assets when they reach the end of their serviceable life. Over recent years, Roads Service has installed a number of LED lighting schemes, with the largest and most recent scheme located at Upper Knockbreda Road, Belfast.

The use of LEDs for street lighting offers great promise of long life and reduced operational and maintenance costs. Roads Service is currently seeking to appraise available street lighting technologies, such as LEDs etc, as well as options for the provision and maintenance of street lighting.

East Belfast: Public Bike Hire

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to connect East Belfast to the Belfast Bike Hire Scheme; and whether a hub could be located in this area.

(AQW 29056/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Belfast City Council was awarded an Active Travel Demonstration Project Grant of almost £700k in August 2012, to develop the infrastructure requirements for a public bike hire scheme in Belfast.

Belfast City Council are responsible for the project management of the scheme and will be responsible for managing any future contractual arrangements, further development of the scheme and meeting ongoing running costs. The Council are fully responsible for the design of the scheme, including the location of docking stations.

Work has commenced on the identification of suitable sites for up to 25 docking stations which will hold a total of 300 bikes at core city centre locations.

My officials are providing a project assurance role in respect of the expenditure associated with the grant and will continue to assist Belfast City Council in any practical way possible, during the development of the scheme.

Roads Service: Bottled Water

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how much Roads Service has spent on bottled water, in each of the last five years; (ii) the cost per bottle; (iii) how often bottled water supplies are tendered for; and (iv) how many bids were received for each tender.

(AQW 29064/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of expenditure incurred by my Department's Roads Service on bottled water, in each of the last five years, are included in the table below:

Amount spent on bottled water in each of the last five years

Financial Year	Amount
2009/10	£5,457.86
2010/11	£5,868.60
2011/12	£5,093.35
2012/13	£2,807.54
2013/14	£968.35

Following a review in 2008 of the provision of bottled water in DRD premises, including those occupied by Roads Service staff, the DRD Departmental Board restricted the use of bottled water within DRD accommodation, where a fresh mains drinking water supply was available within the premises. However, where there was no fresh mains drinking water available in a building, the policy permitted the business area to procure bottled water, subject to the appropriate approval.

As mains drinking water supplies are being installed in each DRD accommodation, the use of bottled water within buildings is being phased out.

With regard to the cost per bottle over the period, this has ranged from £4 to £7.25 for a 19 litre bottle.

In relation to how often the bottled water supply has been tendered for and how many bids were received, due to the low costs involved in each Roads Service Business area/Division, it has not been necessary to tender for this service.

NI Water: Water Conservation

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development how his Department and NI Water encourage water conservation. **(AQW 29084/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has in place a wide range of measures, aimed at encouraging water conservation. In addition to NIW's leakage reduction strategy, it involves a proactive approach to water conservation by all customers, including education and awareness, the issue of water saving devices known as Hippo Bags and water audits. This involves a year round education and public awareness campaign to promote the water conservation message and make available a wide range of advice leaflets and water conservation aids. Over the past three years, NIW has run an extensive media campaign to highlight to customers the need to prepare their pipework in advance of the winter to protect from severe weather conditions. A dedicated Leakline number is available for customers to report leakage incidents.

40% of water delivered is used by the non-domestic sector where there is a wide range of consumption. Metering is the preferred charging method for these customers and NIW is currently extending the scope of metering of non-domestic properties. Metering in this sector is likely to have the most significant contribution to water conservation.

Dedicated pages are available on the NIW website at www.niwater.com with advice on household and non-domestic water efficiency. This includes guidance on the types of appliances that could be fitted to homes and business which would help them to be more efficient in the future and "Top Ten Tips for Business Water Efficiency".

Street Lighting: Energy-saving Bulbs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to use energy saving light bulbs for street lighting.

(AQW 29090/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service seeks to use the most cost-effective street lighting equipment for energy efficiency and performance. Officials have been maintaining a keen interest in the ongoing development and use of Light Emitting Diodes (LED) for street lighting over recent years, through contacts with other roads authorities, professional organisations, manufacturers and contractors.

A number of LED street lighting schemes have already been installed, and Roads Service is currently seeking to appraise available street lighting technologies, such as LEDs etc, as well as options for the provision and maintenance of street lighting.

Translink: Free Wi-Fi

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to install Wi-Fi in train and bus stations.
(AQW 29116/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have liaised with Translink officials who have advised me that Wi-Fi is currently available at Central Station but is not free; rather it is a commercial service provided by BT Openzone.

Translink has looked at providing free Wi-Fi in key locations but this is not being progressed at present, due to the cost and the fact that passengers mostly 'turn up and go', i.e. they spend only a short period waiting for its services.

Planning Applications: Roads Service

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Roads Service has a target for the time it takes to respond to a planning application consultation.
(AQW 29130/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 28634/11-15.

Magee Campus: Resident-only Parking

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed residents' parking scheme near the Magee campus in Derry.
(AQW 29139/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service previously identified a number of areas, around the Magee Campus of the University of Ulster that were considered suitable for the introduction of "resident only" parking schemes, namely in the Lawrence Hill and Northland Road areas. The progression of these proposals is dependent upon the successful introduction of other residents' parking schemes in Northern Ireland, including one in the Bogside area of Londonderry, which have not yet been implemented.

The introduction of further residents' schemes will only be considered following careful monitoring and evaluation of the initial schemes. In addition, there are a number of other areas within the city that would be deemed a higher priority for the implementation of residents' parking schemes.

Schools: 20 mph Speed Limit Zones

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 5340/11-15, for an update on the introduction of 20 mph zones outside schools.
(AQW 29156/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department continues to deliver safety measures at schools and is developing policy to improve the safety of children on their journey to school. The concept of introducing part-time 20 mph speed limits outside schools has been agreed following the success of pilot schemes installed outside three primary schools.

However, as the cost of the safety measures used in the pilot schemes was higher than anticipated and given that financial resources are limited, my Department has been developing equally effective lower-cost safety measures, which will allow more schools to be treated within available budgets.

A new road safety at schools policy, which will encompass all available safety engineering measures, is also nearing completion. It is anticipated this policy will be in place for the next financial year.

Buses: Belfast International Airport–Belfast

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development what bus services operate from Belfast International Airport to Belfast city centre hotels.
(AQW 29166/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink provide bus services from Belfast International Airport to the Europa Buscentre, which is a short walking distance from a number of Belfast City centre hotels. From here passengers can also access other Translink services and/or taxi services to enable them to travel to other hotels throughout the city or further afield.

I understand that a private bus operator has made an application to the Department of Environment, (Driver & Road Transport Licensing) to provide a service from Belfast International Airport to the main Belfast City Centre hotels. This application is a matter for DOE and is currently being considered.

Cycling: Central Station–Short Strand, Belfast

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will work with the Department for Social Development to use the extra width on the road from Central Station to the Short Strand to introduce better cycling lanes and infrastructure. (AQW 29217/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: One of my objectives in establishing a Cycling Unit within my Department is to ensure that cycling provision is a key element in both transport strategy and delivery. I am confident that both Transport NI and the Cycling Unit will work with other interested stakeholders in developing robust and sustainable cycling infrastructure. My officials have recently met with DSD officials about this project and I expect the two Departments to work together to deliver a balanced and sustainable solution for all road users.

Donaghadee Harbour: Capital Works

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what capital works are required on Donaghadee Harbour and its environs. (AQW 29286/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I refer the Member to my previous answer on 16th December 2013 (AQW 28912/11-15).

Rousky, County Tyrone: Pumping Station

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Regional Development whether NI Water plans to locate a pumping station in Rousky, County Tyrone to connect homes to the public sewerage network. (AQW 29312/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has no current plans at this time to provide a first time public sewer extension or pumping station in Rousky to enable homes to connect to the public sewerage network.

NIW received a requisition for a first time public sewer extension and wastewater pumping station from property owners at Rousky in 2009 and a follow up requisition in 2012. NIW is required to provide a requisitioned sewer, subject to certain conditions including a requirement that the persons requesting the requisition pay the reasonable costs of providing the sewer as determined in accordance with NIW's Charges Scheme. In calculating the cost to be borne by the persons making the requisition, NIW deducts a reasonable cost allowance in respect of providing a sewer to domestic premises. The overall estimated cost of the scheme exceeded the available funding under the reasonable cost allowance leaving a shortfall of approximately £270k (2012 prices) to be funded by those benefitting from the service. Unless they agree to meet the shortfall, NIW is unable to progress the work.

Ballygawley Waste Water Treatment Works

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development an update on the upgrading of Ballygawley Water Treatment and Sewage Works. (AQW 29328/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that Ballygawley Wastewater Treatment Works is currently achieving its discharge standard and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has not reported any pollution incidents for the Works. Based on proposals for development within the catchment, NIW has identified a need for increased treatment capacity at the Works and it estimates that the construction of a new Works on the existing site would cost in the region of £2.5 million.

A priority list of capital works has been agreed with the environmental regulator (NIEA) for the forthcoming regulatory review PC 15, which covers the period 2015 to 2021. As the construction of a new Ballygawley Works has been placed at number 64 on the list, it must be considered against the other priority work to be included in NIW's PC15 capital work programme.

Disability Action Transport Scheme

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development what resources his Department has provided the Disability Action Transport Scheme to meet the transport needs of people with a disability. (AQW 29344/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Since 01 April 2013, when the scheme started, my Department has provided grant funding of £2,264,546.00 to Disability Action to operate the Disability Action Transport Scheme across Northern Ireland.

NI Water: Electricity Generation

Mr Wilson asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions his Department has had with Northern Ireland Water to investigate the possibility of generating electricity from the flow of water within water mains, by installing Archimedean Screws within suitable water main pipes. (AQW 29368/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Existing Ministerial Guidance to NI Water includes a priority to contribute to the Programme for Government greenhouse gas emissions reduction target (e.g. through increased use of green energy).

NI Water generates in the region of 2.5 Gigawatts of electricity per year from raw water sources. It is conducting an assessment of the potential to generate additional electricity from both raw water sources and from potable water mains. This assessment will consider a number of hydro technologies including Archimedes Screw and hydro turbines to replace pressure control valves within the water network.

My Department is consulting on future priorities in draft Social and Environmental Guidance for Water and Sewerage Service (2015-21). This includes proposals about investigating opportunities for generating renewable energy from NI Water assets. The Draft Guidance also includes a number of other priorities that could contribute to managing future increases in NI Water's energy demands and operating costs. The public consultation on Draft Social and Environmental Guidance closes on 31 January 2014.

Department for Social Development

Housing Executive/Housing Associations: Properties

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of (i) Housing Executive; and (ii) Housing Association properties in each Housing Executive District Office area.
(AQW 28327/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Housing Executive has provided information about the number of their properties in each District Office area in Table 1 below: -

Table 1 – Housing Executive Properties

North Belfast	6,167
South & East	7,582
West Belfast	5,060
Shankill	3,508
Bangor	2,658
Newtownards	3,855
Castlereagh	3,738
Lisburn Antrim Street	4,325
Lisburn Dairy Farm	1,842
Downpatrick	2,375
Newry	1,917
Banbridge	1,776
Armagh	3,048
Lurgan	2,522
Portadown	1,599
Dungannon	1,757
Fermanagh	1,988
Omagh	1,786
Cookstown	1,031
Antrim	2,364
Newtownabbey 1	2,160
Newtownabbey 2	2,134
Ballymena	2,722
Carrickfergus	1,894
Larne	1,295

Magherafelt	1,289
Ballycastle	818
Ballymoney	1,449
Coleraine	3,046
Limavady	1,451
Waterloo Place	2,179
Waterside	2,392
Collon Terrace	2,352
Strabane	2,164

The information for Housing Associations is not available in the format requested as they do not collate details of their properties by Housing Executive District Office area. However, Table 2 below details the number of Housing Association properties by District Council area: -

Table 2 – Housing Association Properties

Antrim Borough Council	467
Ards Borough Council	1162
Armagh City and District Council	375
Ballymena Borough Council	602
Ballymoney Borough Council	143
Banbridge District Council	404
Belfast City Council	14648
Carrickfergus Borough Council	563
Castlereagh Borough Council	850
Coleraine Borough Council	692
Cookstown District Council	168
Craigavon Borough Council	1294
Derry City Council	4278
Down District Council	902
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	627
Fermanagh District Council	630
Larne Borough Council	344
Limavady Borough Council	369
Lisburn City Council	2899
Magherafelt District Council	271
Moyle District Council	158
Newry and Mourne District Council	1123
Newtownabbey Borough Council	1012
North Down Borough Council	1229
Omagh District Council	384
Strabane District Council	541

NB: Where a housing association identified they had shared/hostel bedspaces these have been counted as one property.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Transforming Your Care: Housing Strategy

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister for Social Development how he will ensure that housing strategies align with Transforming Your Care.

(AQW 28934/11-15)

Mr McCausland: One of the five themes outlined in my Department's Housing Strategy is to meet housing need and support the most vulnerable

In order to meet housing need and support the most vulnerable in the owner occupied sector, the department will

Work with DHSSPS to make the best use of combined resources to support independent living

Review the Supporting People Programme to take into account all new and emerging policies to ensure that appropriate advice and support is available to allow individuals to find housing solutions that enable them to live as independently as possible: and,

Work with DHSS&PS to develop a more joined-up approach to provide the support that will allow as many individuals and families as possible to remain in their own home.

Social Housing: Banbridge/Portadown/Lurgan

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the Programme for Government target to deliver 8,000 new social and affordable homes by 2015, how many of these homes are scheduled for (i) Banbridge, (ii) Portadown and (iii) Lurgan.

(AQW 29091/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Programme for Government set a target to deliver 6000 social and 2000 affordable homes over the 4 year period 2011/12 – 2014/15.

Table 1 denotes the starts target per year and actual number of units delivered. The current year 2013/14 is year 3 of the PfG programme.

Table 2 details those schemes started on site during 2011/12 in Banbridge, Portadown and Lurgan. This information is based on the District Council areas of Banbridge and Craigavon. No starts occurred within these two Council areas during 2012/13.

Table 3 details those schemes within Banbridge and Craigavon District Council areas currently programmed to start on site during 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16.

I am currently considering a new Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) for the 3 year period 2014/15 – 2016/17. This will be published on the Housing Executive's website in January 2014.

Table 4 details the number of affordable property purchases supported by the Co-Ownership Scheme in the 2011/12 and 2012/13 financial years, in the relevant Council Areas. The information is not available in the format requested ie to 2015 due to this being demand led.

Table 1

Year	Starts Target	Actual units Started
2011/12	1400	1410
2012/13	1325	1379
2013/14	1275	217 (at 10th Dec 2013)
2014/15	2000	
Total	6000	3006 (at 10th Dec 2013)

Table 2

Year	HA	Scheme	Units	Need Group
2011/12	Oaklee	Glen View, Rathfriland	2	General
2011/12	South Ulster	169 Banbridge Road, Kinallen	4	General
2011/12	South Ulster	Hillcrest Lurgan	7	General
2011/12	South Ulster	96-100 Thomas St Portadown	3	General
2011/12	South Ulster	5 Abbey Manor Lurgan	1	General
2011/12	South Ulster	Clendinning ESPS Portadown	5	General

Year	HA	Scheme	Units	Need Group
2011/12	South Ulster	4 Meadowbrook Craigavon	1	General
2011/12	South Ulster	16 Deans Walk Lurgan	1	General
Total			24	

Table 3

Year	HA	Scheme	Units	Need Group
2013/14	Not yet nominated	178 Banbridge Road Kinallen	5	General
2013/14	Clanmil	Bayview Park Derrymore	4	General
2013/14	Oaklee	Curran Street Portadown	6	General
2013/14	Trinity	4 Lake Street Lurgan	26	Elderly (Cat1)
2014/15	Habinteg	Woodlands Gilford	1	Physically Disabled
2014/15	Ulidia	South Area Older People Banbridge/Dromore	18	Frail Elderly
2014/15	Habinteg	Headington Drive Lurgan	20	General
2014/15	Oaklee	Edward Street Portadown	15	Homeless/Ex-offenders
2015/16	Trinity	12 Dromara Road, Dromore	9	General
Total			104	

Table 4

Year	Council Area	Units
2011/12	Banbridge District Council	14
2011/12	Craigavon Borough Council	51
2012/13	Banbridge District Council	18
2012/13	Craigavon Borough Council	79

Disability Living Allowance: Atos Healthcare

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to long-term Disability Living Allowance recipients who have been through several medical assessments and their award was not modified, but have since been reassessed by Atos Healthcare and their award has been reduced or removed, what changes have been made to examination guidelines or decision factors; and how these differ from the original guidelines, prior to Atos Healthcare taking over examinations. (AQW 29124/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In a small number of Disability Living Allowance reviews a decision-maker in the Social Security Agency will request an Examining Medical Practitioner report to help them determine eligibility to the benefit. Prior to June 2011 the completion of the Examining Medical Practitioner report was carried out by a General Practitioner engaged by the Social Security Agency for that purpose only and completed during a visit to the claimant's home. The Examining Medical Practitioner gathered information on the diagnosis, the history of the condition, treatment and the severity and likely disabling effects of the condition on day-to-day living

From June 2011 Atos Healthcare has provided the Examining Medical Practitioner service for the Social Security Agency. The Examining Medical Practitioner report is still completed by a General Practitioner during a visit to the claimant's home and the report form completed is still the same one used prior to June 2011. The form is provided by the Social Security Agency to Atos Healthcare and continues to collect the same information as before.

Decision-Makers in determining entitlement to Disability Living consider all the available evidence including, where appropriate, information gathered through an Examining Medical Practitioner report. This approach, which is in line with the legislation governing the benefit, is supported by decision making guidance and has not changed since Atos Healthcare commenced providing the Examining Medical Practitioner service for the Social Security Agency.

Bangor: Housing Waiting List

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are on the housing waiting list in each ward in North Down. (AQW 29128/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive has advised that it does not routinely collate details about the waiting list at ward level. However, the table attached details the number of applicants on the waiting list by Housing Executive Common Landlord Area in its Bangor District Office area, at 1 December 2013.

Table: Number of Applicants on the Bangor Waiting List

NIHE Common Landlord Area	Applicants
Bangor Central	205
Bloomfield Road/ Balloo	644
Churchhill	19
Clandeboye Road	37
Clanmorris	2
Conlig/ Breezemount	49
Crawfordsburn	14
Donaghadee Road	64
Greenmount Avenue	0
Groomsport	68
Helens Bay (Rural)	20
Hollywood/ Redburn	133
Kilcooley	327
Loughview/ White City	107
Skipperstone/ Tughan Court	62
Spencer Street	76
Strand/ Kinnegar	41
Whitehill	132
Woodlands	3

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Housing Executive: Tradespeople's Pay

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Social Development how his Department monitors the level of pay to tradespeople employed by contractors and sub-contractors involved in Northern Ireland Housing Executive work.

(AQW 29151/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that it does not monitor the level of pay to trades people employed by either contractors or sub-contractors. However, the Housing Executive has further advised that all main contractors are required to inform the Housing Executive of any shortcomings in compliance with current legislation.

Housing Executive: Work Standards

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Social Development how his Department monitors the standard of work carried out by contractors and sub-contractors to ensure quality standards compliance with contract and value for money.

(AQW 29152/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I assume the Member is referring to how the Northern Ireland Housing Executive monitors the standard of work carried out by contractors and sub-contractors.

The Housing Executive advises that its Corporate Assurance Unit (CAU) is an independent assurance unit within the Housing Executive. CAU has inspection programmes in place for response and planned maintenance contracts including heating. The inspections provide the Housing Executive Board with a level of assurance on the quality of the work provided by contractors in relation to Housing Executive standards and specifications and the accuracy of the costs claimed. In addition the inspections provide assurance on the management of the contractors by operational staff. On completion of inspections the CAU provide recommendations to management to address both quality and cost issues and they report inspections results quarterly to the Housing Executive's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

Disability Living Allowance: Atos Healthcare

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many Disability Living Allowance recipients have had their award adjusted upward to a higher component following assessment by Atos Healthcare, since it took over medical examinations.

(AQW 29206/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not available as the Department for Work and Pensions IT system used by the Social Security Agency to administer Disability Living Allowance does not capture this specific level of detail.

Cycling: Central Station–Short Strand, Belfast

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will work with the Department for Regional Development to use the extra width on the road from Central Station to the Short Strand to introduce better cycling lanes and infrastructure.

(AQW 29218/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is currently working to complete a Public Realm Improvement Scheme from the Albert Bridge to East Bridge Street linking two previous schemes already completed at Cromac Street junction and Albertbridge Road. The works include upgrading the footway to a high quality stone material along with granite kerbs and suitable boundary treatments at the back of footways. No works are planned for the carriageway as this is the remit of DRD Roads Service. As with all DSD schemes DRD Roads Service is kept informed of all design proposals as part of the normal consultation process with statutory bodies as schemes are developed.

South Down: Homelessness

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Social Development how many people presented themselves as homeless in South Down in each of the last three years; and what action his Department is taking to support these people.

(AQW 29236/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Please note that figures cannot be produced at constituency level. The closest figures can be obtained by interpreting South Down as being represented by the Downpatrick, Newry and Banbridge District Offices of the Housing Executive.

The following tables display the homeless presentations and homelessness acceptances by the 3 districts over the past 3 years and the first six months of this year.

Downpatrick	Presenting as homeless	Accepted as homeless Full Duty Applicant
2010/11	609	299
2011/12	574	204
2012/13	420	209
2013/14 (6 months)	286	134

Newry	Presenting as homeless	Accepted as homeless Full Duty Applicant
2010/11	770	324
2011/12	805	322
2012/13	761	402
2013/14 (6 months)	428	204

Banbridge	Presenting as homeless	Accepted as homeless Full Duty Applicant
2010/11	345	145
2011/12	310	120
2012/13	316	156
2013/14 (6 months)	170	73

In response to homelessness across Northern Ireland, the Housing Executive and its partners in the Promoting Social Inclusion Homelessness Partnership have been developing and producing a range of homeless prevention measures under the auspices of the Homelessness Strategy 2012/2017.

The Housing Executive launched the Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland on 1 May 2012. This followed an extensive consultation and redrafting process throughout 2011 to establish agreement among the Statutory and Voluntary Agencies who would be helping to deliver the strategy.

The Homelessness Strategy 2012-17 sets out a strategy for tackling homelessness over the next five years and establishes the guiding principles for the development and delivery of homelessness services. At this time of economic uncertainty and financial constraints it is more important than ever that homelessness services are appropriate, timely and effective.

The aim of this homelessness strategy is that long term homelessness and rough sleeping is eliminated across Northern Ireland by 2020.

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Housing Executive: Smoke Alarms

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether it is Housing Executive policy to fit smoke alarms in its properties.

(AQW 29250/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive advises that there have been numerous specific smoke and heat detectors installation schemes and their records indicate that smoke alarms have now been fitted in the region of 86,000 of their total tenanted stock of 87,303. The Housing Executive will continue to provide smoke detectors to their remaining stock during heating and kitchen installation schemes and during Disabled Persons Adaptations work. However, it should be noted that a number of tenants did not allow planned work to proceed in their homes which would have included the installation of a wired smoke alarm; the Housing Executive continues to encourage each of these tenants to install a battery powered smoke alarm. The Housing Executive also regularly advises all its tenants to test their alarms.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 28668/11-15, given the disparity of takeup between council areas of similar population size and demographic composition, what further steps can be taken to encourage people to avail of the Warm Homes Scheme.

(AQW 29261/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The marketing of Warm Homes Scheme is the responsibility of the two Scheme Managers (Bryson Energy and H&A Mechanical). The Scheme Managers produce annual marketing plans outlining their proposed promotional activities and report on these activities at the monthly meetings with the Housing Executive. Marketing activities range from press releases and adverts, to attendance at local events and direct mail promotion to target households on qualifying benefits.

They also work with two rural projects, Western Home Environmental Assessment Project (WHEAP) and Maximising Access in Rural Areas (MARA) to encourage scheme take up in rural areas. The Scheme Managers monitor uptake across all their contract areas and respond appropriately. For example, one Scheme Manager is currently targeting households in North Down, where the scheme uptake has typically been low.

The scheme has been successful and since its inception in 2001 more than 117,000 homes have received energy efficiency improvement measures. The scheme is based on eligible households self referring and there will always be variance in numbers by council areas as there will always be those who will not come forward to take advantage of schemes like Warm Homes.

Since April 2012 my Department has been delivering the Affordable Warmth Pilot, working in partnership with the University of Ulster, local councils and the Housing Executive using a targeting tool to identify homes that may be entitled to help from the Warm Homes Scheme. Once this pilot has been completed my Department will report and evaluate on the outcomes and will go to public consultation on proposals for a new scheme early next year.

Winter Fuel Payment: Eligibility

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the rationale for the date of birth cut-off for Winter Fuel Allowance eligibility being moved forward by six months for 2013-2014 as opposed to a full year.

(AQW 29263/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Originally entitlement to Winter Fuel Payment was directly linked to pension age so a woman was entitled from age 60 but a man was not entitled until age 65.

Now, both men and women are entitled to Winter Fuel payment on the same basis. In effect, this is if they have attained the state pension age for a woman in the qualifying week for the winter concerned (the week beginning with the third Monday in September).

Pension age for men and women is currently being equalised on the phased basis set out in Table 1 in Schedule 2 to the Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 (as amended). As set out in that Table, for the winter 2012/13 only those born before 6 July 1951 attained pension age for a woman by the qualifying week. For the winter 2013/14, only those born before 6 January 1952 attained pension age for a woman by the qualifying week

North Antrim: Hostels

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of hostel accommodation places provided to homeless people in North Antrim, in the last twelve months.

(AQW 29296/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Please note that this information cannot be provided by constituency so figures have been provided for the Ballymena, Ballymoney and Ballycastle NIHE District Offices.

Statistics are included for the full year of hostel placements for April 2012 to March 2013. In addition it is only possible to provide figures for the first 5 months of this year from April 2013 to August 2013, the reports for the months of September 2013 to November 2013 are still in development.

The number of households provided with hostel accommodation from April 2012 to March 2013:

District	NIHE hostels	Voluntary Sector hostels	Total
Ballymena	16	63	79
Ballymoney	2	14	16
Ballycastle	0	3	3

The number of households provided with hostel accommodation from April 2013 to August 2013:

District	NIHE hostels	Voluntary Sector hostels	Total
Ballymena	7	32	39
Ballymoney	0	9	9
Ballycastle	1	1	2

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North Antrim: Double Glazing

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the double glazing schemes (i) delivered in the last twelve months; and (ii) planned for the next twelve months, in the North Antrim constituency.

(AQW 29297/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised as follows regarding double glazing schemes in the North Antrim constituency: -

- (i) Delivered in the last 12 months
 - Glebeside 190 dwellings
 - Ballymena 215 dwellings
 - Ballycastle 60 dwellings
- (ii) Planned for the next 12 months
 - Ballymoney 103 dwellings
 - Ballymena 271 dwellings

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North Antrim: Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes benefited from the Warm Homes Grant Scheme in the North Antrim constituency, in the last twelve months.

(AQW 29298/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive administers the Warm Homes Scheme on behalf of the Department. Management information is collected at Council level. The North Antrim constituency comprises the council areas of Moyle, Ballymoney and Ballymena. In those three council areas in the 12 months from December 2012 to November 2013, a total of 662 homes have had Warm Homes measures provided.

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Whitehill, Bangor: Community Workers

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department can take to help a community worker in Whitehill Estate, Bangor, whose salary runs out at the end of 2014.

(AQW 29330/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive does not enter into direct funding arrangements with community workers but has in the past made available limited funding for groups through the Community Development Budget which has been used by groups for salary costs. As this budget is limited, the Housing Executive has sought to invest in communities through locally based community grants (which do not cover salary costs) to help develop local community initiatives on a wider scale. The Housing Executive has therefore, over the past number of years, encouraged Groups to vary their funding sources for salary costs or enter into joint funding arrangements.

At this point in time the Housing Executive anticipates that some funds may continue to be available for salary costs at the end of 2014, however it is not possible for them to give an undertaking at what level funding can be provided or to guarantee funding to secure any particular post.

Millisle: Housing Maintenance

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to list the housing maintenance schemes earmarked for the Millisle area, in the next financial year.

(AQW 29332/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that the planned programme for Millisle next financial year includes:

- Kitchen replacements to 28 dwellings
- Heating replacement to 17 dwellings (mainly previous refusals)
- Double glazing installation to 12 dwellings

Donaghadee: Housing Maintenance

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to list the housing maintenance schemes earmarked for the Donaghadee area, in the next financial year.

(AQW 29333/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that the planned programme for Millisle next financial year includes:

- Kitchen replacement to 74 dwellings
- Heating replacement to 28 dwellings (mainly previous refusals)
- Double glazing installation to 11 dwellings

Housing Benefit: Direct Payments to Landlords

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development how his Department co-operated with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs when making housing benefit payments to landlords who reside outside Northern Ireland, to ensure that there is an awareness of the income derived from the public purse.

(AQW 29347/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Housing benefit may be paid directly to a landlord in certain circumstances, for example, where a claimant has requested such an arrangement. This is provided for in housing benefit legislation.

There is no requirement for the Department for Social Development to notify Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs when payments are made directly to a landlord, regardless of whether or not the landlord resides in Northern Ireland.

Social Housing: Armed Forces Veterans

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the scale, scope and availability by area of housing accommodation available to veterans of the Armed Forces.

(AQW 29357/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Social Housing in Northern Ireland is allocated in accordance with the rules of the Housing Selection Scheme. Subject to a person being eligible in accordance with the rules of the Scheme, they are entitled to be placed on a waiting List in an area of their choice. There is no specific housing for veterans of the Armed Forces.

Social Housing: Armed Forces Veterans

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the numbers of veterans of the Armed Forces waiting for housing accommodation.

(AQW 29358/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information cannot be provided as the Housing Executive does not hold information on the social housing application form that can identify if a person applying for social housing is a veteran of the Armed Forces.

Social Housing: Allocation

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to change the system of allocating social housing from the current points based system.

(AQW 29369/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In 2012, I announced a fundamental review of social housing allocations in Northern Ireland, delivering on a commitment set out in my Housing Strategy and Facing the Future Action Plan.

My Department commissioned independent research and three reports, prepared by the Universities of Ulster and Cambridge have been published (see link below), providing the academics' views on the future of social housing allocations.

When public comments have been received on the reports, the feedback will be considered and proposals developed, which will in turn be subject to full public consultation.

<http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hsdiv-housing/allocations-research.htm>

Social Development Minister: Revision of Answers

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of his acknowledgement that he was erroneous in thinking that he had met with representatives of the Glass and Glazing Federation rather than Turkingtons, whether he will revise his answers to Assembly Questions that he has answered on this matter.

(AQW 29440/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I advised the Committee for Social Development on 12 December 2013 that I inadvertently and unintentionally misinformed the Committee about the attendees of the meeting that was held on 16 April 2012. I will revise my previous answers to Assembly Questions on this matter.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Parliament Buildings: International Calls

Mr McGlone asked the Assembly Commission, pursuant to AQW 28396/11-15, what consultation took place with Members prior to enforcing the restrictions on international calls from Parliament Buildings.

(AQW 29346/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey: It was the understanding of Building Services Branch that, while telephones in Parliament Buildings had previously been re-set to bar international calls, no telephone lines were deliberately restricted from making calls to 00 353 numbers. We have now re-assessed all telephone lines and have discovered that a small number do not have the required 'tac' levels to call 00 353 numbers. This appears to have been due to a technical error and we have subsequently requested, through IT Assist, that all telephone lines in Parliament Buildings are provided with the appropriate 'tac' level in order to make calls to 00 353 numbers.

No restrictions on 00353 numbers were intentionally enforced and therefore no consultation was required. All telephone lines will now have access to 00 353 numbers within Parliament Buildings.

I apologise for any confusion and inconvenience that may have been caused by this inadvertent reduction in 'tac' levels. Please let me know if you require anything further.

Assembly Committees: Broadcast Meetings

Mr Copeland asked the Assembly Commission to detail what action it is taking to ensure all meetings of Statutory Assembly Committees are televised and furthermore are broadcast on the Assembly website.

(AQW 29480/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey: The Assembly has three Committee rooms capable of being recorded in both video and audio - Room 30, Room 29 and the Senate Chamber. Another Committee Room, Room 21, is audio only.

The current design of the broadcast system can only deliver three simultaneous live outputs, although all other output is recorded. That means that when there are more than three Committee meetings happening simultaneously in Parliament Buildings, there is not the capacity to make a video stream available for all Committee meetings.

The Assembly is also able to stream two of these meetings using its current streaming service. To maximise the coverage of Assembly Committees visitors to the Assembly website are advised how they can access meetings being streamed by the BBC Democracy live service and the content of the Assembly streams are sometimes altered to avoid duplication of streaming by the BBC thus maximising the number of Committees available through web streaming.

The 'Listen Again' function on each Committee's individual web page gives access to the audio recording of most recent open session of that Committee and, therefore, is available to all on the website.

In addition, the video feeds of any meetings in Room 29, 30 and the Senate are provided to external TV companies as requested as well as audio feeds for any of the Committee rooms for radio broadcasters.

Access for the public to Committee proceedings is available via attendance at meetings, web streaming, 'Listen Again', Committee minutes and the official Report where available. In addition, all recordings, both video and audio, are archived for the mandate and are available by request.

To further increase the level of access a business case has been developed to procure a new internet video streaming service that will address the issue of smartphone and tablet compatibility so that the Assembly's video and/or audio streams can be made accessible on a wider range of devices and platforms. The new service will also increase the number of available feeds from two to three simultaneous live streams capable of carrying video and/or audio. It is planned that the new service will be in place for the 2014/2015 session.

Further, a plan is being considered at present for a temporary installation of video cameras in Room 21 to ensure a continuity of service and to minimise disruption to the business of the Assembly during the repairs being made to the roof. This is a measure to service a specific need during the renovation and repair phase.

However, this is a only temporary measure as to add one or more televised rooms will require a substantial redesign of the broadcasting infrastructure including finding additional accommodation for production galleries and broadcasting staff. This would be a major project that would require significant capital investment and, in the current climate of austerity and value for money, is not an option that is being considered at present.

Eurest: Food Waste

Mr Agnew asked the Assembly Commission to detail how Eurest currently manages excess food.
(AQW 29503/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey: Eurest minimises food waste by managing a robust food production system. This allows for effective planning with EPOS (Electronic Point Of Sale) information used to forecast production. During Recess periods food production is matched to the occupancy of the building.

All food waste is collected by the Northern Ireland Assembly waste management contractor who transports it to NWP at Glenside for composting.

All Eurest employees are trained in Food Management, Fighting Food Costs and Trim Trax. All these schemes allow Eurest to optimise their food production system.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 3 January 2014

Written Answers to Questions

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission: Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of staff employed by the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, broken down by religion.

(AQW 28565/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The Loughs Agency is an Agency of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. The Loughs Agency has responsibility for the promotion and development of Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough for commercial and recreational purposes in respect of marine, fishery and aquaculture matters.

The Loughs Agency has 10 staff based in the south of Ireland and 46 staff based in the north of Ireland. The Loughs Agency is only required to hold information on community background for employees living in the north. Of these, the breakdown is as follows:

- 20 Protestant employees;
- 25 Catholic employees; and
- 1 non determined employee.

Loughs Agency: A5 Western Transport Corridor

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) why Loughs Agency did not respond to the findings and conclusions of the screening exercise on the A5 Western Transport Corridor; (ii) whether Loughs Agency are a statutory consultee; (iii) whether it is normal for Loughs Agency to respond; and (iv) whether any consideration was given by Loughs Agency to issuing a response.

(AQW 28746/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) The Loughs Agency has been involved in various stages of the wider A5 Western Transport Corridor consultation process from as far back as 2007. The Agency was involved, pre public enquiry, where it has fully participated via letter, email or verbally and has put forward relevant comments. The Loughs Agency did submit a response to the screening exercise. The Agency's response was set out in a letter dated 28th March 2011.
- (ii) The Loughs Agency is currently a non-statutory consultee.
- (iii) The Loughs Agency responds to all consultations that falls within its remit.
- (iv) As stated earlier, the Loughs Agency issued a response on 28th March 2011.

North Antrim: Livestock Theft

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many incidents of stolen livestock have been reported in the North Antrim area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 29300/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013
Number of Incidents	80	66	87

The above table records the number of incidents involving missing or stolen cattle in the Ballymena Divisional Veterinary Office (DVO) area. The majority of the North Antrim area is in the Ballymena DVO area.

APHIS does not differentiate between missing or stolen cattle. Information involving any other missing or stolen livestock is not recorded on APHIS at present.

APHIS does not record information on a constituency basis.

Eggs: Italy/Greece Imports

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she is aware of eggs being imported from Italy or Greece.

(AQW 29320/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My officials interrogated the Trade Control and Export System (TRACES) database and can confirm that there are no records of direct imports of hatching eggs from either Italy or Greece during 2013.

In accordance with EU law table eggs move freely between Member States (MS). DARD is therefore not informed of consignments coming into the north from other MS including Italy and Greece.

Farm Security: CESAR

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department will be administering the recently announced funding package to encourage farmers to fit security devices to their machinery.

(AQW 29380/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Front line administration of this initiative will be undertaken by NFU Mutual staff.

The contact number to reserve the subsidised rates for TRACKER and CESAR is 028 90 818688. The line will be open 09:00 to 17:00 Monday to Friday and the package is available until 31st January 2014, subject to availability.

Tree Disease: Ministerial Meetings

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list the number of meetings she has held on future strategies to combat tree disease and pests with officials in the (i) Republic of Ireland; and (ii) regions of the United Kingdom.

(AQW 29388/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In the past 12 month I have had three meetings with Ministers from the south of Ireland which included agenda items related to tree and plant health strategy on the 9 and 10 July and on the 13 November. My officials have been regularly liaising with their DEFRA counterparts on these issues over this period however I have had no meetings with British Ministers during this period.

Farming: Capital Grant Scheme

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the work undertaken by her Department on a future capital grant scheme for farmers; and to detail the timescale for this work.

(AQW 29409/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's proposals for a capital grant scheme in the new Rural Development Programme (RDP) were outlined in a consultation document published on 1 July 2013, with the period of public consultation closing on 21 October 2013.

My officials are considering the consultation responses received and will continue to develop the programme in conjunction with the Stakeholder Consultation Group before it is submitted to Europe. There is further work to be done on the proposals for the new Programme before it is submitted informally to Europe to commence the process of approval.

Third Sector Organisations: DARD Funding

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) all third sector organisations funded by the Department who provide services to the public; and (ii) the value of each contract.

(AQW 29412/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The following table outlines the third sector organisations funded by my Department in the 2012/13 financial year.

Name of Third Sector Organisation Funded by DARD	Value of Contract
Fermanagh Rural Community Network	£169,689
Cookstown & Western Shores Area Network	£159,500
Tyrone, Armagh, Down & Antrim	£169,798
South Antrim Rural Network	£99,569
Rural Area Partnership In Derry	£133,100

Name of Third Sector Organisation Funded by DARD	Value of Contract
North Antrim Rural Network	£128,831
County Down Rural Community Network	£99,710
County Down Rural Community Network	£198,916
Rural Support	£84,775
University of Ulster	£103,000
City & Guilds	£77,416
Queen's University Of Belfast	£54,541
LANTRA	£28,035
Northern Regional College	£20,963
CIEH	£20,295
RSPB	£8,358
Calc Open Learning	£7,090
UCAS	£5,729
South Eastern Regional College	£5,355
Institute of Materials Minerals & Mining	£5,023
Royal Society For Public Health	£3,762
Food & Drink Sector Skills	£3,635
Randalstown Arches Association	£3,611
Young Farmers' Club Of Ulster	£3,600
Federation of Irish Bee Keepers Association	£2,664
Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board	£2,614
Wageningen University	£2,200
ABC Awards	£2,161
Food And Environment Research Agency	£2,040
South West College	£1,736
Banbridge District Ent Ltd	£1,520
Southern Regional College	£1,250
Inst of Materials Minerals & Mining	£1,182
British Horseracing Educ & Stds Trust	£989
St John Ambulance (Ni)	£975
Open College Network Northern Ireland	£955
Assumption Grammar School	£930
SFQC	£762
Deaf Awareness & Communications	£759
Banbridge Rugby Club	£680
North West Regional College	£640
Shopmobility	£591
Royal College Of Veterinary Surgeons	£578
Larne Enterprise Development company Ltd	£508
Action Cancer	£500
International Safe Transit Association	£498

Name of Third Sector Organisation Funded by DARD	Value of Contract
North Irish Dragons	£450
Strabane Enterprise Agency	£429
Belfast Metropolitan College	£350
Regent House Grammar School	£350
Inishowen Vintage Club	£322
Lisburn Enterprise Organisation Ltd	£308
Greenkeepers Training Committee	£280
Antrim Enterprise Agency	£273
Ni Chest Heart & Stroke Association	£240
Enterprise Ireland	£237
British Horse Society	£210
LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming)	£206
Sixtowns Community Resource Centre	£190
Lisburn City Council	£183
Churchill & District Association	£180
Harper Adams University College	£175
Newtownstewart Leisure Complex Ltd	£163
Institute of Food Science And Technology	£105
Fermanagh Harriers Hunt Club	£100
Inst of Agricultural Engineers	£100
Titanic Schools Project	£100
Institute of Groundsmanship	£98
Royal Horticultural Society The	£84
Claudy Rural Development Ltd	£80
Inst of Agricultural Management	£75
Connemara Pony Breeder's Association	£73
Society of Garden Designers	£64
Mullaghbawn Community Centre Association	£60
Irish Thoroughbred Breeders' Association	£56
British Sandwich Association The	£55
Causeway Enterprise Agency	£50
Dooneen Community Association	£50
Teagasc	£50
Garvagh Development Trust	£45
Southwest College	£40
Loughgiel Community Association	£30
Markethill District Enterprises Ltd	£30
Ulster Ram Breeders Association	£30
RoSPA	£29
Cooneen Community Hall	£25

Animal Welfare: Tuberculosis Breakdown

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the criteria for determining whether there is a potential animal welfare or human hardship problem following a tuberculosis breakdown; and (ii) whether breakdown herds can have immediate access to Alternative Control Herds.

(AQW 29485/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) Given the range of potential animal welfare or human hardship problems following a tuberculosis breakdown it would not be appropriate to apply rigidly defined criteria. Each case will be considered on its merits following discussion between the herdkeeper and the patch Veterinary Officer or local Divisional Veterinary Officer.
- (ii) Any herd keeper who has a problem which they believe will be relieved by moving animals to an Alternative Control Herd (ACH) will be able to apply to do so. Alternative Control Herds will be able to accept cattle from TB free herds on a routine basis. Moves to ACHs from TB breakdown herds will be considered by the Department on a case by case basis and will be permitted where the move will resolve a potential animal welfare or human hardship problem at the breakdown herd, which cannot be resolved by other means such as purchase of additional fodder. It will take some weeks before the first ACHs are approved. Therefore, in the meantime, anyone experiencing animal welfare or hardship problems as a result of TB restrictions should contact their local DARD Direct office for advice.

Rural Development Programme: European Visits

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the European visits made by her Department in the course of implementing the current Rural Development Programme or planning future programmes in each of the past three years.

(AQW 29486/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: For the purposes of answering this question 'European visits' has been taken to mean meetings with the European Commission on implementation of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programme and development of the 2014-2020 Programme. The following table details the meetings which have taken place in this context in the last three years.

Meeting Type	Number	Programme
Rural Development Annual Review	3	2007-2013
EU Rural Development Committee	2	2007-2013 2014-2020
EU Commission – ad hoc issues	3	2007-2013 2014-2020

The answer excludes meetings on negotiating the regulations, which have taken place in Europe over the last three years and which provide the framework for the new Programme.

Rural Development Programme: European Visits

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) any reviews, carried out regarding Departmental visits to Europe, as part of officials' normal duties; and (ii) if any visits were assessed.

(AQW 29487/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A total of 8 meetings have been held with the EU Commission on the implementation of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programme and the development of the 2014-2020 Programme. Due to the nature of these meetings no formal review or assessment was required. Three of these meetings were Annual Reviews following completion of the Annual Progress Report and are an EU requirement. Two meetings were attendance at Rural Development Committee. Information from these meetings was disseminated to relevant DARD staff on return. The remaining three meetings were in relation to specific issues and the outcome of these meetings was discussed with relevant staff.

Single Farm Payment: Maximum Eligible Area

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail how many 2013 Single Farm Payment applications have had field Maximum Eligible Area (MEA) discrepancies identified, and are subject to further Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) checks.

(AQW 29493/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At the outset of the verification checks on 2013 Single Farm Payment applications, the Department identified 3,529 businesses where one or more fields had been claimed with an area greater than the Maximum Eligible Area held by the Department.

Single Farm Payment: Maximum Eligible Area

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail at what stage of the 2013 Single Farm Payment process field Maximum Eligible Area (MEA) discrepancies were identified in applications.

(AQW 29494/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Maximum Eligible Area (MEA) discrepancies were initially identified during the claim validation process. This process commenced after all field information from paper Single Application Forms had been entered into Departmental systems. MEA discrepancies can also be identified through on-the-spot checks such as land eligibility inspections.

Single Farm Payment: Maximum Eligible Area

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) what information has been issued to Single Farm Payment applicants that have had field Maximum Eligible Area (MEA) discrepancies identified with their claims; and are subject to Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) checks; and (ii) at what stage of the process this information was issued.

(AQW 29495/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In September 2013 the Department identified 3,529 businesses where one or more fields had been claimed with an area greater than the Maximum Eligible Area held by the Department.

In all of these cases the Department established whether it held any information which explained why the farm business claimed an area greater than the MEA. In circumstances where the Department did not hold such information, letters were issued to farm businesses on 11 November 2013 requesting responses within a 10 day period. These letters requested an explanation from the farm business.

Single Farm Payment: Maximum Eligible Area

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline whether discrepancies identified with the field Maximum Eligible Area for 2013 Single Farm Payment applications that are subject to Land Parcel Identification System checks are attributable to individual applicants or to her Department.

(AQW 29496/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At the outset of the verification checks on 2013 Single Farm Payment applications, the Department identified 3,529 businesses where one or more fields had been claimed with an area greater than the Maximum Eligible Area held by the Department.

The discrepancies identified have been investigated and are found to have occurred for a variety of reasons including farmer error in the claim and outstanding updates to the LPIS. The majority of discrepancies investigated have been attributed to error by the farmer.

Department for Employment and Learning

Apprenticeships: Female Participation

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline any plans he has to promote women in apprenticeships.

(AQW 29244/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The most recent edition of my Department's ApprenticeshipsNI Statistical Bulletin indicates that from the introduction of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme in 2007 to date, the percentage of females starting ApprenticeshipsNI funded training has increased from 35% to 51%. A full copy of the Statistical Bulletin can be viewed by following the link below.

<http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/publications/r-and-s-stats/apprenticeshipsni-statistical-bulletins.htm>

Factors impacting on this increase include the introduction of an all-age provision coupled with accessibility for those working a minimum of 21 hours per week.

As outlined in my oral statement to the Assembly on Tuesday 4 June 2013, I am aware of a range of gender equality issues facing Northern Ireland. I recognise that females, despite gaining strong educational attainments in the further and higher education fields, are much less likely than males to pursue careers in economically relevant areas such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM).

The implementation of the STEM Strategy, 'Success through STEM' sets out how we will collectively help to address this issue. Businesses themselves have an important role to play. For example, the STEM Business sub-group ran a seminar entitled 'Are you getting the balance right?' in association with the Equality Commission. The seminar engaged with STEM businesses to investigate the issues of gender bias in STEM and assist in identifying additional steps businesses can take to make careers in STEM attractive to women.

As the member will be aware, in February I announced a major review of my Department's apprenticeship policy. The terms of reference for this work state the intention to explore how apprenticeships could have a better gender balance. This review, which is all encompassing in nature, is progressing as planned and I will be reporting its findings shortly.

Apprentices: Retention

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he has given any consideration to how the public sector can be used to assist in the retention of apprentices during the economic downturn.

(AQW 29245/11-15)

Dr Farry: Employment Service Advisers, working across my Department's network of Jobs and Benefits Offices, will explore all employment opportunities with apprentices who are made redundant.

My Department's employment and training programmes, such as Training for Success, Youth Employment Scheme and Steps to Work, include the opportunity for work placement. Training Suppliers work with a range of employers, from all sectors, in order to facilitate suitable placements.

As the member will be aware, in February I announced a major review of my Department's apprenticeship policy. This review, which is all-encompassing in nature and will consider the public sector context, is progressing as planned and I will be reporting its findings shortly.

Universities: Cap Abolished

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the local implications for a proposed lifting of the cap on university numbers.

(AQW 29248/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the Chancellor's Autumn Statement it was announced that universities in England will be given an extra 30,000 student places for 2014/15 and that the cap will be abolished altogether for 2015/16

This change may present the opportunity for more students from Northern Ireland who wish to study in England to take advantage of the additional places being made available. However, there is no strong evidence as to how the regime of higher fees and cost of living expenses will affect the decision of students to study there.

The availability of more places in England may make it more challenging for the local universities to attract students from outside Northern Ireland to study here.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Agrifood: Cooperative Societies

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the economic value of the co-operative sector within the agri-food sector; (ii) the number of jobs sustained within the sector, for each of the last five years; and (iii) the plans to further support its growth.

(AQW 29222/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The following figures are based on information for 2012 for agri-food co-operative societies and their subsidiary companies:

(i)	Total turnover:	£1,093,814,302
	External Sales:	£744,002,883
	Value Added:	£79,398,594
(ii)	Total employment:	2012 – 2,247 employees
		2011 – 2,239 employees
		2010 – 2,179 employees
		2009 – 2,145 employees
		2008 – 2,091 employees

(iii) The Agri-food Strategy, 'Going for Growth', outlines the development strategy over the next six years to 2020, including sub-sector targets and recommendations. Future development plans submitted to Invest NI for consideration for financial assistance will be assessed according to current procedures.

Consumer Estate Agents and Redress Act 2007

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any statutory evidence gathering powers on issues affecting consumers exists, comparable to Section 24 of the Consumer Estate Agents and Redress Act in Great Britain; and to outline any plans she has in relation to this issue.

(AQW 29256/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Section 24 of Consumer Estate Agents and Redress Act 2007 allows the National Consumer Council to request that information be provided to it from certain persons in connection with its functions under the Act. Included among these persons are the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority and the Water Services Regulation Authority.

The provisions that allow the National Consumer Council to request information from these Authorities are broadly similar to the provisions that allow the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland to request information from the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, under both the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 and the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.

With the review of consumer landscape in GB it is proposed that responsibility for the consumer advocacy role for postal matters in Northern Ireland will transfer to the Consumer Council. This transfer of responsibility will come with the power to require that information be provided to the Council, in relation to postal matters. The legislative basis for this power will be through an amendment to the provisions of Section 24 of the Consumer Estate Agents and Redress Act 2007.

Consumer Council: Budget

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much of the Consumer Council budget was spent on each of its functions, including (i) handling enquiries and complaints; (ii) producing publicity materials; (iii) carrying out research; (iv) consumer education activities; and (v) other activities, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 29257/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The budget information is not available in the format requested but the figures below detail the staff salaries for the three years in question together with the amounts spent on work programme by project in 2011/12 and 2012/13 and by area in 2010/11.

Staff Salaries

	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11
Consumer Support	257,674	274,209	278,524
Policy & Research	564,703	545,054	581,176
Consumer Education	153,748	160,930	175,125
Communications	141,355	158,025	137,194
Corporate Services	518,961	541,372	558,411
	1,636,441	1,679,590	1,730,430

Work Programme

By Project	2012/13	2011/12
Fuel Poverty	11,636	34,668
Passenger Rights	27,574	21,929
Household Efficiency	57,102	13,992
Insurance	28,700	3,528
Financial Capability and Initiatives	27,885	60,582
Improving Customer Care	34,652	14,100
Regulation Working Better	22,333	7,099
Public Transport Reform	14,279	6,864
Outreach Strategy	22,079	35,081
*Core Costs	51,200	91,180
Water Governance and Performance	0	5,311
**Consumer Interest	0	27,721
(Money Affairs Policy Recommendations)	0	5,514
	297,440	327,569

* (including consumer education, corporate plan and annual report)

** (including research and consumer panels)

By Area	2010/11
Energy	24,007
Consumer Education	31,726
Transport	43,651
Communications including website	59,792
Water	17,535
Consumer Support	34,174
Money Affairs	34,432
Cross-sectional	74,166
	319,483

Consumer Council: Staff

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the staff (i) role; (ii) function; and (iii) grade of staff in the Consumer Council.

(AQW 29258/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

Role	Function	Grade
Chief Executive	Chief Executive's Office	SCS G5
Director (x2)		G7
Personal Assistant Executive Officer		EO2 EO2
Head of Communications	Communications	DP
Communications Officer (x2)		SO
Placement Student		AA
Head of Education	Consumer Education	DP
Senior Policy Officer (x2) (1 of these posts is currently vacant)		SO
Policy Officer (this post is currently vacant)		EO1
Consumer Support Officer		EO2
Placement Student		AA
Head of Consumer Support	Consumer Support	DP
Consumer Affairs Officer (x2)	(carrying out enquiries/complaints)	EO1
Consumer Support Officer (x5) (1 of these posts is currently vacant)		E02
Administrator (this post is currently vacant)		AO
Head of Policy Team (x4)	Research and policy	DP
Senior Policy Officer (x7) (1 of these posts is currently vacant)		SO
Policy Officer (x3)		EO1
Administrator		AO
Head of Finance & Human Resources	Corporate Services	DP
Finance Manager	(includes Finance, IT and HR)	SO
IT Manager		SO
Corporate Services Manager		SO
Finance Officer (x2)		EO1

Role	Function	Grade
Administrator (x2)		AO

Some of the posts are part-time.

G5 = Grade 5

SO = Staff Officer

AO = Administrative Officer

G7 = Grade 7

EOI = Executive Officer 1

AA = Administrative Assistant

DP = Deputy Principal

EO2= Executive Officer 2

Carbon Trust Loan Scheme: Renewable Heat Incentive

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that regulations published for the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive prohibits grant aid but not loans, why applications are being refused from people who have taken out Carbon Trust Loans.

(AQW 29280/11-15)

Mrs Foster: On 1 November 2013, DETI received a formal request, under the dispute resolution process for the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI), to review a decision taken by Ofgem not to accredit an installation. The issue in question was whether an installation that has availed of a Carbon Trust Loan was eligible to receive the Northern Ireland RHI.

As a result of the review, DETI has revoked the Ofgem decision and considers that an installation that has availed of a Carbon Trust loan is eligible to be considered for accreditation under the Northern Ireland RHI scheme.

In addition, DETI has revised the operating procedures for the scheme. Where an applicant has availed of 'de minimis' aid prior to making an Northern Ireland RHI application for accreditation, the Northern Ireland RHI aid will be provided on the basis of the European Commission's 'de minimis' regulation, Commission Regulation (EC) No 1998/2006 of 15 December 2006 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32006R1998:EN:NOT>

Electricity: Site Management

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what legislative and other barriers exist to demand site management in relation to electricity.

(AQW 29351/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am entirely supportive of maximising the potential which demand side management measures offers.

My officials have been engaged in discussions with the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation to encourage facilitation of the range of demand side measures in Northern Ireland in the context of the Single Electricity Market.

This engagement includes consideration of legislative and other measures which might be desirable or required in the context of wider work on market integration and compliance with relevant EU legislation.

The Department has encouraged the Utility Regulator to explore options for facilitating the range of demand side management measures under the existing regulatory framework while the longer term arrangements are scoped and developed.

Moyle Interconnector: Repair Costs

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her discussions with Mutual Energy regarding the repair costs for the Moyle Interconnector.

(AQW 29378/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Mutual Energy advise that interim repairs to restore the Moyle interconnector to full transfer capacity are expected to cost between £2million and £4million and, subject to obtaining the necessary approvals, should be completed during 2014. Mutual Energy has also agreed proposals with the Utility Regulator for a permanent repair of the Moyle by laying new low voltage cables along a similar route to the existing cables. This is to be completed in 2017 at a current estimated cost of £60million.

Moyle Interconnector: Repair Costs

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for a breakdown of the cost to repair the Moyle Interconnector; and from where will this cost be met.

(AQW 29379/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Mutual Energy advise that interim repairs to restore the Moyle interconnector to full transfer capacity are expected to cost between £2 million and £4 million and, subject to obtaining the necessary approvals, should be completed during 2014. Permanent repair of the Moyle is to be completed in 2017, at a current estimated cost of £60 million.

The cost to repair the Moyle will be funded from a variety of sources with a view to minimising costs to consumers. This will include charges levied on consumers via their energy suppliers for use of the system, revenue from Moyle capacity auctions, and proceeds from insurance claims in relation to the cable faults.

Taxis: Local Economy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the importance of taxiing to the local economy in terms of employment, training, taxes and tourism promotion.

(AQW 29404/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Taxiing provides an essential service to both citizens and visitors. It is important for tourists, shoppers, businesses, school children and the night economy.

Taxi drivers are often the first point of contact for visitors and therefore have a vital role in providing a warm welcome and sharing their valuable knowledge of the area. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board welcomes the participation by local taxi drivers in WorldHost training to ensure they are equipped with industry leading customer service skills when welcoming visitors to Northern Ireland.

According to the Department of Environment, there were almost 16,000 taxi driver licences and almost 2,000 taxi operator licences in Northern Ireland on the 30 September 2013. Statistics from the Department of Regional Development also show that 2% of journeys per person per year are undertaken in taxis or black taxis in the 2010-12 period; this equates to 15 taxi journeys per person per year.

While statistics are scarce on the economic output of taxi drivers, particularly because many are self employed, statistics are available on taxi operations. In December 2013, the Inter-Departmental Business Register showed there were approximately 175 VAT and/or PAYE registered taxi operations in Northern Ireland. These businesses collectively had a turnover of over £39 million and employment of 975.

Taxis: Tourism

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact of a single tiered taxi industry on the tourism industry, in relation of clarity and simplicity, fairness and costs.

(AQW 29405/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Legislation to introduce a single tier licensing system for taxis is a matter for the Department of the Environment.

Taxis provide an important service for visitors to Northern Ireland and are often the first point of contact. I welcome proposals that will provide fair and equitable standards for service providers and deliver a high quality service that meets visitors' expectations of a modern tourism destination.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Service: Showers

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel which Civil Service offices that offer shower facilities for people that cycle to work; and whether there are plans to install shower facilities across all offices.

(AQW 27675/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): There are a total of 123 buildings in the NICS and Agency estate that have showers available for cyclists. Provision of additional shower facilities are planned in a further 2 buildings.

There is currently no plan to provide shower facilities throughout the NICS estate for cyclists as it is a matter for the Department with premises officer responsibility to consider the appropriateness of such facilities in a particular building.

In existing buildings for which my Department has premises officer responsibility, where circumstances allow and space is available and it is appropriate to do so and budget constraints permit, shower facilities are provided.

Energy Performance Certificates

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will consider offering a reduction for high performing domestic and non/domestic properties in Energy Performance Certificate assessments to encourage property holders to invest in energy efficiency schemes.

(AQW 28620/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Although it isn't clear from the question I assume that it is a reduction in rates that is referred to.

In 2009 my Department introduced a scheme to provide a rates holiday to the first occupiers of newly built zero and low carbon houses. It was decided to close the scheme in 2012 due to the high cost of administration and the relatively low take up, and to transfer the funding to the Green New Deal, in order to make better use of available money in pursuit of similar aims.

I have no plans to introduce another rates scheme of this nature using energy performance certificates.

Disposable Income of Households

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail, for the most recent consecutive five years for which data is available, (i) the average disposable income per head; (ii) comparable figures for British regions; and (iii) comparable figures for regions in the south of Ireland.

(AQW 28864/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Comparable data in the form of Disposable Income of Households presented as Purchasing Power Standards based on final consumption per inhabitant is produced by Eurostat and is presented in Table 1. This information is only available up to 2010 and takes account of the differences in the cost of living between countries.

Table 1: Disposable Income of Households by NUTS 2 regions 2006-2011 (Eurostat)

Purchasing power standards based on final consumption per inhabitant	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
United Kingdom	17,415	17,252	17,078	16,649	17,190
North East (UK)	14,783	14,424	14,346	14,169	14,592
North West (UK)	15,664	15,429	15,361	15,009	15,532
Yorkshire and The Humber	15,537	15,177	14,967	14,413	14,853
East Midlands (UK)	16,099	15,864	15,625	15,126	15,602
West Midlands (UK)	15,650	15,345	15,141	14,841	15,370
East of England	18,425	18,091	17,840	17,465	17,825
London	21,834	22,173	21,981	21,488	22,090
South East (UK)	19,785	19,470	19,157	18,629	19,329
South West (UK)	17,443	16,988	16,863	16,585	17,108
Wales	15,284	15,112	14,987	14,535	15,125
Scotland	16,398	16,563	16,612	16,189	16,827
Northern Ireland	15,374	15,879	15,479	14,535	14,950
Éire/Ireland	14,193	14,965	15,158	14,680	14,845
Border, Midland and Western	12,644	13,395	13,667	13,493	13,711
Southern and Eastern	14,758	15,538	15,704	15,117	15,265

Source: Eurostat

Background Note

- 1 The Office for National Statistics provides Eurostat with Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) which forms the basis of the UK regional figures provided. Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) is the amount of money that individuals (i.e. the household sector) have available for spending or saving. This is money left after expenditure associated with income, e.g. taxes and social contributions, property ownership and provision for future pension income. It is calculated gross of any deductions for capital consumption.
- 2 The Central Statistics Office (CSO) provides Eurostat with Disposable Income which forms the basis of the ROI regional figures provided. CSO define Disposable Income as total income minus current taxes on income (i.e. income taxes, other current taxes) minus social insurance contributions.
- 3 Eurostat define the purchasing power standard (PPS) as an artificial currency unit. Theoretically, one PPS can buy the same amount of goods and services in each country. However, price differences across borders mean that different amounts of national currency units are needed for the same goods and services depending on the country. PPS are derived by dividing any economic aggregate of a country in national currency by its respective purchasing power parities (PPPs). PPS is the technical term used by Eurostat for the common currency in which national accounts aggregates are expressed when adjusted for price level differences using PPPs. Thus, PPPs can be interpreted as the exchange rate of the PPS against the euro.

October Monitoring: DEL Bids

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the criteria used to determine which Department of Employment and Learning projects were awarded funding at the October Monitoring Round 2013.

(AQW 29214/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The Department of Employment and Learning submitted no bids as part of the 2013-14 October monitoring round.

Pay: Mean Weekly Earnings

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail, for the most recent five years for which data is available, the (i) total average weekly earnings broken down by both public and private industrial sectors; (ii) total amount of this money paid as bonuses across these sectors.

(AQW 29247/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The average (mean) gross weekly earnings and bonus pay for all employee jobs in Northern Ireland for public and private industrial sectors is provided in Table 1 for the years requested.

The figures are from the Northern Ireland Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) conducted by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

Table 1: Mean Gross Weekly earnings and Bonus¹ Pay for all employee jobs², by public and private industrial sectors.

All Employees 2013 ³	Mean Gross Weekly Pay (£)		Mean Gross Weekly Bonus (£)	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	x	368	x	0.00
Mining and Quarrying	x	x	x	x
Manufacturing	x	481	x	10.90
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	x	x	x	x
Water collection, treatment and supply	x	x	x	x
Construction	x	437	x	1.10
Motor trades	x	358	x	37.55
Wholesale	x	390	x	17.37
Retail	x	237	x	2.61
Transport & storage (inc. postal)	460	454	0.04	9.08
Accommodation & food services	x	186	x	0.85
Information & communication	x	563	x	6.23
Finance & insurance	653	543	0.00	5.18
Property	401	x	0.00	x
Professional, scientific & technical	x	428	x	3.76
Business administration and support services	x	321	x	7.93
Public administration and defence	496	x	4.31	x
Education	465	x	0.00	x
Health	486	254	4.21	0.00
Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services	335	237	0.00	2.96

All Employees 2012 ³	Mean Gross Weekly Pay (£)		Mean Gross Weekly Bonus (£)	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	x	242	x	0.00
Mining and Quarrying	x	x	x	x
Manufacturing	x	473	x	6.83
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	x	715	x	6.64

All Employees 2012 ³	Mean Gross Weekly Pay (£)		Mean Gross Weekly Bonus (£)	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Water collection, treatment and supply	x	x	x	x
Construction	x	458	x	5.33
Motor trades	x	334	x	22.27
Wholesale	x	389	x	14.18
Retail	x	211	x	1.28
Transport & storage (inc. postal)	438	384	4.34	4.31
Accommodation & food services	x	182	x	0.02
Information & communication	x	595	x	7.55
Finance & insurance	446	582	1.74	14.91
Property	397	x	0.00	x
Professional, scientific & technical	x	436	x	8.04
Business administration and support services	x	282	x	7.09
Public administration and defence	557	x	2.59	x
Education	421	x	0.99	x
Health	507	249	10.65	0.08
Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services	345	218	0.00	0.53

All Employees 2011 ³	Mean Gross Weekly Pay (£)		Mean Gross Weekly Bonus (£)	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	x	219	x	0.00
Mining and Quarrying	x	x	x	x
Manufacturing	x	468	x	13.98
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	x	751	x	49.59
Water collection, treatment and supply	x	x	x	x
Construction	x	491	x	5.76
Motor trades	x	333	x	25.66
Wholesale	x	429	x	18.49
Retail	x	262	x	2.81
Transport & storage (inc. postal)	460	438	0.00	9.05
Accommodation & food services	x	200	x	0.44
Information & communication	x	536	x	9.51
Finance & insurance	581	615	0.00	6.69
Property	391	x	0.00	x
Professional, scientific & technical	809	456	0.00	9.59
Business administration and support services	x	276	x	8.90
Public administration and defence	556	x	2.37	x
Education	438	x	0.32	x
Health	520	261	2.52	0.11
Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services	x	241	x	0.78

All Employees 2010 ³	Mean Gross Weekly Pay (£)		Mean Gross Weekly Bonus (£)	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	x	270	x	0.52
Mining and Quarrying	x	x	x	x
Manufacturing	x	437	x	9.38
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	x	686	x	16.96
Water collection, treatment and supply	x	x	x	x
Construction	x	450	x	0.93
Motor trades	x	340	x	30.80
Wholesale	x	407	x	12.30
Retail	x	246	x	2.48
Transport & storage (inc. postal)	398	412	0.12	3.45
Accommodation & food services	x	181	x	0.18
Information & communication	x	485	x	0.88
Finance & insurance	607	515	0.00	3.06
Property	406	x	0.00	x
Professional, scientific & technical	x	444	x	2.24
Business administration and support services	x	279	x	3.27
Public administration and defence	528	x	1.93	x
Education	415	x	0.45	x
Health	467	249	2.70	0.36
Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services	333	x	3.80	x

All Employees 2009 ³	Mean Gross Weekly Pay (£)		Mean Gross Weekly Bonus (£)	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	x	x	x	x
Mining and Quarrying	x	x	x	x
Manufacturing	x	433	x	8.12
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	x	669	x	4.20
Water collection, treatment and supply	x	x	x	x
Construction	x	431	x	2.29
Motor trades	x	330	x	12.06
Wholesale	x	425	x	14.06
Retail	x	235	x	2.29
Transport & storage (inc. postal)	443	375	0.03	6.42
Accommodation & food services	223	194	x	0.27
Information & communication	x	504	x	5.43
Finance & insurance	493	497	2.41	12.66
Property	413	x	0.36	x
Professional, scientific & technical	x	462	x	4.93
Business administration and support services	x	284	x	6.59
Public administration and defence	526	x	1.47	x

All Employees 20093	Mean Gross Weekly Pay (£)		Mean Gross Weekly Bonus (£)	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Education	410	x	0.04	x
Health	466	262	2.89	0.24
Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services	382	242	5.88	0.65

Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (NI & UK)

Notes:

- 1 Gross weekly bonus pay covers all bonus payments such as profit sharing, productivity, performance and other bonus or incentive pay, piecework and commission.
 - 2 Employees (full-time and part-time) on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay-period was not affected by absence.
 - 3 The introduction of methodological changes to improve the quality of ASHE data has resulted in discontinuities in trends. Estimates for 2011, 2012 and 2013 are not directly comparable to earlier results.
- 'x' denotes figures which are unreliable due to sample sizes associated with the cell.

Mental Health: Public Sector Work Placements

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of people with mental health issues finding it difficult to secure a work placement in the public sector; and what action his Department is taking to address this problem. **(AQW 29311/11-15)**

Mr Hamilton: Corporate HR (CHR) in my Department manages applications for unpaid work experience placements with the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) departments. Each year approximately 200 placements are facilitated by the NICS for individuals seeking work experience, including people with disabilities.

During 2013 CHR facilitated Action Mental Health to raise awareness within NICS of issues facing people recovering from mental health illness in returning to the world of work. Following a limited pilot placement in my department involving Action Mental Health, and further consultation with departments, CHR developed a new work experience scheme specifically for people with disabilities, including people with mental health issues. This new scheme will augment existing work experience arrangements and will launch in January 2014.

Information on the revised policy arrangements and application forms for the scheme will be available on the NICS Recruitment website www.nicsrecruitment.gov.uk in January 2014.

Rates: Commercial Property Revaluation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the proposed timeframe for the rating review of non-domestic properties. **(AQW 29362/11-15)**

Mr Hamilton: The revaluation of all commercial property in Northern Ireland is well underway.

Land & Property Services (LPS) is making good progress on the validation of the rental evidence it received and the detailed market analysis has started.

The valuation process will then follow in March next year and by late 2014 LPS will produce a draft Valuation List which will inform individual ratepayers of their new assessments, before the new bills issue in April 2015.

North Down: Life Expectancy

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list, in ascending order, life expectancy in the North Down constituency, broken down by ward. **(AQW 29465/11-15)**

Mr Hamilton: Period Life Expectancy at birth for North Down Local Government District (2008-2010) is 79.0 years for men and 82.2 years for women. Life expectancy statistics for electoral wards are not available.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Hospitals: Consultant Recruitment

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are any particular difficulties in recruiting hospital consultants locally, compared to other parts of the UK.

(AQW 29272/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Health and Social Care Trusts have informed my Department that they have had difficulties in recruiting hospital consultants locally in a certain number of specialties. The difficulties occur in a range of different specialties and vary across Trusts. We are aware that there are also difficulties in recruiting consultants in certain specialties in other parts of the UK, particularly in specialties such as Emergency Medicine.

South Down: Mental Health Services

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what investment has been made in mental health in South Down, over the last three years; and what plans his Department has to improve mental health services in South Down over the next three years.

(AQW 29310/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health services in the South Down constituency area are provided by the South Eastern HSC Trust (in the northern part of the constituency) and the Southern Trust (in the southern part of the constituency). As mental health services are provided on a Trust wide basis, the Trusts cannot provide information on financial investment solely in the South Down constituency area.

Developemnts in Mental Health Services within the South Eastern HSC Trust

Mental Health Services within the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust's area of South Down have benefitted from a range of investments over the past three years.

This investment has strengthened the Mental Health infrastructure within the South Down area, with the enhancement of locally based Home Treatment Services, Day Hospital Provision, Community Mental Health Teams, Outpatient Services, Personality Disorder Services, Psychological Therapies, Supported Living Schemes, Rehabilitation Services, Carers Support, Addiction Services and Acute Mental Health Inpatient Provision. Additionally there has been an investment to strengthen the responsiveness of Out of Hours Mental Health Services to individuals who present to Emergency Departments with self-harm across the Trust's of South Down.

Over the next three years it is envisaged that additional investment will enable the Trust to:

- Implement new models of care that will support and enhance provision within the community and voluntary sector through a new Trust-wide Health & Wellbeing Hub Model (encompassing the South Down area)
- Support a new pilot project within the locality that will target respite arrangements for mental health carers
- Enhance the range of psychological therapy services
- Deliver an enhanced psychiatric liaison service to the Trust's Emergency Departments.

Developments in Mental Health Services within Southern HSC Trust

Mental Health Services in the Southern Trust have undergone significant reform and modernisation since 2009.

A range of mental health services, based at Daisy Hill Hospital, are available to GPs providing to the Newry and Mourne Council population, which includes South Down, including:

- Primary Mental Health Care Service (for short term intervention for mid-moderate mental health problems with outreach clinic in Kilkeel)
- Support & Recovery Team providing longer term support and recovery for people with mental health problems
- Addiction Clinic at Daisy Hill Hospital
- Eating Disorder Clinic at Daisy Hill Hospital.

The Southern Trust has plans to enhance Mental Health Services across the Trust area in the following areas:

- Psychiatry liaison services to Acute hospitals
- Further development of community addiction services including alcohol liaison services;
- Centralisation of acute in-patient mental health services on the Bluestone site with the opening of 10 Psychiatrist Intensive care beds and 10 Assessment and Treatment beds for adults with a learning disability;
- Enhancement of eating disorder services.

Domiciliary Care Workers: Registration

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when domiciliary care workers will be registered with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council.

(AQW 29376/11-15)

Mr Poots: Strengthening public protection through registration of the social care workforce in Northern Ireland is one of my Department's key policy priorities. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council was set up specifically to deliver on that policy commitment and ensure we have a competent and confident workforce that is trusted by service users and their families.

Roll out of registration has been subject to public consultation and on that basis registration has been progressed on a phased priority basis for specific groups. It is compulsory for the following groups to be registered with the NISCC: social workers, social work students; social care workers in adult residential care and in nursing homes; and social care managers in adult residential, day care and domiciliary settings.

My officials are currently working with the NISCC to develop proposals, including a timeframe, for continuation of rollout of registration to the final groups of social care workers, including domiciliary care workers. These proposals will be subject to public consultation.

Ambulances: Turnaround Times

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the downtime statistics for ambulances, in the last month, in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 29381/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is assumed that ambulance downtime refers to the ambulance turnaround time, i.e. the length of time for the ambulance to be made ready for the next journey following arrival at hospital.

It should be noted that the NIAS do not capture information on the date/time of admission of patients to emergency care departments. As a consequence, information on turnaround times detailed in the response refers to the time between the ambulance arriving at the emergency care department and it 'clearing' the location. The crew will remain with the patient until they have been handed over to the relevant clinical personnel within the HSC Hospital environment. The ambulance turnaround time will include patient handover and other aspects such as the time to clean and replenish the ambulance for the next call.

The information provided relates to all ambulance journeys, including urgent and routine patient journeys in addition to those resulting from emergency calls.

Ambulance turnaround times for each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust in November 2013 are detailed in the table below.

HSC Trust	< 15 min	15 - 30 min	30 - 45 min	45 - 60 min	1 - 2 Hrs	2 - 3 Hrs	More than 3 Hrs	Total
Belfast	387	1,472	1,507	608	190	2	0	4,166
Northern	553	1,345	436	67	19	0	0	2,420
South Eastern	184	882	935	325	97	0	0	2,423
Southern	358	1,124	487	193	163	24	4	2,353
Western	497	1,017	283	59	38	1	0	1,896
Other locations	124	74	12	5	2	0	0	217
Northern Ireland	2,103	5,914	3,660	1,257	509	27	4	13,475

Source: NIAS

Other refers to patients who refused to travel and those taken to locations which were not an acute hospital.

e.g. Belfast International Airport, Northern Ireland Cancer Centre, Lurgan Hospital etc.

Ambulances: Turnaround Times

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what was the longest ambulance downtime at each hospital in the last month; and on how many occasions downtime exceeded two hours.

(AQW 29382/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is assumed that ambulance downtime refers to the ambulance turnaround time, i.e. the length of time for the ambulance to be made ready for the next journey following arrival at hospital.

It should be noted that the NIAS do not capture information on the date/time of admission of patients to emergency care departments. As a consequence, information on turnaround times detailed in the response refers to the time between the

ambulance arriving at the emergency care department and it 'clearing' the location. The crew will remain with the patient until they have been handed over to the relevant clinical personnel within the HSC Hospital environment. The ambulance turnaround time will include patient handover and other aspects such as the time to clean and replenish the ambulance for the next call.

The information provided relates to all ambulance journeys, including urgent and routine patient journeys in addition to those resulting from emergency calls.

- (i) During November 2013, the longest ambulance turnaround time for each acute hospital is detailed in the table below.

Longest Ambulance Turnaround Time, by Hospital

Hospital	Time (HH:MM:SS)
Royal Victoria	2:56:42
Belfast City	1:47:42
RBHSC	1:30:00
Mater	1:20:17
Antrim Area	1:36:47
Causeway	1:13:22
Whiteabbey	0:33:35
Ulster	1:45:32
Lagan Valley	1:30:52
Downe	1:29:33
Craigavon Area	3:53:31
Daisyhill	1:58:55
South West Acute	2:02:38
Altnagelvin	1:58:01
Tyrone county	1:16:27

Source NIAS

- (ii) In November 2013, ambulance turnaround time exceeded 2 hours on 31 occasions, 28 in Craigavon Area, twice in the Royal Victoria and once in the South West Acute.

Nurses: Readmission to Register

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the process for re-entry to nursing for qualified nurses who have temporarily stepped out of the profession.

(AQW 29427/11-15)

Mr Poots: A Nurse/midwife who has previously been on the NMC register and wishes to apply for readmission after a break of at least three months, will need to meet the specific requirements as listed below:

- 450 hours of registered practice and 35 hours of learning activity must have been completed in the previous three years within the UK or overseas and NMC will ask the nurses/midwives to sign a declaration to this effect.
- A Nurse/midwife will also need to complete an application to readmit to the register and provide NMC with references.
- If a nurse/midwife cannot meet the required hours but can meet 750 hours of practice in the last five years and 35 hours of learning in the last three years, NMC will have a discussion to decide whether the necessary requirements are met or not. At this stage NMC will provide the nurse/midwife with an application pack and provide further information.

Practice can include supervisory, teaching, research and managerial roles as well as providing direct patient care. However, practice hours completed while the nurse/midwife were lapsed or not registered, for example working as a health care assistant, cannot be counted towards the practice requirement.

It is illegal to work in a role requiring registration whilst unregistered in any circumstances. Applications for re-admission from registrants who are found to have been working are referred to the Registrar's Advisory Group for consideration.

Ambulances: Turnaround Times

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the longest ambulance waits outside each hospital in Northern Ireland for the 12 weeks from August to October 2013.

(AQW 29443/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is assumed that this question refers to the ambulance turnaround time, i.e. the length of time for the ambulance to be made ready for the next journey following arrival at hospital.

It should be noted that the NIAS do not capture information on the date/time of admission of patients to emergency care departments. As a consequence, information on turnaround times detailed in the response refers to the time between the ambulance arriving at the emergency care department and it 'clearing' the location. The crew will remain with the patient until they have been handed over to the relevant clinical personnel within the HSC Hospital environment. The ambulance turnaround time will include patient handover and other aspects such as the time to clean and replenish the ambulance for the next call.

The longest ambulance turnaround time for each Hospital during the 12 weeks from August to October 2013 are detailed in the table below.

Longest Ambulance Turnaround Time, by Hospital

Hospital	Time (HH:MM:SS)
Royal Victoria	02:00:00
Belfast City	01:00:00
Mater	01:30:00
Antrim Area	01:30:00
Causeway	01:30:00
Ulster	01:55:00
Lagan Valley	01:10:00
Downe	01:30:00
Craigavon Area	03:33:30
Daisyhill	03:08:55
South West Acute	02:05:00
Altnagelvin	02:29:53

Department of Justice

DOJ: Joint Work Programmes

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to list the joint work programmes his Department has engaged in with other parts of the UK.

(AQW 29340/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): A list, in chronological order, of the joint work programmes undertaken by my Department with other parts of the UK is provided in the table below. The list includes programmes since 12 April 2010 when the devolution of policing and justice took place. However the list also includes one ongoing programme which commenced prior to devolution which my Department is involved in.

Joint Work Programmes Undertaken By The With Other Parts of the UK

Title of Inter-Governmental Joint Work Programme	Name of Department(s) Engaged in Joint Work Programme	Date Programme Commenced	Date Programme Ended
Central Assistance Programme	Home Office	November 2005 (pre devolution).	Ongoing
UK Steering Group on Police use of Less Lethal Weaponry	Home Office, MOD, DOJ, Scottish Government	DOJ joined the programme in April 2010.	Ongoing
Cooperation on delivery of forensic services (on a trilateral basis with the Republic of Ireland's forensic laboratory).	Forensic Services, Scottish Police Services Authority	October 2010	Ongoing
National Crime Agency	Home Office	October 2010.	Ongoing

Title of Inter-Governmental Joint Work Programme	Name of Department(s) Engaged in Joint Work Programme	Date Programme Commenced	Date Programme Ended
Review of Future Regulation of Private Security Industry	Home Office, Scottish Government, DOJ	November 2010.	Ongoing
Draft Modern Slavery Bill	Home Office	September 2012.	Ongoing
Disclosure and Barring Service, Modernisation Programme	Home Office, Scottish Government	December 2012.	Ongoing
Joint Strategic Group on Human Trafficking	Home Office, Ministry of Justice, Scottish Government, Welsh Government, DOJ	December 2012	Ongoing

Criminal Justice: Compensation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the procedure in cases in which compensation has been ordered after convictions which are not appealed, but the compensation is not paid; and whether the compensation can be taken from state benefits and paid directly to victims through the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service.

(AQW 29365/11-15)

Mr Ford: Compensation ordered following a criminal conviction cannot currently be deducted from state benefits.

I am developing legislation to bring forward a Fines and Enforcement Bill and am considering a number of measures to improve the enforcement of court imposed fines and other sums including compensation.

Rural Crime Unit: Evaluation

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the effectiveness of the Rural Crime Unit.

(AQW 29387/11-15)

Mr Ford: An evaluation of the Rural Crime Unit is scheduled to be undertaken by the Rural Crime Unit Steering Group in Autumn 2014, following the Rural Crime Unit's first year of operation. This evaluation will provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the Rural Crime Unit and help determine the future operation of the Unit.

While I do not think it would be appropriate for me to make an assessment of the Unit's effectiveness prior to the completion of this evaluation, an outcome of the Unit's effective partnership working was recently evidenced when the Minister of Agriculture and Regional Development and I launched an initiative to provide a subsidy to farmers in E and F policing districts to encourage the fitting of security equipment to their farm machinery.

This initiative was informed by the work of the Rural Crime Unit which identified those districts as 'hotspot' areas for the theft of farm machinery.

Data from the unit will primarily be used to assist District Commanders in making operational decisions and targeting deployment of police resources. It will also provide an opportunity for partners from the Rural Crime Unit Steering Group to support farmers through the development of crime prevention initiatives.

Forensic Science Northern Ireland: Delays

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) what action is he taking to address the over-demand on forensics service; and (ii) for his assessment of the subsequent delays impacting on court cases by missing timetable targets.

(AQW 29407/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) It is difficult to predict the demand for forensics services. However, Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI) has arrangements in place to enable brokering to other forensic science providers when capacity exceeds demand. FSNI is also working with colleagues in Scottish and Irish laboratories to identify any opportunities for dealing with excess demand. To date these opportunities have been limited as they too experience excess demands in some areas.

In addition, FSNI recently launched a Transformation Programme which aims to improve timeliness and capacity across the organisation. As well as overseeing the introduction of new facilities for evidence recovery and the analysis of DNA and a new case management system, the Programme aims to deliver an increase in capacity and improvement in turnaround times in those areas where this initiative is applied.

- (ii) Speeding up justice is one of my key priorities. A multi agency programme is in place to bring improvements to the criminal justice system. FSNI has a part to play in speeding up the processes which deliver forensic information to the courts. FSNI continues to work closely with the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service to identify and prioritise those cases which may result in a delay in court processes.

Sex Offenders: Convictions from other Jurisdictions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 28917/11-15, whether it is accepted that, as the law stands, a non-national sex-offender who committed offences outside Northern Ireland can move to, and live in, Northern Ireland without restrictions which would otherwise apply to a Northern Ireland citizen, until police become aware of the past convictions, and that is likely only if there is a further offence committed in Northern Ireland or the person is sought under a European or International Arrest Warrant; and for his assessment of the risk to the public that this poses and of the increased vulnerability of potential victims.

(AQW 29449/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is little I can add to the answer I gave to AQW/28917/11-15. The law currently requires that the court make a notification order under section 97 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 once it is proved that the person has a conviction for a relevant offence outside the UK. Once a notification order has been made the person is subject to the same notification requirements as if he had been convicted in this jurisdiction. I also made reference to the provisions in the Criminal Justice Act (NI) 2013 which, on commencement, will make sex offenders convicted outside the UK subject to notification after they have been in NI for a qualifying period.

Information in relation to previous convictions from other jurisdictions can come to police attention in a number of ways, such as those described in the question, but also including information sharing across jurisdictions.

As I said in my answer to AQW/28917, border controls and immigration are not devolved matters, and it is not possible to place travel restrictions on persons who live within the EU.

Courts and Tribunals Service: Mixed Committals

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to clarify (i) the content of the recent guidance given by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service in respect of listing mixed committals as special hearings; (ii) the reasons for this guidance; and (iii) when it was issued.

(AQW 29450/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service has not recently issued guidance in respect of listing mixed committal proceedings as special hearings.

Legal Aid: Very High Cost Cases

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how much has been paid in Legal Aid in Very High Cost cases in each of the last three financial years; and to how many (i) legal firms; (ii) junior and senior counsel; and (iii) defendants, do the figures relate.

(AQW 29451/11-15)

Mr Ford: The amounts paid by the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission in Very High Cost cases in the last three financial years is as follows:

	Crown Court	Magistrates Court	Total
2010-11	£12.84M	£0.11M	£12.95M
2011-12	£6.26M	£0.26M	£6.52M
2012-13	£10.95M	£0.30M	£11.25M

Additional detail can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Prison Service: Environmental Allowance

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice what percentage of Prison Officers receive an environmental allowance; and whether he has any plans to offer this payment to Prison Officers who are not in receipt of the allowance, in light of the increase in dissident republican activity.

(AQW 29455/11-15)

Mr Ford: 31% of staff formerly received a Northern Ireland Prison Service Payment to reflect the special circumstances in which they worked. This was consolidated into salaries in 1995 (officers) and 2006 (Governors) as part of a wider pay deal.

The Prison Service Pay Review Body has provided me with a comprehensive report on the issue of an allowance. They have recommended payment of a supplementary risk allowance of £1,320 per annum for the remaining prison grade staff (69%) not in receipt of the consolidated payment. NIPS Management are considering how this will be financed from within existing baselines.

Legal Aid: Not-for-profit Organisations

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to detail the annual amount of Legal Aid claimed by not-for-profit organisations, which have contracts with his Department, for each of the last five years.

(AQW 29499/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission, through funding provided by the Department of Justice, has grant funding agreements with two not-for-profit organisations: the Housing Rights Service, for the provision of advice and assistance in mortgage repossession, and ejectment proceedings and the Law Centre (NI), for the provision of legal services for immigration, asylum and human trafficking.

Payments made to the holders of these grants over the last 5 years, are as follows:

Financial Year	Law Centre NI	Housing Rights Service	Total
2008/09	£ 169,083	0.00	£ 169,083
2009/10	£217,497	0.00	£ 217,497
2010/11	£ 247,289	0.00	£247,289
2011/12	£ 206,784	0.00	£206,784
2012/13	£ 254,786	£60,000	£314,786
Totals	£1,095,439	£60,000	£1,155,439

These figures include the current grants as well as payments made from the Legal Aid Fund in respect of advice and assistance and legal services not covered by the grants.

It is not possible for the Commission to provide full details of the additional amounts actually claimed from the Legal Aid Fund as, for example, in High Court cases the Commission pays Legal Aid bills as assessed by the Taxing Master. The amount paid from the Legal Aid fund will therefore differ from the amount actually claimed.

Legal Aid: Legacy Inquest Cases

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost to the Legal Aid fund of representation for the estimated 56 re-opened inquests into suspicious deaths and matters, referred back to the courts by the Attorney General.
(AQW 29500/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are now 57 legacy inquest cases in total, of which 12 have been disposed of. There are, therefore, 45 active legacy inquest cases relating to 73 deaths.

Of the 12 cases disposed of, two were referred to the Coroner by the Attorney General under section 14 of the Coroners Act (Northern Ireland) 1959. Of the 45 on-going cases, 23 were referred to the Coroner by the Attorney General.

Funding for representation in legacy inquest cases is available, subject to specified criteria, by way of 'exceptional legal aid'. Applications for such funding are submitted to the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission.

To date, fees have been paid by the Commission in two cases disposed of that were referred to the Coroner by the Attorney General. The total costs paid by the Commission amounted to £22,000 (inclusive of VAT). Of the remaining 23 on-going cases referred to the Coroner by the Attorney General, to date funding has been granted in 5 cases. However, as these cases are still in preparation, figures for the total estimated costs are not available.

The Commission has not yet received applications for funding in relation to the other 18 on-going cases referred to the Coroner by the Attorney General. Until applications for funding are received, the potential cost of a successful application cannot be assessed.

Not-for-profit Organisations: DOJ Funding

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to detail the annual amount of public funding, other than Legal Aid, allocated to not-for-profit organisations which have contracts with his Department, for each of the last five years.
(AQW 29501/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since its formation in April 2010 the Department of Justice, including its Agencies but not its arm's length bodies, has allocated no public funding other than Legal Aid to not-for-profit organisations which have contracts for the provision of legal services in each of the last three financial years.

Department for Regional Development

Buses: Belfast International Airport–Belfast

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he would organise an open procurement competition to encourage a Bus Service from Belfast International Airport dropping and collecting passengers to and from Belfast City Hotels.

(AQW 29167/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The current road service licensing arrangements, administered by the Department of the Environment (DoE), enables private bus operators to identify gaps in the market and apply for a licence to run a service, if it is not already adequately catered for by Translink or by other private operators.

Roads: 20 mph Speed Limit Zones

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the 20mph zones in each roads service division.
(AQW 29235/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the roads with a 20 mph Speed Limit that my Department has legislated for, from 1996 to date, are available in the Assembly Library.

Foyle: DRD Work Programme

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's work programme in the Foyle constituency up to the summer of 2014, including road works listed by street.
(AQW 29241/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would advise the Member that information on completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformatio%20type-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

Northern Ireland Water has proposals for a number of work packages in the Foyle Constituency which include:

- Londonderry Drainage Area Plan: Buncrana Road Work Package, Stage 2 (early contractor involvement);
- Foyle Springs, Derry Flood Alleviation;
- Clooney Park West, Londonderry Storm Sewer Extension;
- Gortinreid Bridge Waste Water Pumping Station - Pumping Main Upgrade;
- Londonderry Drainage Area Plan: Buncrana Road Work Package, Stage 2;
- Ard Na Smoll, Dungiven, Storm Sewer Extension; and
- Lone Moor Road, Londonderry, Storm Sewer Extension.

Taxi Ranks

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development what position his Department takes on Public Hire taxis parking outside official ranks in Belfast which results in blocked roads; and how he polices 'over-ranking'.
(AQW 29277/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not have the statutory power to enforce over ranking at taxi ranks. However, it has the power to enforce parking restrictions, which are marked by signage and road markings. It carries out this function through its parking enforcement contract with NSL.

NSL's Traffic Attendants (TAs) issue Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) to vehicles parked in contravention of parking restrictions. Where parking restrictions exist outside taxi ranks, PCNs can be issued to vehicles parked in contravention of the restrictions, for example, vehicles parked on double yellow lines or in bus lanes.

Taxis: Parking Restrictions

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any correspondence between his Department, and its agencies, and the PSNI on penalising Public Hire taxi drivers who block roads and footpaths.
(AQW 29278/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has the power to enforce parking restrictions, which are marked by signage and road markings. It carries out this function through its parking enforcement contract with NSL, which is managed by the Department's Parking Enforcement Unit. Where parking restrictions do not exist but vehicles are parked in manner which causes an obstruction, enforcement power rests with the PSNI.

There has been no correspondence between my Department's Parking Enforcement Unit and the PSNI regarding Public Hire taxi drivers blocking roads or footpaths.

If a member of the public contacts the Parking Enforcement Unit in relation to parked vehicles that are causing an obstruction where no parking restriction applies, officials will advise them to contact the PSNI directly.

Brook Street, Derry: Gritting

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the traffic figures and school buses using the street, why Brook Street, Derry has not been added to the gritting schedule.

(AQW 29321/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: At the request of residents, Roads Service implemented a traffic calming scheme in Brook Street in March 2009. Translink was consulted on the proposals and no objections or comments were received. Roads Service considers that use of Brook Street by buses is not appropriate due to the presence of the traffic calming features. Whilst Brook Street is not included on the current gritting schedule, a salt box has been provided for use by the public on a self-help basis.

As well as reducing vehicle speeds, the presence of traffic calming measures at this location makes it less attractive to through traffic. My Department would not wish to encourage the use of Brook Street by through traffic. A suitable alternative route via Foyle Road and Bishop Street, which is included on the salted network, is available. In addition, Roads Service made alterations to the Foyle Road/Bishop Street junction in February 2010 so that buses could be more easily accommodated on these roads.

Third Sector Organisations: DRD Funding

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) all third sector organisations funded by the Department who provide services to the public; and (ii) the value of each contract.

(AQW 29413/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below sets out the third sector organisations which receive grant assistance from my Department to assist them in the provision of services to the public. My Department does not have contracts with these organisations rather provides grant assistance to them.

I have provided the levels of grant provided for the 2013/2014 financial year.

Name of Third Sector Organisation	Grant 2013/14 £
CDM Transport (Cookstown, Dungannon & Magherafelt)	553,798.63
Down District Accessible Transport (Down , North Down & Ards)	439,843.16
Easilink Community Transport(Omagh, Strabane & Foyle)	534,627.42
Fermanagh Community Transport	490,443.00
Lagan Valley Rural Transport (Lisburn)	208,896.00
North Coast Community Transport (Limavady, Coleraine, Moyle, Ballymena & Ballymoney)	605,224.00
Southern Area Transport (Armagh, Lurgan, Banbridge, Newry & Mourne)	392,246.97
South Antrim Community Transport	212,665.39
Disability Action Transport Scheme (DATS)	2,946,819.00
Volunteer Now	80,788.00
Disability Action Group Transport	185,952.00
Disability Action Mobility Centre	81,587.00

Cregagh View, Knocknacarry: Completion

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 27652/11-15, will the Minister enable works on the Cregagh View Residential Development, Cushendun, to be completed.

(AQW 29416/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: This development in Knocknacarry comprises eight completed houses and 16 sites at which construction has not yet started, and the developer is in Administration. As only one third of the houses are complete, my Department's Roads Service has no immediate plans to take enforcement action, however, I have asked officials to keep the situation under review.

Cycling Unit

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development to (i) provide an update on the work of the new departmental cycling unit; and (ii) detail any plans to address cycling issues in rural areas.

(AQW 29418/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In order to give increased focus and priority to the needs of cyclists throughout Northern Ireland, including in rural areas, and to encourage greater participation in this healthy and sustainable form of transport, I established a Cycling

Unit in November 2013. I have given it responsibility for ensuring that cycling provision is a key element in both transport strategy and delivery and to deliver effective progress of a range of cycling initiatives.

My officials are presently exploring how the new cycling unit can co-ordinate all cycling related matters in both urban and rural areas in a coherent manner and are developing a detailed work programme for the unit which includes an Active Schools Travel Programme. This will provide a programme of cycling and walking skills training for our young people in up to 180 schools across Northern Ireland and this includes schools which serve more rural areas.

South Belfast: Resident-only Parking

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update in residential parking in inner south Belfast. (AQW 29423/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is currently developing Residents' Parking Schemes in the Lower Malone and Rugby Road/ College Park Avenue areas of Belfast. These schemes are well advanced, both in terms of design and consultation, and officials hope to carry out the formal consultation on the proposals in spring 2014.

Informal consultation is currently underway to determine if residents' parking proposals for the Donegall Pass area have broad local support. There are also plans to begin a similar exercise in the Sandy Row area in early January 2014.

My Department's Roads Service has been unable to progress a Residents' Parking Scheme in the Stranmillis area due to a lack of consensus amongst local residents and business associations, who have fundamental differences of opinion on the proposals.

Street Lighting: Costs

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of street lighting in each district, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 29426/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of my Department's expenditure on street lighting in each Council district, in each of the last five years, are provided in the table below:

Council	2008-09 £'000	2009-10 £'000	2010-11 £'000	2011-12 £'000	2012-13 £'000
Antrim	703	799	807	734	1,360
Ards	999	822	866	608	1,066
Armagh	822	514	947	1,203	764
Ballymena	1,449	993	872	1,250	1,114
Ballymoney	282	338	438	538	307
Banbridge	552	273	469	770	615
Belfast	3,530	3,290	3,592	3,577	3,830
Carrickfergus	457	636	316	692	439
Castlereagh	936	706	712	553	752
Coleraine	2,306	1,052	1,316	1,466	1,169
Cookstown	399	392	392	455	412
Craigavon	1,143	2,454	1,286	2,126	1,148
Derry	1,748	2,075	1,759	2,415	2,438
Down	994	588	505	1,137	825
Dungannon & South Tyrone	739	682	659	741	695
Fermanagh	1,014	725	749	1,058	868
Larne	399	377	298	519	470
Limavady	481	387	495	489	395
Lisburn	1,935	1,346	1,016	888	962
Magherafelt	480	446	1,040	466	432
Moyle	206	176	166	222	177

Council	2008-09 £'000	2009-10 £'000	2010-11 £'000	2011-12 £'000	2012-13 £'000
Newry & Mourne	1,299	1,016	1,263	786	1,111
Newtownabbey	1,206	1,759	1,246	1,627	1,412
North Down	1,164	1,048	1,008	1,086	1,079
Omagh	817	860	345	786	757
Strabane	660	586	648	636	582

Roads: Claims for Damaged Vehicles

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Regional Development how many claims have been made against his Department for damaged caused to vehicles, or injuries sustained, due to unsatisfactory road maintenance in each of the last five years; and how many of these claims were (i) successful; and (ii) unsuccessful.

(AQW 29445/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of claims my Department has received for damage caused to vehicles, or injuries sustained, in the last five financial years, are shown in the table below. However, it is not possible to provide details of how many of these claims were due to unsatisfactory road maintenance.

The table also provides details of the number of claims that were successful, unsuccessful or are still ongoing. It should also be noted that claims received by my Department may not always be concluded in the same financial year.

Claims for damage caused to vehicles and injuries sustained

	Claims Received	Successful	Unsuccessful	Ongoing
2008/2009	2,737	1,116	1,583	38
Personal Injury	856	198	621	37
Vehicle Damage	1,881	918	962	1
2009/2010	3,432	1,626	1,703	103
Personal Injury	946	176	670	100
Vehicle Damage	2,486	1,450	1,033	3
2010/2011	3,565	1,851	1,596	118
Personal Injury	1,006	221	668	117
Vehicle Damage	2,559	1,630	928	1
2011/2012	2,739	1,048	1,562	129
Personal Injury	1,086	183	776	127
Vehicle Damage	1,653	865	786	2
2012/2013	2,400	834	1,416	150
Personal Injury	955	88	733	134
Vehicle Damage	1,445	746	683	16

Translink: Contingency Plans

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline whether his Department has developed contingency plans in the event of future rail strikes.

(AQW 29464/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has a business continuity strategy and has developed a range of contingency plans to cover a wide spectrum of service disruptions. Implementation will depend very much on the type and extent of disruption, however, NI Railways' approach is to continue to develop a positive industrial relations environment and hence reduce the likelihood of strikes occurring in the first place.

Translink: Free Wi-Fi

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the effectiveness and quality of WI-FI availability on Northern Ireland Railways.

(AQW 29466/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: WiFi on NI Railways has proven to be very popular, with up to 20% of passengers making use of the service (up to 60,000 user sessions per week). WiFi has been a factor contributing to the current unprecedented rates of growth in passenger numbers across the network.

Passengers may experience some black spots where WiFi/mobile phone coverage is restricted.

North Down: Cycle Lanes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the additional usage of new cycle lanes in North Down in the last five years.

(AQW 29467/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is committed to providing safer roads for the growing number of vulnerable road users, including cyclists and pedestrians, through a range of safety measures, such as, traffic calming and enhancement of the pedestrian and cycling network. I fully recognise the benefits to be obtained from improving the cycle network, in particular the environmental and health benefits and the positive contribution to an integrated transport system.

Over the past 5 years, my Department has invested in the region of £4.1m in creating approximately 75km of new cycle lanes, however, it currently does not carry out monitoring of usage of new cycle lanes.

Department for Social Development

Social Security Agency: Sanctions

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many benefits claimants have been referred to the Social Security Agency to have sanctions applied to their benefits, in each of the last three years; and (ii) how many of these claimants had sanctions applied, broken down by age group.

(AQW 28950/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): My Department only has information available from May 2011 to respond to this AQW request. The table below provides the details of the number of claimants referred for consideration of sanctions, and of the numbers applied. Information on the age breakdown of claimants referred for sanction is not recorded.

Period	No of claimants referred for sanction	No of sanctions applied
1 May 2011 – 31 March 2012	21,419	6,831
1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013	36,821	11,546
1 April 2013 – 30 November 2013	22,940	8,104
Totals	81,180	26,481

Derry: Social Housing

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQWs 28991/11-15, 28992/11-15, 28993/11-15 and 28994/11-15, what action he has taken to ensure that further social housing developments in Derry are brought forward as a matter of urgency.

(AQW 29374/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive produces and publishes an Unmet Social Housing Need Prospectus on its website and this forms an integral part of the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP).

The prospectus provides essential information for housing associations and developers in respect of locations of unmet social housing need shortages of programmed development sites. These are locations where the Housing Executive would welcome suitable proposals/ schemes.

Housing Associations are encouraged to use the Prospectus to identify locations where there is a current unmet social housing need, with a view to exploring development opportunities and bringing forward proposals for inclusion within the SHDP.

The SHDP and the Unmet Housing Need Prospectus is managed on a 3 year rolling programme and updates are posted to the Housing Executive's website on a weekly basis.

I have recently approved the new Social Housing Development Programme for the period 2014/15 – 2016/17, and this will be published on the Housing Executive's website shortly.

Crumlin Road Courthouse

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the progress of the Crumlin Road Courthouse. (AQW 29400/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department, with ministerial support from across the NI Executive, has been working in co-operation with OFMDFM, SIB, NIEA (DOE) and BCC to identify a sustainable end use for the Crumlin Road Courthouse. Following a procurement competition, a consultant was appointed in July 2013 to complete a Development Study. The consultants have engaged a wide range of stakeholders, carried out a comprehensive condition report on the building and conducted considerable research into potential end uses. A number of options were presented at a consultation event on 21 November and public feedback has now been sought. A full report is expected in early in the New Year.

Warm Homes Scheme: Rural Areas

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the percentage of Warm Homes Scheme measures that have been delivered in rural areas since its inception in each contract area; and how this compares with the target set for delivery.

(AQW 29428/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive manages the Warm Homes Scheme on behalf of the Department. The Warm Homes Scheme was introduced in July 2009, since then up to 30 November 2013 it delivered a total 41,976 interventions. Of these, 16,866 (40%) interventions have been in rural areas. The overall Warm Homes Scheme target is to deliver 40% of energy efficiency measures in rural areas.

The table below provides details from the start of the scheme in July 2009 to 30 November 2013. For contract Area A that figure is 29% and Area B the figure is almost 51%.

Year	Area A			Area B			Warm Homes Scheme Total		
	Completed Jobs	Rural Jobs	Rural %	Completed Jobs	Rural Jobs	Rural %	Completed Jobs	Rural Jobs	Rural %
2009/10	3,231	922	28.54%	3,542	1,714	48.39%	6,773	2,636	38.92%
2010/11	4,909	1,527	31.11%	5,401	2,667	49.38%	10,310	4,194	40.68%
2011/12	4,951	1,525	30.80%	5,700	2,908	51.02%	10,651	4,433	41.62%
2012/13	4,750	1,214	25.56%	4,887	2,562	52.42%	9,637	3,776	39.18%
2013/14 (to 30/11/13)	2,583	741	28.69%	2,022	1,086	53.71%	4,605	1,827	39.67%
Total	20,424	5,929	29.03%	21,552	10,937	50.75%	41,976	16,866	40.18%

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Wi-Fi: Town Centres

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how many town centres in each constituency have been assisted by his Department in attaining free wi-fi provision.

(AQW 29441/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In an effort to help to make town centres more attractive and competitive, my Department in conjunction with Council has introduced free Wi-Fi across a number of towns. To date, this initiative has been rolled out to 18 town centres across Northern Ireland. While most of the schemes have been in operation for a relatively short time, the feedback from shoppers and traders alike has been very positive.

The information requested is detailed in the table below:

Constituency	Number of towns which DSD has assisted in attaining free Wi-Fi provision
East Antrim	0
East Belfast	0
East Londonderry	1

Constituency	Number of towns which DSD has assisted in attaining free Wi-Fi provision
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	2
Foyle	0
Lagan Valley	1
Mid Ulster	2
Newry and Armagh	2
North Antrim	0
North Belfast	0
North Down	1
South Antrim	0
South Belfast	0
South Down	3
Strangford	2
Upper Bann	3
West Belfast	0
West Tyrone	1
Total	18

Royston House: Medical Examination Centre

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any plans to relocate the medical appointment facilities on the 4th floor in Royston House to ground floor accommodation that would meet the needs of Employment and Support Allowance patients attending medicals.

(AQW 29461/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is currently evaluating options to provide ground floor medical examination provision for Belfast's Medical Examination Centre. It is hoped that a way forward will be agreed with the service provider in early in 2014.

Homeless People: Under 18

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people who are classified as homeless are under the age of eighteen.

(AQW 29463/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that at 1st December 2013 there was a total of 44 single applicants awarded Full Duty Applicant status (homeless) and aged under 18 recorded on the waiting list.

Derry: Apex Housing Association

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 28993/11-15, to detail why Apex were unsuccessful in acquiring the site.

(AQW 29481/11-15)

Mr McCausland: This scheme was originally programmed to start on site during 2014/15. The Association advised the Housing Executive in July 2013 that the scheme would not progress and the proposal was subsequently removed from the SHDP. Apex Housing has not yet acquired this site, however the Association has bid for a scheme to develop 52 units at Creggan Park during 2016/17.

Derry: Clanmil Housing Association

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 28994/11-15, to detail why Clanmil were unsuccessful in acquiring the site.

(AQW 29482/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Clanmil Housing was unable to agree a price with the vendor and advised the Housing Executive on 4th July 2013 that the Association would be unable to progress this scheme. The proposal was subsequently removed from the SHDP.

Derry: Apex Housing Association

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 28466/11-15, to detail why Apex were unsuccessful in acquiring the site.

(AQW 29483/11-15)

Mr McCausland: This scheme was originally programmed to start on site during 2014/15. The Association advised the Housing Executive in November 2013 that the scheme was at an early feasibility stage and was unlikely to progress until 2016/17. The proposal was subsequently slipped on the SHDP to 2016/17.

Derry: Apex Housing Association

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 28992/11-15, to detail why Apex were unsuccessful in acquiring the site.

(AQW 29484/11-15)

Mr McCausland: This scheme was originally programmed to start on site during 2014/15. The Association advised the Housing Executive in July 2013 that the scheme would not progress and the proposal was subsequently removed from the SHDP. Apex Housing has not yet acquired this site, however the Association has bid for a scheme to develop 16 units at Rathmore Road during 2016/17.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Parliament Buildings: Public Transport

Mr Flanagan asked the Assembly Commission pursuant, to AQW 28867/11-15, to outline (i) what efforts have been made to assess the current usage of public transport for employees and visitors to Parliament Buildings or other buildings within the wider Stormont Estate; and (ii) what consideration has been given to carrying out a survey amongst users of the Stormont Estate to establish whether staff members and visitors would use public transport if better links were provided.

(AQW 29431/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Stormont Workplace Travel Consortium (a consortium of all public service employers in the Stormont Estate area led by OFMDFM) commissioned Atkins Transport Planning Belfast to produce The Stormont Estate Workplace Travel Plan (November 2008). As one of the public service employers within the Stormont Estate the Northern Ireland Assembly fed into the Travel Plan through the Steering Group, Travelwise NI. A copy of the Travel Plan, which focuses on staff rather than visitors, is available from the Sustainable Development Office in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Stormont Workplace Travel Consortium has not had a meeting for some time but the Northern Ireland Assembly continues to assess current usage of public transport by staff in Parliament Buildings through the staff survey.

Consideration is currently being given to the travel section of the 2014 Northern Ireland Assembly staff survey and its enhancement will provide opportunities to target the development of public transport links through the Stormont Workplace Travel Consortium.

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

Revised Written Answers

Department of Education

In this Bound Volume, page WA 110, please replace AQW 28691/11-15 with:

West Belfast: DE Spend

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of (i) capital spend; (ii) maintenance spend; and (iii) any other additional spend by his Department in West Belfast, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 28691/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The information requested is detailed in the table below.

	2010/11 £	2011/12 £	2012/13 £	Total
Capital	8,429,425	8,123,126	10,217,603	26,770,154
Maintenance	4,074,520	4,581,502	5,691,734	14,347,756
Other Spend*	121,148,134	122,782,083	122,029,706	365,959,923
Total	133,652,079	135,486,711	137,486,711	407,077,833

* includes spend on schools, school meals kitchens, youth clubs, transport, Sure Start, special needs etc.

Department of Finance and Personnel

In this Bound Volume, page WA 55, please replace AQW 28312/11-15 with:

Business: Turnover less than £500,000

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of businesses that have an annual turnover of less than £500,000 and/or employ fewer than fifty people; and (ii) the location of the sales and exports of these businesses, including the value and proportion of trade.

(AQW 28312/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): At March 2012 there were 69,275 Northern Ireland businesses which were either VAT registered or operating a PAYE scheme, with an annual turnover of less than £500,000 and/or employed fewer than fifty people.

Comprehensive information relating to the location of the sales and exports of these businesses is not available. However, information relating to the estimated value and location of sales for such businesses in the manufacturing sector is provided in Table 1.

Information on the total value of tradable services exports from such companies in (i) Construction (ii) Manufacturing and (iii) a "High Export Potential" group is provided in Table 2. Broad destination data is not available for the Construction group.

Table 1: Broad destination sales and percentage of total sales from Northern Ireland manufacturing businesses with fewer than 50 employees or with turnover less than £500,000 in 2011/12

	Value (£m)	% of sales
Total Sales	2,841	100.0
NI Sales	1,500	52.8
GB Sales	576	20.3

	Value (£m)	% of sales
Export Sales	765	26.9
ROI Sales	444	15.6
Rest of Europe Sales	139	4.9
Rest of World Sales	182	6.4

Source: Manufacturing Sales and Exports Survey 2011/12, Economic & Labour Market Statistics Branch, NISRA

Footnotes:

- 1 Total sales includes all sales regardless of destination.
- 2 Exports include all sales outside the United Kingdom.

Table 2: 2011 NI tradable Services exports in the Construction and Manufacturing Sectors and High Export Potential businesses for companies with fewer than 50 employees and/or with turnover less than £500,000

	Value (£m)	% of sales
Construction Export Sales ¹	118.3	100.0
Manufacturing (Services) Exports Sales:		
Export Sales	13.8	100.0
ROI Sales	9.1	66.3
Rest of Europe Sales	0.3	2.4
Rest of World Sales	4.3	31.3
High Export Potential Group:		
Export Sales	80.7	100.0
ROI Sales	32.1	39.8
Rest of Europe Sales	8.2	10.2
Rest of World Sales	40.4	50.1

- 1 Destination data not available for Construction exports

Source: Exporting Northern Ireland Services 2011 (NISRA)

Department of Justice

In this Bound Volume, page WA 78, please replace AQW 28609/11-15 with:

Derry: DOJ Decentralisation

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to 27956/11-15, to detail (i) why there are only 5 civil servants from his Department based in Derry and (ii) whether he intends to decentralise any functions to Derry to aid economic growth in the North West region.

(AQW 28609/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice):

- (i) As outlined in my answer to AQW/27956/11-15, the information provided did not include the number of civil service posts in the NI Courts and Tribunals Service. This information will follow as soon as possible. My answer also only included those staff at grades specified in the question. At 1 January 2012 and 1 January 2013 there were also 11 non-general service grades based in Derry
- (ii) The Bain Review on the relocation of public sector posts outside Belfast predates the Department of Justice, which came into existence on 12 April 2010. The Department of Finance and Personnel has responsibility for taking forward the recommendations of the Bain Review. There are currently no strategic or active plans to move any posts to Derry.

Department for Regional Development

In this Bound Volume, page WA 410, please replace AQW 28128/11-15 with:

Cycling Unit: Budget

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total budget of the new departmental cycling unit.
(AQW 28128/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I announced the establishment of a new cycling unit in August 2013 to deliver the effective co-ordination and management of a range of cycling initiatives. The unit was formally established in November this year.

Senior officials in my Department are currently exploring budget and resource requirements to ensure the necessary funding is secured to deliver the Department's objectives. Given that the Unit has been set up in-year, the annual budget is estimated at around £800K for staffing and promotional costs. Discussions are also underway to identify what additional resource budget is required and the capital funding required for infrastructure measures.

In Bound Volume 89, page WA 415, please replace AQW 28172/11-15 with:

Water Consumption: Flushing Options

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of (i) the reduction in water consumption if all dwellings were equipped with toilets with two flushing options; and (ii) offering incentives to households to install toilets with two flushing options.

(AQW 28172/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the promotion of water efficiency as a means of managing consumption and reducing water taken from the environment is recognised in its Water Resource Management Plan.

- (i) It is acknowledged that water efficient appliances and devices, such as dual flush toilets, when installed and used appropriately can contribute to reduced water consumption in households. This is reflected by the requirements embodied in The Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 which came into effect on 3 August 2009.

There are so many unquantifiable variables that a detailed and meaningful assessment of the total reduction in water consumption if all dwellings were equipped with dual flush toilets has not been undertaken. Any assessment would be expected to take account of the number, type and size of cisterns currently installed in households in order to evaluate any relative change in water consumption and there are no such statistics available. Further, anecdotal commentary within the UK Water Industry, in relation to the use of dual flush toilets, suggests a risk of householders practicing double flushing either due to insufficient water to clear the contents of the toilet pan, or users not being familiar with dual flush options. It is known that a modern dual flush cistern discharges a full flush of approximately 6 litres and a partial flush of 4 litres. In contrast, toilet cisterns produced before 1993 generally discharge a flush of 9 litres, while those produced between 1993 and 2001 generally produce a flush of 7.5 litres, and those after 2001 typically discharge a flush of 6 litres.

- (ii) There are currently no plans to offer incentives to households to install or convert to dual flush toilets.

Department for Social Development

In Bound Volume 89, page WA 440, please replace AQW 5055/11-15 with:

Welfare Reform

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the dates in 2013 that he, or his senior officials, met with each of the political parties represented in the Assembly in relation to the Welfare Reform Bill.

(AQO 5055/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The dates I and my officials met with political parties represented in the Assembly in relation to the Welfare Reform Bill are set out below:

- 28 January 2013
- 25 February 2013
- 19 March 2013
- 22 April 2013
- 3 June 2013
- 2 July 2013

In this Bound Volume, page WA 200, please replace AQW 28801/11-15 with:

Educational Underachievement Working Group

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what were the social-based policies, that as a participant in the North/South sectoral meeting on education, on 8th November 2013, he agreed as a focus for the educational underachievement working group; and what are the social interventions which he anticipates being advanced by the working group.

(AQW 28801/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): As stated in the joint Assembly statement made on the 26 November in relation to on the North/South Ministerial Council Education. The Council agreed that the Education Underachievement Working Group would focus on three strands of work which should have a greater focus on social-based policies with an intended educational outcome.

The three strands of work to be taken forward are

- international benchmarking studies;
- school-based and social interventions to address underachievement; and
- the impact of pre-school placements on primary level performance.

I welcome this change in focus which complements my department priorities for improving the quality of life and life chances for our most disadvantaged children and young people.

In Bound Volume 76, page WA 482, please replace AQW 13524/11-15 with:

Benefits: Sanctions

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many benefit customers have been reported to his Department to be sanctioned during the current mandate.

(AQW 13524/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): 31,596 benefit customers were referred to my Department for consideration of applying a sanction from May 2011 to date.

In Bound Volume 76, page WA 482, please replace AQW 13529/11-15 with:

Benefits: Sanctions

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many benefit customers have been sanctioned by his Department in the current mandate.

(AQW 13529/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): 10,029 sanctions were imposed on customers in receipt of benefit from May 2011 to date.

In this Bound Volume, page WA 467, please replace AQW 29441/11-15 with:

Wi-Fi: Town Centres

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how many town centres in each constituency have been assisted by his Department in attaining free wi-fi provision.

(AQW 29441/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): In an effort to help to make town centres more attractive and competitive, my Department in conjunction with Council has introduced free Wi-Fi across a number of towns. To date, this initiative has been rolled out to 18 town centres across Northern Ireland. While most of the schemes have been in operation for a relatively short time, the feedback from shoppers and traders alike has been very positive.

The information requested is detailed in the table below:

Constituency	Number of towns which DSD has assisted in attaining free Wi-Fi provision
East Antrim	0
East Belfast	0
East Londonderry	1
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	2
Foyle	0
Lagan Valley	1
Mid Ulster	2
Newry and Armagh	2
North Antrim	0
North Belfast	0
North Down	1
South Antrim	0
South Belfast	0
South Down	3
Strangford	2
Upper Bann	3
West Belfast	0
West Tyrone	1
Total	18

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Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 2 December 2013

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matter of the Day

2.1 Glasgow Helicopter Crash Disaster

Mr Gregory Campbell made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the Glasgow helicopter crash disaster. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Assembly Business

3.1 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Ms Megan Fearon replace Ms Maeve McLaughlin as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; that Ms Michaela Boyle replace Ms Megan Fearon as a member of the Committee for Finance and Personnel; and that Ms Maeve McLaughlin replace Ms Michaela Boyle as a member of the Committee for Education.

Ms C Ruane

Mr R McCartney

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Statement – Strategic Assessment of Rate Collection and Recovery

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton, made a statement regarding the Strategic Assessment of Rate Collection and Recovery, following which he replied to questions.

4.2 Statement - North South Ministerial Council Meeting in Aquaculture and Marine Sectoral Format

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Aquaculture and Marine Sectoral Format, following which she replied to questions.

4.3 Consideration Stage – Road Races (Amendment) Bill (NIA 29/11-15)

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, moved the Consideration Stage of the Road Races (Amendment) Bill (NIA 29/11-15).

Four amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

5. Question Time

5.1 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

5.2 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

6. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Consideration Stage – Road Races (Amendment) Bill (NIA 29/11-15)

Debate resumed on the Bill.

The Speaker took the Chair.

Clauses

After debate, Amendment 1 to Clause 1 was **negatived** (Division 1).

After debate, Amendment 2 to Clause 1 was **negatived** (Division2).

After debate, Amendment 3 to Clause 1 was **made** without division.

Amendment 4 was not moved.

After debate, the question that Clause 1 stand part of the Bill was **made** without division.

Long Title

The question being put, the Long Title was agreed without division.

The Road Races (Amendment) Bill (NIA 29/11-15) stood referred to the Speaker.

7. Assembly Business

7.1 Motion - Extension of sitting on Monday 2 December 2013 under Standing Order 10(3A)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 2 December 2013 be extended to no later than 10.00pm.

Mr S Dickson

Mr P Weir

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Private Members' Business

8.1 Motion – Day Services for Individuals with a Learning Disability

Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the Bamford Review Equal Lives report and the expectations it places across all Departments; supports the Northern Ireland Executive's Bamford Action Plan 2012-15, including the action to "enhance provision of person-centred day opportunities (including employment provision) for people with a learning disability that facilitate integration into the community"; recognises that, while day centre provision will always be required, more must be done to promote choice and independence for individuals living with learning disabilities, including development of employment opportunities, access to culture, arts and leisure, transport and education opportunities; demands full and meaningful involvement of service users, carers and other stakeholders in the development of new services; calls for improved access for people with learning disabilities to high quality, individualised services through supported living, supported employment, productive daytime opportunities, educational, social and leisure activities; encourages benchmarking of day services/day opportunities in order to drive improvements, ensure consistency of quality and equity of access; and urges the Minister of Health, Social

Services and Public Safety, and Executive colleagues, to work cross-departmentally alongside voluntary/ community organisations and statutory agencies to put in place a network of services that deliver enhanced opportunities for those with learning disabilities.

*Ms P Brown
Mr D McIlveen
Mr G Dunne
Mr J Wells*

8.2 Amendment 1

Proposed:

At end insert:

‘; and ensure that the necessary financial arrangements are put in place in order to facilitate the 2012-2015 Bamford Action Plan.’

*Mr F McKinney
Mr S Rogers*

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **carried** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

8.3 Motion – Small Business Saturday

Proposed:

That this Assembly supports the forthcoming Small Business Saturday on 7 December 2013; and urges the local community to make a special effort to support local traders on that day

*Mrs J Cochrane
Mr A Ross
Mr D Kinahan
Mr P Flanagan
Mr P McGlone*

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

9. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 8.56pm.

**Mr William Hay
The Speaker**

2 December 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

2 December 2013

Division 1

Consideration Stage – Road Races (Amendment) Bill (NIA 29/11-15) – Amendment 1

Proposed:

In page 1, line 7, at beginning insert

“Subject to paragraph (1BA),”

Mr J Allister

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 3

Noes: 77

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Allister and Mr McCallister.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Kinahan.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

2 December 2013
Division 2

Consideration Stage – Road Races (Amendment) Bill (NIA 29/11-15) – Amendment 2

Proposed:

In page 1, line 11, at end insert

“(1BA) A contingency day may not be—

(a) the whole of a Sunday; or

(b) any part of a Sunday beginning before 1.30pm or ending after 6pm.”.

Mr J Allister

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 3

Noes: 77

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Allister and Mr McCallister.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Kinahan.

The Amendment **fell**.

Road Races (Amendment) Bill

Annotated Marshalled List of Amendments

Consideration Stage

Monday 2 December 2013

Amendments tabled up 9.30am, Thursday, 28 November 2013 and selected for debate

The Bill will be considered in the following order-
Clauses and Long Title

Amendment 1 [Negatived on Division]

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 7

At beginning insert 'Subject to paragraph (1BA),'

Mr Jim Allister

Amendment 2 [Negatived on Division]

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 11

At end insert -

'(1BA) A contingency day may not be—

(a) the whole of a Sunday; or

(b) any part of a Sunday beginning before 1.30pm or ending after 6pm.'

Mr Jim Allister

Amendment 3 [Made]

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 11

At end insert -

'(1BB) An order may not specify the whole or part of a Sunday as a contingency day unless the Department is satisfied that the terms of the order are such as to minimise as far as reasonably practicable any disruption to the activities of the local community on that day.'

Mr Jimmy Spratt

Mr Alex Easton

Mrs Brenda Hale

Amendment 4 [Not Moved]

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 20

At end insert -

'(1CA) Where a contingency day is a Sunday, a direction under paragraph (1C) requires the approval of the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly.'

Mr Jimmy Spratt

Mr Alex Easton

Mrs Brenda Hale

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 27 November – 2 December 2013

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Registrar General Northern Ireland Annual Report 2012 (DFP)

A Corporate Governance Inspection of the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission November 2013 (DOJ)

Department for Regional Development - Archaeological Claims Settlement 3 December 2013 (NIAO)

Business Services Organisation Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2013 (DHSSPS)

Western Education and Library Board Annual Report and Accounts 2012-13 (DE)

5. Assembly Reports

Report on the Carrier Bags Bill NIA 20/11-15 (NIA 125/11-15) Committee for the Environment

Report on the Committee's Review into Electricity Policy Part 1: Security of Electricity Supply (NIA 145/11-15) Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Report on Public Service Pensions Bill (NIA 149/11-15) Committee for Finance and Personnel

6. Statutory Rules

S. R. 2013/277 The Social Security (Age-Related Payments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DSD)

S. R. 2013/279 The Trunk Road T7 (A26 Dualling-Glarryford to A44 Drones Road Junction) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

S. R. 2013/281 The Gas (Applications for Licences and Extensions) (Amendments No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DETI)

For Information Only:

S. R. 2013/275 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Banbridge) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

S. R. 2013/276 (C.18) The Child Maintenance (2008 Act) (Commencement No.12 and Savings Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

S. R. 2013/280 The Private Accesses (A26 Dualling-Glarryford to A44 Drones Road Junction) (Stopping-Up) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

The Planning (Hazardous Substances) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DOE)

9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 3 December 2013

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement - North South Ministerial Council Meeting in Environmental Sectoral Format

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Mark H Durkan, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Environmental sectoral format following which he replied to questions.

2.2 Statement – ‘Enabling Success’ A New Strategic Framework to Tackle Economic Inactivity in Northern Ireland

The Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, made a statement regarding ‘Enabling Success’ A New Strategic Framework to Tackle Economic Inactivity in Northern Ireland, following which he replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

2.3 Consideration Stage – Tobacco Retailers Bill (NIA 19/11-15)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, moved the Consideration Stage of the Tobacco Retailers Bill (NIA 19/11-15).

Forty two amendments were tabled to the Bill, as well as notice of intention to oppose the question that Clauses 1, 5, 6 and 11 stand part of the Bill.

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.27pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots.

3.2 Finance and Personnel

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton.

4. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Consideration Stage – Tobacco Retailers Bill (NIA 19/11-15)

After debate, the question that Clause 1 stand part of the Bill was negated without division.

After debate, Amendment 1 inserting new Clause 1A was made without division and it was agreed that the new clause stand part of the Bill.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

After debate, Amendment 2 to Clause 2 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 3 to Clause 2 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 4 to Clause 2 was made without division.

After debate, Amendments 5, 6 and 7 to Clause 2 were made without division.

After debate, Amendment 8 to Clause 2 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 9 to Clause 2 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 10 to Clause 2 was made without division.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 2 as amended stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 11 to Clause 3 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 12 to Clause 3 was made without division.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 3 as amended stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 13 to Clause 4 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 14 to Clause 4 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 15 to Clause 4 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 16 to Clause 4 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 17 to Clause 4 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 18 to Clause 4 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 19 to Clause 4 was made without division.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 4 as amended stand part of the Bill.

After debate, the question that Clause 5 stand part of the Bill was negated without division.

After debate, the question that Clause 6 stand part of the Bill was negated without division.

After debate, Amendment 20 to Clause 7 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 21 to Clause 7 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 22 to Clause 7 was made without division.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 7 as amended stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 23 to Clause 8 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 24 to Clause 8 was made without division.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 8 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 9 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 25 inserting new Clause 9A was made without division and it was agreed that the new clause stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 26 inserting new Clause 9B was made without division and it was agreed that the new clause stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 27 to Clause 10 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 28 to Clause 10 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 29 to Clause 10 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 30 to Clause 10 was made without division.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 10 as amended stand part of the Bill.

After debate, the question that Clause 11 stand part of the Bill was negated without division.

After debate, Amendment 31 to Clause 12 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 32 to Clause 12 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 33 to Clause 12 was made without division.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 12 as amended stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 34 to Clause 13 was made without division.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 13 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clauses 14 and 15 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 35 to Clause 16 was made without division.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 16 as amended stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 36 inserting new Clause 16A was made without division and it was agreed that the new clause stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 17 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 37 to Clause 18 was made without division.

After debate, Amendment 38 to Clause 18 was made without division.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 18 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clauses 19, 20 and 21 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 39 to Clause 22 was made without division.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 22 as amended stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 40 to Clause 23 was made without division.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 23 as amended stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 41 to Clause 24 was made without division.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clause 24 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clauses 25 and 26 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 42 to the Long Title was made without division.

The question being put, the Long Title as amended was agreed without division.

The Tobacco Retailers Bill (NIA 19/11-15) stood referred to the Speaker.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion – School Hours

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Education to review the current compulsory instruction time in schools; and to examine whether current fixed term dates, school opening hours, holidays and training days correspond with what is required to meet the needs of pupils, parents and the economy, and that they are in line with international best practice for delivering the best outcomes for all pupils.

Mr C Hazzard
Ms M Boyle
Mr P Sheehan

5.2 Amendment 1**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'economy,' and insert:

'and that appropriate consultation is undertaken with schools and managing authorities to ensure an agreed approach to deliver the best outcomes for pupils.'

Mr M Storey

Mr J Craig

Mr S Moutray

Mr R Newton

Debate ensued.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **carried** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

Mr Robin Newton spoke to his topic regarding tourism in East Belfast.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 7.11pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

3 December 2013

Tobacco Retailers Bill

Annotated Marshalled List of Amendments

Consideration Stage

Tuesday 3 December 2013

Amendments tabled up to and including Thursday, 28 November 2013

The Bill will be considered in the following order—
Clauses and Long Title

Clause 1 [*Question that the clause stand part negatived without division*]

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety gives notice of his intention to oppose the question that clause 1 stand part of the Bill.

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 1 [*Made without division*]

New Clause

After clause 1 insert—

‘Register of tobacco retailers

1A.—(1) The registration authority must, in accordance with the provisions of this Act, maintain a register of persons carrying on a tobacco business (“the Register”).

(2) On the basis of information contained in the Register, the registration authority must, at all reasonable times, make available for public inspection—

- (a) a list of premises at which tobacco businesses are carried on; and
- (b) such other information as may be prescribed.

(3) The registration authority must make available to each council and the Department such information contained in the Register as that council or the Department may require.

(4) Information made available under subsection (3) to a council may be used by the council only for the purpose of enabling it or assisting it to perform its functions under—

- (a) this Act;
- (b) Part 2 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978; and
- (c) the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.

(5) In any proceedings for an offence under this Act a certificate issued by the registration authority which states that on any date a person was or was not registered in respect of any premises shall be evidence of the facts stated in it; and any such certificate which purports to be issued by the registration authority shall be taken to be so issued unless the contrary is proved.

(6) In this Act—

“registered” means entered in the Register, and “unregistered” is to be construed accordingly;

“the registration authority” means a body which is established or constituted by or under Northern Ireland legislation and is prescribed for the purposes of this Act.’

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 2 [*Made without division*]

Clause 2, Page 1, Line 11

Leave out from ‘council’ to the end of line 12 and insert ‘registration authority—’

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 3 [*Made without division*]

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 6

Leave out ‘council’ and insert ‘registration authority’

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 4 [*Made without division*]

Clause 2, Page 2, Line 7

Leave out ‘or’ and insert—

‘(aa) the applicant has, within the period of 5 years ending with the day on which the application is made, been convicted of an offence under section 170 or 170B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 in relation to tobacco and been sentenced for that offence to a custodial sentence (whether suspended or not); or’

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 5 [Made without division]**Clause 2**, Page 2, Line 8

Leave out 'council' and insert 'registration authority'

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 6** [Made without division]**Clause 2**, Page 2, Line 12

Leave out 'council' and insert 'registration authority'

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 7** [Made without division]**Clause 2**, Page 2, Line 14

Leave out 'council' and insert 'registration authority'

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 8** [Made without division]**Clause 2**, Page 2, Line 19

Leave out 'the council considers appropriate' and insert 'which the Department may direct the authority to include'

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 9** [Made without division]**Clause 2**, Page 2, Line 20

Leave out 'council' and insert 'registration authority'

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 10** [Made without division]**Clause 2**, Page 2, Line 24

Leave out 'the council considers appropriate' and insert 'which the Department may direct the authority to include'

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 11** [Made without division]**Clause 3**, Page 2, Line 30

Leave out from 'council' to 'situated' in line 31 and insert 'registration authority'

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 12** [Made without division]**Clause 3**, Page 2, Line 35

Leave out '3 months' and insert '28 days'

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 13** [Made without division]**Clause 4**, Page 2, Line 38

Leave out 'A council' and insert 'The registration authority'

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 14** [Made without division]**Clause 4**, Page 3, Line 1

Leave out subsection (2) and insert—

'(2) The registration authority must amend the Register so as to remove—

(a) references to registered premises in respect of which a restricted premises order has effect;

(b) a person's entry from the Register where that person has, within a period of 5 years ending with the day on which the removal is made, been convicted of an offence under section 170 or 170B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 in relation to tobacco and has been sentenced for that offence to a custodial sentence (whether suspended or not).'

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 15** [Made without division]**Clause 4**, Page 3, Line 4

Leave out 'A council' and insert 'The registration authority'

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 16** [Made without division]**Clause 4**, Page 3, Line 5

After '(2)' insert '(a)'

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 17** [Made without division]**Clause 4**, Page 3, Line 8

Leave out 'A council' and insert 'The registration authority'

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 18** [Made without division]**Clause 4**, Page 3, Line 10

Leave out 'council' and insert 'registration authority'

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 19** [Made without division]**Clause 4**, Page 3, Line 13

Leave out 'a council' and insert 'the registration authority'

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Clause 5 [*Question that the clause stand part negated without division*]

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety gives notice of his intention to oppose the question that clause 5 stand part of the Bill.

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Clause 6 [*Question that the clause stand part negated without division*]

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety gives notice of his intention to oppose the question that clause 6 stand part of the Bill.

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 20 [*Made without division*]**Clause 7**, Page 4, Line 8

Leave out 'may not exceed one year' and insert 'must not be less than 28 days or more than 3 years'

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 21 [*Made without division*]**Clause 7**, Page 4, Line 14

Leave out '3' and insert '5'

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 22 [*Made without division*]**Clause 7**, Page 5, Line 10

At end insert—

'(ba) an offence relating to tobacco committed under section 170 or 170B of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 on any premises in Northern Ireland (which are accordingly "the premises in relation to which the offence is committed");

(bb) an offence committed under section 8F, 8G or 8H of the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979 on any premises in Northern Ireland (which are accordingly "the premises in relation to which the offence is committed");'

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 23 [*Made without division*]**Clause 8**, Page 5, Line 40

Leave out 'may not exceed one year' and insert 'must not be less than 28 days or more than 3 years'

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 24 [*Made without division*]**Clause 8**, Page 5, Line 42

Leave out '3' and insert '5'

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 25 [*Made without division*]**New Clause**

After clause 9 insert—

'Restricted premises orders: display of notices

9A.—(1) This section applies where—

- (a) a restricted premises order has effect in respect of premises ("the relevant premises"); and
- (b) a person ("P") carries on a retail business at the relevant premises.

(2) P must display a notice in the relevant premises in accordance with subsection (3).

(3) The notice must—

- (a) state that a restricted premises order has been made in respect of the relevant premises and the period for which the order has effect;
- (b) be displayed in a prominent position in the relevant premises where it is readily visible to persons at every relevant point of sale; and
- (c) be displayed no later than 5 days after the date on which the restricted premises order has effect.

(4) A relevant point of sale is one that was used for the sale of tobacco or cigarette papers at any time during the period of 2 months ending with the date on which the restricted premises order was made.

(5) Regulations may specify—

- (a) the dimensions of the notice to be displayed in accordance with this section;
- (b) the wording of the statement to be displayed on the notice; and
- (c) the size of the statement.'

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 26 [*Made without division*]**New Clause**

After clause 9 insert—

'Restricted premises orders: no tobacco in retail area

9B.—(1) This section applies where—

- (a) a restricted premises order has effect in respect of premises ("the relevant premises"); and
- (b) a person ("P") carries on a retail business at the relevant premises.

(2) P must, no later than the day after the date on which the restricted premises order has effect, ensure that no tobacco or cigarette papers are in the retail area of the relevant premises.

(3) Subsection (2) does not apply to tobacco and cigarette papers in the retail area of the relevant premises which an individual may have for his or her own use.

(4) In this section "retail area" means any part of the relevant premises used for the serving of customers or the display of goods.'

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 27 [*Made without division*]**Clause 10**, Page 6, Line 37

At end insert—

‘(6A) If a person fails, without reasonable excuse, to comply with section 9A(2), the person commits an offence.’

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 28** [*Made without division*]**Clause 10**, Page 6, Line 37

At end insert—

‘(6B) If a person fails, without reasonable excuse, to comply with section 9B(2), the person commits an offence.’

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 29** [*Made without division*]**Clause 10**, Page 7, Line 4

At end insert—

‘(d) subsection (6A) is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale;’

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 30** [*Made without division*]**Clause 10**, Page 7, Line 4

At end insert—

‘(e) subsection (6B) is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.’

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Clause 11** [*Question that the clause stand part negatived without division*]*The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety gives notice of his intention to oppose the question that clause 11 stand part of the Bill.**Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 31** [*Made without division*]**Clause 12**, Page 7, Line 14

Leave out from ‘the proper’ to the end of line 15 and insert ‘ascertaining whether any of the following offences is being or has been committed on the premises and, if so, by whom—

- (i) an offence under section 10;
- (ii) an offence under Article 3, 4 or 4A of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978;
- (iii) an offence under Article 4, 4A or 5 of the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991;’

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 32** [*Made without division*]**Clause 12**, Page 7, Line 34

Leave out from ‘of the proper’ to the end of line 34 and insert ‘mentioned in subsection (1)(a).’

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 33** [*Made without division*]**Clause 12**, Page 7, Line 37

Leave out from ‘of the proper’ to ‘this Act’ in line 38 and insert ‘mentioned in subsection (1)(a).’

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 34** [*Made without division*]**Clause 13**, Page 8, Line 21

Leave out from ‘an offence’ to the end of line 24 and insert ‘—

- (a) an offence under section 10(1), (2), (3), (6A) or (6B),
- (b) an offence under Article 3, 4 or 4A of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978,
- (c) an offence under Article 4, 4A or 5 of the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991;’

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 35** [*Made without division*]**Clause 16**, Page 10, Line 29

Leave out ‘3’ and insert ‘5’

*Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety***Amendment 36** [*Made without division*]**New Clause**

After clause 16 insert—

‘Council’s duty to share information about enforcement**16A.—**(1) Every council must make available to every other council, the registration authority and the Department such information relating to—

- (a) fixed penalty notices given in respect of tobacco offences committed in the district of that council,
- (b) convictions in respect of tobacco offences committed in the district of that council, and
- (c) restricted premises orders and restricted sale orders made on an application by that council, as the other council, the registration authority or, as the case may be, the Department may require.

(2) Information made available under subsection (1) to a council or the registration authority may be used by the council or the registration authority only for the purpose of enabling it or assisting it to perform its functions under this Act.

- (3) In this section “tobacco offence” has the meaning given in section 7(14).’

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 37 [Made without division]**Clause 18**, Page 11, Line 1

Leave out subsection (2) and insert—

‘(2) In Article 3(3) (prohibition on sale of tobacco, etc. to persons under 18) for “level 4” substitute “level 5”.’

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 38 [Made without division]**Clause 18**, Page 14, Line 38

Leave out subsection (3) and insert—

‘(3) After Article 4 insert—

“Purchase of tobacco on behalf of persons under 18

(2) 4A.—(1) A person aged 18 or over who knowingly buys or attempts to buy tobacco or cigarette papers on behalf of a person under the age of 18 shall be guilty of an offence.

(3) (2) A person guilty of an offence under paragraph (1) is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.”’

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 39 [Made without division]**Clause 22**, Page 16

Leave out lines 33 and 34 and insert—

“the Register” has the meaning given in section 1A(1);

“registered”, “unregistered” and “the registration authority” have the meanings given in section 1A(6);’

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 40 [Made without division]**Clause 23**, Page 17, Line 9

Leave out subsection (3) and insert—

‘(3) Paragraph (aa) of section 2(3) does not apply in relation to an offence mentioned in that paragraph which is committed before the commencement of that paragraph.

(4) Paragraph (b) of section 4(2) does not apply in relation to an offence mentioned in that paragraph which is committed before the commencement of that paragraph.

(5) Section 12 does not apply in relation to an offence mentioned in section 12(1)(a) which is committed before the commencement of that section.

(6) Section 13 does not apply in relation to an offence mentioned in section 13(1) which is committed before the commencement of that section.

(7) Subsection (2) of section 18 does not apply in relation to an offence which is committed before the commencement of that subsection.’

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 41 [Made without division]**Clause 24**, Page 17, Line 16

Leave out ‘5(2),’

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Amendment 42 [Made without division]**Long Title**

Leave out ‘to confer additional powers of enforcement in relation to offences under Articles 3 and 4 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978;’ and insert ‘to amend the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1978; to confer additional powers of enforcement in relation to offences under that Order and the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991;’

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 3 December 2013

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules

S. R. 2013/278 The Insolvency (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOJ)

S. R. 2013/282 The Housing Benefit (Local Housing Allowance and Executive Determinations) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) (DSD)

For Information Only:

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 4 December 2013

2011-2015 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
Marine Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12	30.04.13	13.05.13	21.05.13	17.09.13
Welfare Reform Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				
Planning Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13	06.06.13	24.06.13 & 25.06.13			
Tobacco Retailers Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	18.10.13	09.10.13	3.12.13			
Carrier Bags Bill 20/11-15	03.06.13	11.06.13	30.11.13					
Financial Provisions Bill 22/11-15	17.06.13	01.07.13	13.12.13					
Public Service Pensions Bill 23/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	29.11.13					
Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill 24/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	13.12.13					

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill 27/11-15	16.09.13	24.09.13	11.12.13					
Local Government Bill 28/11-15	23.09.13	01.10.13	20.02.14					
Road Races (Amendment) Bill 29/11-15	18.11.13	26.11.13	/	/	2.12.13			

2011-2015 Mandate**Non-Executive Bills**

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 25/11-15	17.06.13							
Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill 26/11-15	24.06.13	23.09.13 & 24.09.13	11.04.14					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 9 December 2013

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement – Update on Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding an update on Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services, following which he replied to questions.

3. Matter of the Day

3.1 Death of Mr Nelson Mandela

Mr Martin McGuinness made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the death of Mr Nelson Mandela. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

3.2 Findings of the Smithwick Report

Mr Paul Givan made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the findings of the Smithwick Report. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

3.3 Gun attacks on PSNI

Mr Nelson McCausland made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the gun attacks on the PSNI. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Mark H Durkan.

4.2 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

5. Executive Committee Business

5.1 Statement - Inter-Governmental Agreement on Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters

The Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, made a statement regarding the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters, following which he replied to questions.

5.2 Further Consideration Stage – Road Races (Amendment) Bill (NIA 29/11-15)

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Road Races (Amendment) Bill (NIA 29/11-15).

Two amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Clauses

After debate, Amendment 1 to Clause 1 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 2 to Clause 1 was **negatived** without division.

The Road Races (Amendment) Bill (NIA 29/11-15) stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

6. Assembly Business

6.1 Motion - Extension of sitting on Monday 9 December 2013 under Standing Order 10(3A)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 9 December 2013 be extended to no later than 9.00pm.

Mr P Ramsey

Ms C Ruane

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Speaker took the Chair.

7. Committee Business

7.1 Motion – Report on the Review into Electricity Policy: Part 1 – Security of Electricity (NIA 145/11-15)

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves the first report of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment on its Review into Electricity Policy: Part 1 - Security of Electricity (NIA 145/11-15); and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in conjunction with her Executive colleagues, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the System Operator for Northern Ireland to implement, as applicable, the recommendations contained therein.

Chairperson, Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Private Members' Business

8.1 First Stage - Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill (NIA 30/11-15)

Mr Pat Ramsey introduced a Bill to set a maximum speed limit on residential roads of 20 miles per hour.

The Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill (NIA 30/11-15) passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

8.2 Motion – Job Losses at HM Revenue and Customs

Proposed:

That this Assembly views with alarm the intention of HM Revenue and Customs to close offices in Newry, Enniskillen, and the North West, leading to a loss of 340 jobs, without carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment or consulting with the public and elected representatives; and calls on the Executive, in the interest of the economy, to make representations to HM Treasury with a view to keeping these jobs in Northern Ireland.

*Mr D Bradley
Mrs K McKeivitt
Mr C Eastwood
Mr J Byrne*

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

9. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 8.07pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

9 December 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 4 - 9 December 2013

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

The relationship between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland December 2013 (DOJ)

Northern Ireland Audit Office Sport NI's Project Management and Oversight of the St Colman's Project (NIAO)

Northern Ireland Social Care Council Annual Report and Accounts 2012/2013 (DHSSPS)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

S. R. 2013/283 The Occupational Pensions (Revaluation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DSD)

S. R. 2013/285 The Goods Vehicles Testing (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOE)

S. R. 2013/286 The Motor Vehicle Testing (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOE)

For Information Only:

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Proposed Housing (Anti-Social Behaviour) Bill (Northern Ireland) A Consultation Document 2013 (DSD)

9. Departmental Publications

Research to inform a Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations Policy (DSD)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 10 December 2013

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Final Stage – Road Races (Amendment) Bill (NIA 29/11-15)

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, moved that the Final Stage of the Road Races (Amendment) Bill (NIA 29/11-15) do now pass.

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

The Road Races (Amendment) Bill (NIA 29/11-15) passed Final Stage without division.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion – Special Education

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the importance of close collaboration between the health and the education sectors in addressing the needs of young people with special educational needs in a holistic manner; and calls on the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure that the appropriate and effective mechanisms are in place for 0-6 year olds to provide early identification of needs, that multi-disciplinary approaches to addressing need are in place for all pupils with special needs, and that each child has a designated coordinator appointed as part of the statementing process to ensure that the delivery of these integrated services optimises the life chances of the pupils.

*Mr M Storey
Miss M McIlveen
Mr J Craig
Mrs B Hale*

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The sitting was suspended at 12.47pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

4.2 Social Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

5. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion – Sexual Orientation Strategy

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes that a Sexual Orientation Strategy was subject to consultation in 2006; further notes that public commitments to publish a document by the end of 2013 were made by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in Together: Building a United Community; expresses its deep concern that this document does not appear to have progressed to date; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to publish a cross-departmental Sexual Orientation Strategy as a matter of priority.

Mr C Lyttle

Ms A Lo

Mr S Dickson

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** (Division).

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

6. Adjournment

Mr Daithí McKay spoke to his topic regarding the Ballymena bus and train station.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.53pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

10 December 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

10 December 2013

Division

Motion – Sexual Orientation Strategy

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes that a Sexual Orientation Strategy was subject to consultation in 2006; further notes that public commitments to publish a document by the end of 2013 were made by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in Together: Building a United Community; expresses its deep concern that this document does not appear to have progressed to date; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to publish a cross-departmental Sexual Orientation Strategy as a matter of priority.

Mr C Lyttle

Ms A Lo

Mr S Dickson

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 48

Noes: 30

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ni Chuilin, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lunn and Mr McCarthy.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Moutray and Mr G Robinson.

The Motion was **carried**.

Road Races (Amendment) Bill

Annotated Marshalled List of Amendments

Further Consideration Stage

9 December 2013

Amendments tabled up to 9.30am Thursday, 5 December 2013 and selected for debate

Amendment 1 [Made]

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 15

At end insert -

‘(1CA) An order authorising the use of the roads specified in the Schedule to the Road Races (North West 200) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 may not specify as a contingency day—

- (a) the whole of a Sunday; or
- (b) any part of a Sunday beginning before 1.30 pm or ending after 6 pm.’

Mr Jim Allister

Amendment 2 [Negatived]

Clause 1, Page 2, Line 9

Leave out from ‘and’ to end of line 14

Mr John McCallister
Mr Basil McCrea

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 10 December 2013

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
 2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
 3. Orders in Council
 4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
Department for Social Development Records NI Retention and Disposal Schedule November 2013 (DSD)
 5. Assembly Reports
 6. Statutory Rules
S. R. 2013/291 The Food Safety, Food Hygiene and Official Controls (Sprouting Seeds and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DHSSPS)
- For Information Only:**
7. Written Ministerial Statements
 8. Consultation Documents
 9. Departmental Publications
Onshore Renewable Electricity Action Plan 2013-2020 (DETI)
 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 11 December 2013

2011-2015 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
Marine Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12	30.04.13	13.05.13	21.05.13	17.09.13
Welfare Reform Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				
Planning Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13	06.06.13	24.06.13 & 25.06.13			
Tobacco Retailers Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	18.10.13	09.10.13	3.12.13			
Carrier Bags Bill 20/11-15	03.06.13	11.06.13	30.11.13					
Financial Provisions Bill 22/11-15	17.06.13	01.07.13	13.12.13					
Public Service Pensions Bill 23/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	29.11.13					
Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill 24/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	13.12.13					

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill 27/11-15	16.09.13	24.09.13	11.12.13					
Local Government Bill 28/11-15	23.09.13	01.10.13	20.02.14					
Road Races (Amendment) Bill 29/11-15	18.11.13	26.11.13	/	/	2.12.13	9.12.13	10.12.13	

**2011-2015 Mandate
Non-Executive Bills**

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 25/11-15	17.06.13 Bill fell. Re-introduced as Bill 30/11-15 (see below)							
Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill 26/11-15	24.06.13	23.09.13 & 24.09.13	11.04.14					
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 30/11-15	09.12.13							

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 13 January 2014

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matter of the Day

2.1 **Death of Mr Paul Goggins MP**

Dr Alasdair McDonnell made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the death of Mr Paul Goggins MP. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

2.2 **Impact of coastal flooding**

Miss Michelle McIlveen made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the impact of coastal flooding. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

3. Assembly Business

3.1 **Motion - Extension of sitting on Monday 13 January 2014 under Standing Order 10(3A)**

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 13 January 2014 be extended to no later than 9.00pm.

Mr P Ramsey

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 **Statement - Report on the Review of Apprenticeships**

The Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry made a statement regarding the Report on the Review of Apprenticeships, following which he replied to questions.

4.2 **Statement – EU Budget allocation for Pillar 1 (Direct Payments) and Pillar 2 (Rural Development) of the Common Agricultural Policy 2014-2020**

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill made a statement regarding the EU Budget allocation for Pillar 1 (Direct Payments) and Pillar 2 (Rural Development) of the Common Agricultural Policy 2014-2020.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

5. Question Time

5.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the First Minister, the Rt Hon Peter Robinson. The junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, also answered a number of questions.

5.2 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

6. Question for Urgent Oral Answer

6.1 Emergency departments in Craigavon Area Hospital and the Royal Victoria Hospital

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, responded to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer tabled by Mr Fearghal McKinney.

6.2 Future of Mivan in Antrim

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster, responded to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer tabled by Mr Danny Kinahan.

7. Executive Committee Business (cont'd)

7.1 Statement – EU Budget allocation for Pillar 1 (Direct Payments) and Pillar 2 (Rural Development) of the Common Agricultural Policy 2014-2020 (cont'd)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, replied to questions regarding the statement.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

7.2 Statement – North South Ministerial Council Transport Sector Meeting (Roads and Transport)

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council Transport Sector Meeting (Roads and Transport), following which he replied to questions.

7.3 Statement – North South Ministerial Council Transport Sector Meeting (Road Safety)

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Mark H Durkan, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council Transport Sector Meeting (Road Safety), following which he replied to questions.

The Speaker took the Chair.

8. Private Members' Business

8.1 Motion – Haass/O'Sullivan Proposals

Proposed:

That this Assembly acknowledges that the published Haass/O'Sullivan proposals represent a significant opportunity for political parties to show positive leadership, have the potential to make a meaningful contribution to the peace building process, and offer an opportunity to take significant steps forward in a number of difficult policy areas; notes that Dr Richard Haass was invited jointly by the five Executive parties to chair the process and thanks Dr Haass, Professor O'Sullivan and their team for their very worthy contribution over the past six months; calls on the Executive to begin putting in place the foundations for implementation of the proposals; and further calls on all parties to support their successful implementation.

Ms J McCann

Mr G Kelly

Ms C Ruane

8.2 Amendment 1**Proposed:**

Leave out all after the first 'proposals' and insert:

'were a genuine attempt to resolve the controversial issues of dealing with the past, parades and flags; thanks Dr Haass, Professor O'Sullivan and their team for their very worthy contribution over the past six months; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to agree proposals for a practical and positive way forward on the three issues of contention.'

Mr T Elliott
Mr M Nesbitt
Mr D Kennedy

8.3 Amendment 2**Proposed:**

Leave out all after "months;" and insert:

'and welcomes the decision of the party leaders to meet on 14 January to consider the next steps.'

Mr P Robinson
Mr J Bell
Mrs A Foster
Mr G Campbell

8.4 Amendment 3**Proposed:**

Leave out all after second "Executive" and insert:

'to take urgent steps to implement the provisions relating to dealing with the past and to develop a time-limited, independently-chaired mechanism to reach agreement between the parties on outstanding issues on parades and flags, building on the progress made and delivering real change to meet the aspirations of the public who invested hope in the Haass process.'

Mr C Lyttle
Mr D Ford
Dr S Farry
Mr S Dickson

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, Amendment No. 1 **fell** (Division 1).

The Question being put, Amendment No. 2 **fell** (Division 2).

The Question being put, Amendment No. 3 **fell**.

The Question being put, the Motion was **negatived** (Division 3).

9. Adjournment**Proposed:**

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 8.22pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

13 January 2014

Northern Ireland Assembly

Divisions

13 January 2014

Division 1

Motion – Haass/O’Sullivan Proposals – Amendment 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after the first ‘proposals’ and insert:

‘were a genuine attempt to resolve the controversial issues of dealing with the past, parades and flags; thanks Dr Haass, Professor O’Sullivan and their team for their very worthy contribution over the past six months; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to agree proposals for a practical and positive way forward on the three issues of contention.’

*Mr T Elliott
Mr M Nesbitt
Mr D Kennedy*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 12

Noes: 89

AYES

Mr Beggs, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Elliott and Mr Nesbitt.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Dickson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Fearon and Mr G Kelly.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

13 January 2014
Division 2

Motion – Haass/O’Sullivan Proposals – Amendment 2

Proposed:

Leave out all after “months;” and insert:

‘and welcomes the decision of the party leaders to meet on 14 January to consider the next steps.’

Mr P Robinson
Mr J Bell
Mrs A Foster
Mr G Campbell

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 38

Noes: 63

AYES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

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

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hussey, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McNarry, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ni Chuilin, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Fearon and Mr G Kelly.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

13 January 2014
Division 3

Motion – Haass/O’Sullivan Proposals

Proposed:

That this Assembly acknowledges that the published Haass/O’Sullivan proposals represent a significant opportunity for political parties to show positive leadership, have the potential to make a meaningful contribution to the peace building process, and offer an opportunity to take significant steps forward in a number of difficult policy areas; notes that Dr Richard Haass was invited jointly by the five Executive parties to chair the process and thanks Dr Haass, Professor O’Sullivan and their team for their very worthy contribution over the past six months; calls on the Executive to begin putting in place the foundations for implementation of the proposals; and further calls on all parties to support their successful implementation.

Ms J McCann

Mr G Kelly

Ms C Ruane

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 49

Noes: 52

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Fearon and Mr G Kelly.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Overend and Mr G Robinson.

The Motion was **negatived**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 11 December 2013 – 13 January 2014

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

South Eastern Regional College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2013 (DEL)

Northern Regional College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2013 (DEL)

Belfast Metropolitan College Annual Report and Financial Statements 2012-2013 (DEL)

Southern Regional College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2013 (DEL)

North West Regional College Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2013 (DEL)

South West College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2013 (DEL)

Monitoring of Progress on Implementation of the Youth Justice Review Recommendations December 2013 (DOJ)

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency - Statistical Bulletin: Pay Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil service – 2013 (DFP)

iLEX Urban Regeneration Company Derry-Londonderry Annual Report and Financial Accounts 2012-13 (OFMDFM)

Insolvency Service Annual Report and Account for year ended 31 March 2013 (DETI)

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute 2012-2013 Annual Report and Statement of Accounts (DARD)

Libraries NI Annual Report and Accounts 2012-13 (DCAL)

Southern Education and Library Board Disposal and Retention Schedule (DCAL)

Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland Disposal and Retention Schedule (DCAL)

Northern Ireland Social Security Agency Social Fund Account for the year ended 31 March 2013 (NIAO)

Maze Long Kesh Development Corporation Report and Accounts 10 Months Ended 31 March 2012 (OFMDFM)

Maze Long Kesh Development Corporation Report and Accounts 2012 – 2013 (OFMDFM)

5. Assembly Reports

Report on the Financial Provisions Bill (NIA 152/11-15) Committee for Finance and Personnel

Report on Department of Finance and Personnel – Collaborative Procurement and Aggregated Demand (NIA 153/11-15) Public Accounts Committee

6. Statutory Rules

- S. R. 2013/287 The Road Service Licensing (Community Licences) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOE)
- S. R. 2013/292 The Smoke Control Areas (Exempted Fireplaces) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOE)
- S. R. 2013/293 The Legal Aid for Crown Court Proceedings (Costs) (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOJ)
- S. R. 2013/294 The Feed (Hygiene and Enforcement) and the Animal Feed (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DHSSPS)
- S. R. 2013/295 The Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowances Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DARD)
- S. R. 2013/296 The Contaminants in Food (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DHSSPS)
- S. R. 2013/297 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Belfast) (Amendment No.4) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)
- S. R. 2013/298 The Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOE)
- S. R. 2013/299 The Health Services (Cross-Border Health Care) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DHSSPS)
- S. R. 2013/300 General Dental Services (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DHSSPS)
- S. R. 2013/301 The Health and Personal Social Services (General Medical Services Contracts) (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DHSSPS)
- S. R. 2013/302 Provision of Health Services to Persons not Ordinarily Resident (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DHSSPS)
- S. R. 2013/303 The Housing Benefit (Executive Determinations and Local Housing Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DSD)
- S. R. 2013/304 The Seeds (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DARD)
- S. R. 2013/308 The Jobseeker's Allowance (Habitual Residence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DSD)
- S. R. 2014/1 The Common Agricultural Policy Single Payment and Support Schemes (Cross Compliance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DARD)
- S. R. 2014/2 The General Ophthalmic Services (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2014 (DHSSPS)

For Information Only:

- S. R. 2013/284 The Licensing (George Best Belfast City Airport) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DSD)
- S. R. 2013/288 The Control of Traffic (Antrim) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)
- S. R. 2013/289 The One-Way Traffic (Belfast) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)
- S. R. 2013/290 The C334 Derryleckagh Road and B7 Bridge Road, Warrenpoint (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)
- S. R. 2013/305 The Waiting Restrictions (Bangor) (Amendment No.3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)
- S. R. 2013/306 The Roads (Speed Limit) (No. 4) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)
- S. R. 2013/307 The Parking Places (Disabled Persons' Vehicles) (Amendment No. 7) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

- Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland Thematic Review (DHSSPS)
- Transfer of Monies from the Pillar 1 to the Pillar 2 Budget of the Common Agricultural Policy (DARD)

8. Consultation Documents

Consultation on Proposals to Amend the Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspection) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 (DFP)

Draft Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 - Draft Local Government Pension Scheme (Amendment and Transitional Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 - Consultation December 2013 (DOE)

Consultation on changes to the glass Packaging Recycling Business Target to 2017 (DOE)

Consultation on a Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 (DOE)

Consultation on the Introduction of a Fixed Penalty and Penalty Deposit for Non Payment of the HGV Road User Levy (DOE)

Public Consultation on the Proposed Public Passenger Transport (Service Agreements and Service Permits) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (DRD)

Public Consultation on the Strategy Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse, Northern Ireland 2013-2020 (DHSSPS & DOJ)

9. Departmental Publications

Athbheithniú ar an Phlean Corparaideach Oideachais 2012-2015 agus Plean Bliantúil Gno na Roinne Oideachais 2013-2014 (DE)

Report on the British Wool Marketing Board Agricultural Marketing Scheme 2012-13 (DARD)

Northern Health and Social Care Trust The Accounts of the Charitable Trust Funds For the year ended 31 March 2012 (DHSSPS)

An Independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment - year four December 2013 (DSD)

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2013 (OFDFM)

The Northern Ireland Police Fund (a company limited by guarantee) Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended March 2013 (DOJ)

World Police and Fire Games Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013 (DCAL)

Northern Ireland Screen Commission Directors' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2013 (DCAL)

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service: An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight and Report on Accounts 2011-12 (DFP)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 14 January 2014

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement – Cross-Departmental Strategy on Autism

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding the Cross-Departmental Strategy on Autism, following which he replied to questions.

2.2 Statement – East Belfast Development Proposals and Area Based Planning

The Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, made a statement regarding the East Belfast Development Proposals and Area Based Planning, following which he replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

2.3 Consideration Stage – Public Service Pensions Bill (NIA 23/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Simon Hamilton, moved the Consideration Stage of the Public Service Pensions Bill (NIA 23/11-15).

Twenty one amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.34pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

3.2 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

4. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Consideration Stage – Public Service Pensions Bill (NIA 23/11-15)

Debate resumed on the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 1 to 4 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 1 to Clause 5 was **made** (Division 1).

After debate, Amendment 2 to Clause 5 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 3 to Clause 5 was **negatived** (Division 2).

As Amendment 3 was not made, Amendment 4 was not called.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 5 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 6 and 7 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 5 to Clause 8 was **negatived** (Division 3).

After debate, Amendment 6 to Clause 8 was **negatived** (Division 4).

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 8 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 7 to Clause 9 was **negatived** (Division 5).

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 9 stand part of the Bill.

The Speaker took the Chair.

After debate, Amendment 8 to Clause 10 was **negatived** (Division 6).

After debate, Amendment 9 to Clause 10 was **negatived** (Division 7).

After debate, Amendment 10 to Clause 10 was **made** without division.

As Amendment 10 was made, Amendment 11 was not called.

After debate, Amendment 12 to Clause 10 was **negatived** (Division 8).

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 10 as amended stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 13 to Clause 11 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 14 to Clause 11 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 11 as amended stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 15 to Clause 12 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 12 as amended stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 16 to Clause 13 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 13 as amended stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 17 to Clause 14 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 14 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 15 to 17 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 18 to Clause 18 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 19 to Clause 18 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 20 to Clause 18 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 18 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 19 to 23 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 21 to Clause 24 was **negatived** (Division 9).

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 24 stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 25 to 37 stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Schedules 1 to 9 stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, the Long Title was **agreed** without division.

The Public Service Pensions Bill (NIA 23/11-15) stood referred to the Speaker.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr McLaughlin) took the Chair.

5. Adjournment

Mr Séan Rogers spoke to his topic regarding the restoration of 24 hour Accident and Emergency service at the weekend at Downe Hospital.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 9.11pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

14 January 2014

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 January 2014
Division 1

Consideration Stage – Public Service Pensions Bill (NIA 23/11-15) - Amendment 1

Proposed:

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 2

Leave out from beginning to 'workers,' in line 3 and insert -

'(1) Subject to subsection (2), scheme regulations for a scheme under section 1'

Minister of Finance and Personnel

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 80

Noes: 13

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

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

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs McKeivitt and Mr McKinney.

The Amendment was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 January 2014
Division 2

Consideration Stage – Public Service Pensions Bill (NIA 23/11-15) – Amendment 3

Proposed:

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 30

Leave out 'member representatives' and insert 'trade union representatives'

Mr D Bradley
Mr S Rogers

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 39

Noes: 50

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs McKeivitt and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

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

The following Member voted in both Lobbies and is therefore not counted in the result: Mr Ford.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 January 2014
Division 3

Consideration Stage – Public Service Pensions Bill (NIA 23/11-15) – Amendment 5

Proposed:

Clause 8, Page 5

Leave out lines 9 and 10

*Mr D Bradley
Mr S Rogers*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 38

Noes: 48

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs McKeivitt and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 January 2014
Division 4

Consideration Stage – Public Service Pensions Bill (NIA 23/11-15) – Amendment 6

Proposed:

Clause 8, Page 5, Line 26

Leave out 'negative resolution' and insert 'the affirmative procedure (see section 34(1))'

Mr D Bradley
Mr S Rogers

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 38

Noes: 48

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs McKeivitt and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 January 2014
Division 5

Consideration Stage – Public Service Pensions Bill (NIA 23/11-15) – Amendment 7

Proposed:

Clause 9, Page 6, Line 11

Leave out '5' and insert '10'

Mr D Bradley
Mr S Rogers

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 38

Noes: 49

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs McKeivitt and Mr McKinney.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 January 2014
Division 6

Consideration Stage – Public Service Pensions Bill (NIA 23/11-15) – Amendment 8

Proposed:

Clause 10, Page 6

Leave out lines 15 and 16 and insert '65.'

Mr D Bradley
Mr S Rogers

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 39

Noes: 48

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Eastwood and Mrs D Kelly.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 January 2014
Division 7

Consideration Stage – Public Service Pensions Bill (NIA 23/11-15) – Amendment 9

Proposed:

Clause 10, Page 6, Line 16

At end insert -

‘(1A) Subsection (1) does not apply in relation to a person under a scheme under section 1 whose normal pension age is specified by scheme regulations for the scheme.

The normal pension age for such a person must be the age specified by the scheme regulations; and such regulations may specify any age less than state pension age, but not less than 65.’

*Mr D McKay
Mr M McLaughlin
Ms M Boyle*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 38

Noes: 48

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Boylan and Ms Ruane.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 January 2014
Division 8

Consideration Stage – Public Service Pensions Bill (NIA 23/11-15) – Amendment 12

Proposed:

Clause 10, Page 6

Leave out lines 24 to 33 and insert '65.'

Mr D Bradley
Mr S Rogers

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 39

Noes: 48

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Eastwood and Mrs D Kelly.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

Question accordingly negatived.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

14 January 2014
Division 9

Consideration Stage – Public Service Pensions Bill (NIA 23/11-15) – Amendment 21

Proposed:

Clause 24, Page 13, Line 34

Leave out from 'if' to the end of line 3 on page 14

Mr D Bradley

Mr S Rogers

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 26

Noes: 44

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs McKeivitt and Mr Rogers.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Mr Buchanan, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

The Amendment **fell**.

Public Service Pensions Bill

Marshalled List of Amendments

Consideration Stage

Tuesday 14 January 2014

Amendments tabled up to 9.30am Thursday, 9 January 2014 and selected for debate
The Bill will be considered in the following order-
Clauses, Schedules and Long Title

Amendment 1 [Made on division]

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 2

Leave out from beginning to 'workers),' in line 3 and insert -

'(1) Subject to subsection (2), scheme regulations for a scheme under section 1'

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Amendment 2 [Made without division]

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 6

Leave out 'must provide' and insert 'may make the provision required under subsection (1) above by providing'

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Amendment 3 [Negatived on division]

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 30

Leave out 'member representatives' and insert 'trade union representatives'

Mr Dominic Bradley

Mr Sean Rogers

Amendment 4 [Not moved]

Clause 5, Page 4, Line 4

At end insert -

(10) In this Act a "trade union" has the meaning set out in Section 1 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

Mr Dominic Bradley

Mr Sean Rogers

Amendment 5 [Negatived on division]

Clause 8, Page 5

Leave out lines 9 and 10

Mr Dominic Bradley

Mr Sean Rogers

Amendment 6 [Negatived on division]

Clause 8, Page 5, Line 26

Leave out 'negative resolution' and insert 'the affirmative procedure (see section 34(1))'

Mr Dominic Bradley

Mr Sean Rogers

Amendment 7 [Negatived on division]

Clause 9, Page 6, Line 11

Leave out '5' and insert '10'

Mr Dominic Bradley

Mr Sean Rogers

Amendment 8 [Negatived on division]

Clause 10, Page 6

Leave out lines 15 and 16 and insert '65.'

Mr Dominic Bradley

Mr Sean Rogers

Amendment 9 [Negatived on division]

Clause 10, Page 6, Line 16

At end insert -

'(1A) Subsection (1) does not apply in relation to a person under a scheme under section 1 whose normal pension age is specified by scheme regulations for the scheme.

The normal pension age for such a person must be the age specified by the scheme regulations; and such regulations may specify any age less than state pension age, but not less than 65.'

Mr Daithí McKay

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin

Ms Michaela Boyle

Amendment 10 [*Made without division*]**Clause 10**, Page 6, Line 17

Leave out subsection (2) and insert -

‘(2) Subsection (1) does not apply in relation to fire and rescue workers who are firefighters.

The normal pension age for such persons under a scheme under section 1 must be the age specified by the scheme regulations for the scheme; and such regulations may specify any age not exceeding 60, but not less than 55.

(2A) Subsection (1) does not apply in relation to members of the police service.

The normal pension age for such persons under a scheme under section 1 must be 60.’

Mr Daithi McKay
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
Ms Michaela Boyle
Mr John McCallister

Amendment 11 [*Not moved*]**Clause 10**, Page 6, Line 21

At end insert -

‘for members of the police service and no more than 60 for fire and rescue workers who are firefighters’

Mr Dominic Bradley
Mr Sean Rogers
Mr John McCallister

Amendment 12 [*Negatived on division*]**Clause 10**, Page 6

Leave out lines 24 to 33 and insert ‘65.’

Mr Dominic Bradley
Mr Sean Rogers

Amendment 13 [*Made without division*]**Clause 11**, Page 7, Line 27

At end insert -

‘(4A) Before giving directions under this section the Department of Finance and Personnel must consult such persons (or representatives of such persons) as appear to the Department likely to be affected by the directions.’

*Minister of Finance and Personnel***Amendment 14** [*Made without division*]**Clause 11**, Page 7, Line 31

Leave out ‘(4)’ and insert ‘(4A)’

*Minister of Finance and Personnel***Amendment 15** [*Made without division*]**Clause 12**, Page 8, Line 30

At end insert -

‘(10) Before giving directions or making regulations under this section the Department of Finance and Personnel must consult such persons (or representatives of such persons) as appear to the Department likely to be affected by the directions or regulations.’

*Minister of Finance and Personnel***Amendment 16** [*Made without division*]**Clause 13**, Page 9, Line 20

After ‘qualified’ insert -

‘and must not be—

- (a) an employee of the responsible authority;
- (b) the scheme manager;
- (c) a scheme member; or
- (d) an employee of the Department of Finance and Personnel’

*Chair, Committee for Finance and Personnel***Amendment 17** [*Made without division*]**Clause 14**, Page 9, Line 24

After ‘is’ insert ‘a’

*Minister of Finance and Personnel***Amendment 18** [*Made without division*]**Clause 18**, Page 11, Line 26

At end insert -

‘(5A) Scheme regulations may also provide for exceptions to subsection (1) in the case of—

- (a) persons who were members of a public body pension scheme specified in the regulations, or who were eligible to be members of such a scheme, immediately before 1 April 2012, and
- (b) such other persons as the regulations may specify, being persons who before that date had ceased to be members of a scheme referred to in paragraph (a) or to be eligible for membership of such a scheme.’

*Minister of Finance and Personnel***Amendment 19** [*Made without division*]**Clause 18**, Page 11, Line 27

After ‘(5)’ insert ‘or (5A)’

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Amendment 20 [*Made without division*]

Clause 18, Page 11, Line 37

After '(5)' insert ', (5A)'

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Amendment 21 [*Negatived on division*]

Clause 24, Page 13, Line 34

Leave out from 'if' to the end of line 3 on page 14

Mr Dominic Bradley

Mr Sean Rogers

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 14 January 2014

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
 - Northern Ireland Audit Office The Future Impact of Borrowing and Private Finance Commitments - Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General 14 January 2014 (NIAO)
 - Northern Ireland Community Relations Council Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2013 (OFMDFM)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
 - For Information Only:**
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publication

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 15 January 2014

2011-2015 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
Marine Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12	30.04.13	13.05.13	21.05.13	17.09.13
Welfare Reform Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13	08.04.13				
Planning Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13	06.06.13	24.06.13 & 25.06.13			
Tobacco Retailers Bill 19/11-15	15.04.13	23.04.13	18.10.13	09.10.13	3.12.13			
Carrier Bags Bill 20/11-15	03.06.13	11.06.13	30.11.13	26.11.13				
Financial Provisions Bill 22/11-15	17.06.13	01.07.13	13.12.13	11.12.13				
Public Service Pensions Bill 23/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	29.11.13	27.11.13	14.01.14			
Licensing of Pavement Cafés Bill 24/11-15	17.06.13	25.06.13	13.12.13	05.12.13				

Title & NIA Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill 27/11-15	16.09.13	24.09.13	11.12.13	04.12.13				
Local Government Bill 28/11-15	23.09.13	01.10.13	20.02.14					
Road Races (Amendment) Bill 29/11-15	18.11.13	26.11.13	/	/	2.12.13	9.12.13	10.12.13	

2011-2015 Mandate**Non-Executive Bills**

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 25/11-15	17.06.13 Bill fell. Re-introduced as Bill 30/11-15 (see below)							
Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill 26/11-15	24.06.13	23.09.13 & 24.09.13	11.04.14					
Road Traffic (Speed Limits) Bill 30/11-15	09.12.13							

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.